

Self-Monitoring and Consumer Psychology

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ABSTRACT Research on the relations between self-monitoring differences and two important areas of consumer behavior, reactions to specific advertising approaches and product evaluation strategies, is reviewed and evaluated. First, research on the responsiveness of high and low self-monitors to image-oriented and product-quality-based advertising attempts is addressed. Although findings generally indicate that high self-monitors are more responsive to image-oriented ads and that low self-monitors are more responsive to quality-based appeals, these results have not been robust. Possible reasons for this inconsistency are explored. Second, research on the means by which high and low self-monitors evaluate consumer products is examined. Findings suggest that when judging product quality, low self-monitors tend to rely on product performance and high self-monitors more likely use the product's image-enhancing capabilities. Additionally, research indicates that self-image/product-image congruency is generally a more important concern for low self-monitors, but high and low self-monitors' differential reliance on this congruency might be moderated by the situations in which the product is typically used. Additional possible delimiting conditions of these general findings are discussed.

Research and theory on persuasion and social influence processes have traditionally occupied a rather prominent role in personality and social psychology (Eagly, 1991; Hovland & Janis, 1959; Petty & Wegener, 1998a). And with good reason. Social influence attempts,

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particularly in the form of commercial advertising and mass marketing campaigns, are pervasive in our everyday lives. In the United States alone, in 2001, for example, more than \$220 billion were spent on advertising and marketing ventures (www.adage.com), and it has been estimated that on any given day U.S. citizens are exposed to in excess of 3,500 advertisements and marketing attempts (Jhally, 1998, cited in Rumbo, 2002). Although advertising and marketing campaigns have been designed to influence us on a wide range of topics, most of the advertising and marketing we are likely to encounter concerns the desirability of everyday consumer products. The goal of these campaigns, of course, is quite singular: to alter significantly our attitudes toward and beliefs about particular products in the hope that our newly formed attitudes and beliefs will translate into an increased probability that, at some time in the future, we will purchase or, at the very least, be willing to try the advertised product.

Despite this common goal, the particular advertising and marketing campaigns employed to change our perceptions are as varied as the products themselves. For example, some advertisements use physically attractive spokespeople, others rely on more expert spokespeople, and yet others rely on “everyday” spokespeople. Some advertisements are rather brief and devoid of much content; others are more detailed and information dense. Some use humor as a vehicle, whereas others induce a more somber and contemplative mood. Many factors have likely contributed to the development of this impressive array of advertising strategies, including the possibility that different types of products are best advertised with different types of advertising campaigns (Shavitt, 1990) and the likelihood that individuals of differing demographic characteristics (e.g., gender, income) are differentially responsive to divergent advertising strategies (Martin, 2003; Shavitt, Lowrey, & Haefner, 1998). An intriguing additional possibility is that differences in recipient personality may influence the type of advertising appeals to which people are responsive. Indeed, empirical research in the past 20 years or so has demonstrated rather convincingly that dispositional differences can and do have an important role in determining the effectiveness of any given influence attempt (Eagly, 1981; Haugtvedt, Petty, & Cacioppo, 1992).

One such individual difference variable that has enjoyed a good deal of attention in this context in recent years is the self-monitoring

construct (Gangestad & Snyder, 2000; Snyder, 1974, 1979; Snyder & Gangestad, 1986). High self-monitors, as identified by their relatively high scores on the Self-Monitoring Scale (Snyder & Gangestad, 1986), typically try to be the kind of person called for in each situation in which they find themselves. They tend to be concerned about the image they project to others in social situations, and they are generally adept at adjusting their self-presentations to fit differing social and interpersonal considerations of appropriateness. As a consequence, high self-monitors often display marked situation-to-situation shifts in the images they project to others. Moreover, research on the motivations underlying the attitudes of high self-monitors has suggested that their attitudes serve primarily a social adjustive function. In particular, high self-monitors appear to be especially responsive to information targeted at social adjustive concerns (DeBono, 1987, DeBono & Edmonds, 1989). For example, research indicates that when high self-monitors are presented with information indicating that their current attitudes are at odds with those of important reference groups, they will change their attitudes in the direction of the consensus (cf. Snyder, 1987).

In contrast, low self-monitors, as identified by their relatively low scores on the Self-Monitoring Scale (Snyder & Gangestad, 1986), characteristically do not attempt to mold their behavior to fit situation specific considerations of appropriateness. Rather, they appear more concerned with maintaining a relatively high degree of congruence between their overt behaviors and their attitudes, values, and dispositions. As a consequence, they tend to rely on their own attitudes, feelings, and dispositions when making decisions or behavioral choices, and they typically display a high degree of consistency between their private attitudes and public behaviors. Research on the functional bases of low self-monitors' attitudes has suggested that their attitudes may be primarily value expressive in nature (Kristiansen & Zanna, 1988). Low self-monitors tend to be very responsive to information concerning the relationship between their values and their current attitudes. If informed that a current attitude is not consistent with a professed value but that an alternative attitude is, research indicates that low self-monitors will change their attitudes in the direction of the more value-consistent attitude.

One arena in which the differing interpersonal orientations of high and low self-monitors manifest themselves quite strikingly is that of

consumer psychology. In particular, research has suggested that self-monitoring may be an important individual difference variable to consider when attempting to understand two traditionally important domains of consumer psychology: reactions to specific types of advertising (e.g., Snyder & DeBono, 1985) as well as the strategies individuals use to evaluate everyday consumer products (e.g., Aaker, 1999; DeBono, 2000; Graeff, 1996). In the first part of this article, research on the responsiveness of high and low self-monitors to particular advertising strategies will be reviewed. Given the inconsistent nature of the results of this research, an attempt will be made to identify possible reasons for the variability of the findings and to suggest possible delimiting conditions.

In the second section of this article, an overview of research addressing the strategies by which high and low self-monitors evaluate products will be provided. Particular attention will be paid to the different cues that high and low self-monitors appear to use when assessing product quality after sampling a product and to the impact that self-image/product-image congruency has on high and low self-monitors' product evaluations.

Advertising Image Versus Highlighting Quality

Although advertising strategies vary on a multitude of dimensions, one of the more fundamental ways in which they differ is in the particular aspect of the product stressed in the advertisement. Indeed, a recent history of the advertising industry suggests that on a very general level, advertisements typically highlight one of two product attributes (Fox, 1984; see also Johar & Sirgy, 1991). Some advertisements, so-called soft-sell ads, focus not on the product itself but rather on the image associated with using or possessing the product. These advertisements tell us the kind of person we can be if we own a particular product or the kinds of reactions we are likely to get from others if they know we possess this product. The classic Marlboro Man advertisements and Pepsi's "Now Generation" campaign are familiar examples of such soft-sell approaches.

Other advertisements, hard-sell ads, tell us primarily about the product itself. These advertisements emphasize the utilitarian value of the product and attempt to convince us that the product performs the way a product of its type should. Such advertisements often provide information about, for example, the quality of materials

used to make the product, the durability of the product, or, in cases of things to eat or drink, the taste of the product. Zenith's "The quality goes in before the name goes on" slogan and Ford's claim that "Quality is Job One" can be taken as variations of this hard-sell approach.

Given the contrasting interpersonal orientations identified by the self-monitoring construct (cf. Snyder, 1979), it occurred to Snyder and DeBono (1985, 1987) that one of the reasons that these two rather distinct advertising strategies are effective is that they might differentially appeal to individuals who differ in their self-monitoring propensities. As a consequence of their concerns with the image they project to others and with the situational appropriateness of their behaviors, high self-monitors might be particularly responsive to advertisements that highlight the image that could be gained or projected through the possession of a particular product (Chatterjee & Hunt, 1996). In contrast, given their overarching concerns with behaving in ways consistent with their personal attitudes, values, and dispositions, low self-monitors might seek a similar consistency in the products they possess. That is, low self-monitors might be particularly responsive to advertisements that emphasize the consistency between what a product purports to be and how that product actually performs.

These predictions were tested by Snyder and DeBono (1985) in a series of three studies. In the first study, they created an image-oriented and quality-based advertisement for each of three different products: Canadian Club whiskey, Barclay cigarettes, and Irish Mocha Mint flavored instant coffee. For each product, the pictorial content of the two ads was the same. What differed was the copy associated with the picture. For one of the ads, the copy alluded to an image that could be gained or achieved through use of the product. The copy of the other ad focused more on the product itself and gave the reader some information about the product's content and quality. For example, the ad for Irish Mocha Mint coffee showed a couple relaxing in a candle-lit room drinking coffee. The image-oriented version of this ad suggested that one could "Make a chilly night become a cozy evening with Irish Mocha Mint coffee" while the more quality-based ad told the reader about "Irish Mocha Mint: A delicious blend of three great flavors—coffee, chocolate, and mint."

Snyder and DeBono showed participants each set of ads and, for each set, asked participants to choose between the ads on a number

of evaluative dimensions (e.g., “Which ad do you like better?” “Which ad is more persuasive?”). They found that, across the three sets, high self-monitoring individuals were more likely than were low self-monitoring individuals to endorse the image-oriented ads, and, conversely, that low self-monitoring individuals were more likely than high self-monitors to favor the quality-based ads.

In their second study, Snyder and DeBono (1985) used the same advertisements as in the first study but focused on a different dependent variable. In this study, participants were shown either the three image-oriented ads or the three quality-based ads. After viewing each ad, participants were asked to estimate, within a given range, how much they would be willing to pay for the advertised product. Consistent with the results of the first study, Snyder and DeBono found that high self-monitoring individuals were willing to pay more for products when the advertisements highlighted the image associated with the product but that low self-monitors expressed higher willingness-to-pay estimates when the ads focused on the product itself.

Finally, in their last study, Snyder and DeBono (1985) contacted individuals and inquired whether they would be willing to be part of a test sample for a new shampoo. Before indicating their willingness, however, participants were told something about the shampoo and its marketing strategy. Some were told that clinical tests indicated this shampoo was as good as others in terms of its cleaning ability but consistently outscored its competitors in terms of how it left hair looking. Others were told the opposite—that this shampoo was as good as others in terms of how it left hair looking but was superior in its cleaning ability. The results indicated that high self-monitoring individuals were more willing to be part of the test sample when the marketing pitch emphasized how their hair would look whereas low self-monitoring individuals were more likely to want to try the shampoo when told of its superior cleaning abilities.

Despite the general confirmation of predictions, however, these studies also suggested that the relations between self-monitoring and reactions to advertising strategies are likely much more complex than a first glance might indicate. In both the first and second study, for example, although differences between high and low self-monitors were evident when collapsing across the three ads, follow-up tests indicated that in both studies, significant differences between the reactions of high and low self-monitors occurred only in response

to one of the ads, that for Canadian Club. Although reactions to the other two ads were in the predicted direction, the differences did not reach conventional levels of statistical significance.

And, indeed, subsequent research on the differential reactions of high and low self-monitors to image-oriented and quality-based advertising appeals has produced decidedly mixed results. Some studies have produced conceptual replications or, at least, partial confirmations of the original findings. DeBono and Packer (1991, Study 1), for example, created image-oriented and quality-based advertisements for a fictitious cola product and a fictitious cassette tape and had high and low self-monitors sample the product after exposure to one of the two ads. They found that high self-monitors evaluated the products more favorably following exposure to the image-oriented ads, but that low self-monitors thought more highly of the products after viewing the quality-based ads. In a separate study, DeBono and Packer (1991, Study 2) report evidence that high self-monitors perceive image-oriented ads as more self-relevant than quality-based ads and that the opposite appears true of low self-monitors. In addition, a third study (DeBono & Packer, 1991, Study 3) demonstrated that high self-monitors, after a delay of a week, better recognized image-oriented ads and that after a similar delay, low self-monitors better recognized quality-based ads.

In terms of attempts at more direct replications of the original Snyder and DeBono (1985) findings, Lennon, Davis, and Fairhurst (1988), using image-oriented and quality-based ads for a Pendleton Sweater, Guess Jeans, and a Jordache shirt, found that high self-monitors tended to evaluate more positively the image-oriented ads and that low self-monitors were more likely to endorse the product quality-based ads, although these results did not quite reach conventional levels of statistical significance. Much like Snyder and DeBono, Lennon et al. found that the differential reactions of high and low self-monitors were much more evident for one set of their ads (the Pendleton sweater ads) than the other two, although in all three cases the means were in the expected direction.

Similarly, Zuckerman, Gioioso, and Tellini (1988) constructed image-oriented and quality-based versions of ads for Pontiac's Fiero, Heineken Beer, and Barclay cigarettes and asked participants to indicate which version of the ad they preferred. Although the means generated were in the predicted direction (i.e., low self-monitors were more likely than were high self-monitors to endorse the quality

advertisements), the results also fell short of conventional levels of statistical significance. Last, employing the Revised Self-Monitoring Scale (Lennox & Wolfe, 1984), Celuch and Slama (1995) demonstrated that individuals who score high on this scale had more positive attitudes toward the ad after viewing an image-oriented ad for a cognac than did individuals who scored low on this scale, but only if the image portrayed in the ad was a socially acquisitive one.

Other research, however, has failed to find practically any degree of support for the predicted relations between self-monitoring and advertising style. The Lennon et al. study, previously cited, found no reliable relations between the mean price participants were willing to pay in response to their image-oriented and quality-based ads as a function of self-monitoring. Bearden, Shuptine, and Teel (1989) report a series of studies in which they presented high and low self-monitors with an image-oriented and a quality-based advertisement for a fictitious brand of jeans as well as a fictitious brand of shoes. Using similar dependent measures as Snyder and DeBono (1985), Bearden et al. were not able to find any systematic differences between high and low self-monitors in their responses to the image-oriented and quality-based ads either on an evaluative measure or on a price-willing-to-pay assessment. They did, however, find that high self-monitors were more likely to indicate a willingness to try the product after exposure to the image-oriented version of the shoe ad and that low self-monitors were more willing to try the product in response to a quality-based version of this ad, but they did not find equivalent differences in response to the jeans ads. Moreover, Davis and Lennon (1989), using image-oriented and quality-based advertisements for shoes, pant suits, skirted suits, and sweaters, and Browne and Kaldenberg (1997), using image-oriented and non-image-oriented ads for a car, a pen, and a bar of soap, also failed to find consistent evaluative differences between high and low self-monitors as a function of advertising technique.

The existing literature, then, presents a rather clouded picture. In some studies, the relations between self-monitoring propensity and reactions to advertising strategy are evident and consistent. In other studies, the relations, though apparent, are much weaker (see also Covell, Dion, & Dion, 1994). In yet other studies, the relations are seemingly nonexistent. What can account for these discrepancies? Why is it that high and low self-monitors sometimes respond differentially to image-oriented and quality-based ads but at other

times such differences cannot be found? It might be worth noting that no published study has found a significant reversal of the Snyder and DeBono results (i.e., some studies are consistent with the original results and others find no self-monitoring-ad strategy relations, but no study has found either that low self-monitors are significantly more responsive to image advertisements or that high self-monitors are significantly more responsive to quality-based ads). Nonetheless, an examination of the possible reasons underlying the seeming lack of robust results certainly appears warranted. Although some have speculated that self-monitoring measurement and construct conceptualization issues as well as difficulties in operationalizing product image may be part of the cause for the inconsistent findings (see Slama & Singley, 1996, for a complete discussion), data directly examining these concerns as possible explanations are currently lacking (but see Celuch & Slama, 1995). There are, however, two different lines of empirical research that may offer possible clues for the variability in the findings.

Information-Processing Concerns

As research on the psychology of persuasion over the past 25 years has demonstrated quite clearly and consistently, the importance of the specific arguments offered in a persuasive message on the ultimate effectiveness of that message is dependent on the message recipient's motivation and ability to process the contents of the message (Petty & Wegener, 1998a). In particular, the specific contents of a persuasive message become a key element in a message's effectiveness when both motivation and ability to process the message are relatively high. Under such conditions, individuals tend to be persuaded when the quality of the arguments presented is strong but tend not to be persuaded if argument quality is weak. Research has uncovered many variables that appear to influence either motivation to process (e.g., the importance of the topic; Petty Cacioppo & Goldman, 1981) or ability to process (e.g., amount of distraction in the environment; Petty, Wells, & Brock, 1976).

Recently, Petty and colleagues (Petty & Wegener, 1998b; Petty, Wheeler, & Bizer, 2000) suggested that an additional variable that might affect motivation to process a persuasive message is the extent to which the specific content of a persuasive message matches the motivations underlying (i.e., functional basis of) an individual's

attitudes (see also Lavine & Snyder, 2000). In particular, they hypothesized that when such a match occurs, the individual becomes more motivated to process the message and, as a result, argument quality becomes an important determinant of the message's effectiveness. As a consequence, they argued that when a message matches the motivational underpinnings of an individual's attitude (e.g., when a high self-monitor is presented with an image-oriented advertisement), then a message containing strong arguments will be persuasive, but a message containing weak arguments will not.

To examine this possibility, Petty and Wegener (1998b) replicated Snyder and DeBono's (1985) Study 1 with one addition: They also manipulated the strength of the image-oriented and quality-based arguments. They did not find that high self-monitors generally preferred the image-oriented ads and that low self-monitors generally preferred the quality-based ads. What they did find, however, was more intriguing: a significant match \times argument strength interaction. This interaction indicated that when a match occurred (i.e., a high self-monitor was presented with an image-oriented ad or a low self-monitor was presented with a product-quality ad), individuals were much more responsive to the strength of the arguments presented than when a mismatch occurred. Thus, when high self-monitors were exposed to image-oriented ads, they evaluated those ads more favorably when the ads contained strong arguments and significantly less favorably when they contained weak arguments. Similarly, when low self-monitors were exposed to the quality-based ads, they reacted more favorably when the ads contained strong arguments and less favorably when the ad contained weak arguments.

In a similar vein, DeBono and Telesca (1990) presented high and low self-monitors with an ad for a new tanning lotion that contained either strong or weak arguments and that varied in the extent to which it represented an image-oriented appeal. In some conditions, the message was presented by a very physically attractive woman (an image cue), and, in other conditions, the message was presented by the same woman, who was made to look much less attractive. Similar to what Petty and Wegener (1998b) found, the results indicated that in the presence of the image cue, high self-monitors were much more responsive than were low self-monitors to the content of the message and were persuaded only when the attractive spokesperson presented relatively strong arguments (see also DeBono & Harnish, 1988).

It appears then that one reason that image-oriented ads might not always be effective with high self-monitors and that quality-based ads might not always be effective with low self-monitors is that these “matched” ads induce a more thorough consideration of the strength of the specific arguments offered. Perhaps only when the arguments used in these matched messages are perceived by message recipients as particularly strong will favorable evaluations result. As a consequence, it could very well be that part of the variability in the results of self-monitoring-image/quality-ad research can be explained by variability in argument quality in the matched ads. This would seem to be a fruitful arena for future research.

Product-Related Issues

Shavitt (1990) has suggested and presented evidence that not every product can be advertised and marketed successfully with a variety of strategies. Some products, she showed, serve primarily only one purpose, and, as a consequence, the advertising approach that works best for that product is one that focuses on that product's main function (see also Johar & Sirgy, 1991). An advertising strategy that attempts to market that product for a purpose other than its primary one, she demonstrated, will be far less successful. Consider aspirin as an example (Shavitt, 1990). Aspirin's main function is pain relief. Rarely does or can one use aspirin to project a desirable image. As a consequence, Shavitt contends, an image-oriented ad would not likely be successful for this type of product because aspirin generally cannot be used for image-enhancing purposes. Only an ad that highlights the pain-relieving properties of this product should be persuasive.

This line of reasoning led Shavitt, Lowrey, and Han (1992) to predict that the relations between self-monitoring and image-oriented/quality-based advertising are more likely to be found among those products that can serve multiple functions; that is, products that can reasonably be used for image-enhancing purposes as well as for more practical/utilitarian purposes. For those products that serve primarily either a practical/utilitarian purpose (e.g., air conditioners) or an image-enhancing/social identity purpose (e.g., greeting cards), they argued, self-monitoring differences are not likely to emerge. In one study designed to test these notions (Shavitt et al., 1992, Study 2), they presented high and low self-monitors with possible

arguments that could be used to advertise each of three products, an air conditioner (a utilitarian product), a class ring (an image/social identity product), and a watch (a multiple-function product) and asked participants to choose the three arguments they would use if they were constructing an advertisement for this product. The arguments from which participants could select were a mix of product-quality information and image/social-identity claims. As expected, they found that for the air conditioner, both high and low self-monitors selected to the same extent primarily product-quality arguments and for the class ring, both high and low self-monitors selected primarily social-identity arguments. For the watch (the multiple-function product), however, self-monitoring differences emerged. Although low self-monitors selected equivalent numbers of social-identity and product-quality arguments, high self-monitors selected significantly more social-identity than product-quality arguments.

In a conceptual replication (Shavitt et al., 1992, Study 3), participants were instructed to write advertisements that would appeal to them personally for an aspirin (utilitarian product), a university flag (social identity product), and a pair of sunglasses (multiple function product). Results showed no self-monitoring differences for the aspirin or the flag. For the aspirin, virtually all subjects wrote product-quality/utilitarian copy; for the flag, virtually all subjects wrote image/social-identity copy. Self-monitoring differences were evident, however, in the copy generated for the sunglasses. For this multiple-function product, high self-monitors generated more image-oriented/social-identity and less quality-based/utilitarian copy than did low self-monitors.

Although neither of these studies examined directly the reactions of high and low self-monitors to image-oriented and quality-based advertising as a function of product-category, the results are nonetheless instructive. They suggest that the relations between self-monitoring propensity and type of advertising appeal might be constrained by the nature of the product advertised. If a product is, in fact, generally used for a single purpose, then perhaps we should not expect to see significant self-monitoring differences as a function of advertising strategy. As the Shavitt et al. (1992) results indicate, in such a situation, most individuals, regardless of self-monitoring propensity, may gravitate toward those advertisements that speak to the product's sole function. According to this reasoning, self-monitoring differences in response to image-oriented and quality-based advertisements are likely to be

most evident for those products that have utilitarian value but that can also be used for image-enhancing purposes. Although an issue for future research to address, it may very well be the case that some studies have failed to find reliable relations between self-monitoring and ad orientation because, at least in part, those studies used products that can only serve a very limited number of functions.

Product Perception

The research demonstrating the apparent differential concerns of high and low self-monitors regarding the image-enhancing potential versus performance likelihood of consumer products has laid the groundwork for investigations into a different, but related, area of consumer psychology, that of product perception. Two domains, in particular, have been the focus of recent research efforts: the strategies by which individuals evaluate product quality and the impact that brand-image/self-image consistency has on product evaluation.

Evaluating Product Quality

A fundamental concern within consumer psychology is gaining an understanding of the strategies by which consumers judge product quality (Rao & Monroe, 1989). By what means do they decide whether a product is a quality one? One answer, of course, is in terms of the actual performance of the product. If a product works as it should and has a high degree of reliability, consumers will generally evaluate that product favorably and consider it a quality product (e.g., Compeau, Grewal, & Monroe, 1998).

Interestingly, product performance is not the only criterion consumers employ in arriving at these judgments. Research suggests that consumers also take into account so-called image variables when attempting to understand a product's quality. Image variables are defined as attributes of a product that are distinct from the product itself but are strongly associated with the product and can be used to make inferences about its quality (Erickson, Johansson, & Chao, 1984). These are generally variables that tell us something about the image we are likely to project if we possess a particular product, the impression of self we are likely to convey to others, or the kind of reaction we are likely to elicit from others. Among those image variables that have a demonstrated impact on perceptions of product

quality are country of origin (Chao, 1998) and product price (Dodds, Monroe, & Grewal, 1991).

Given the apparent differential motivations underlying their attitudes and beliefs about consumer products, it occurred to DeBono and colleagues (cf. DeBono, 2000) that differences in self-monitoring propensities might be related to the particular strategies individuals use when judging product quality. As a consequence of their concerns with product performance and the consistency between what a product purports to be and how it actually performs, DeBono (2000) argued that low self-monitors might be particularly likely to use product performance as a means by which to evaluate product quality. In contrast, to the extent that the particular image conveyed by a product is a more pressing concern for high self-monitors, DeBono (2000) suggested that high self-monitors might be more likely to rely on image variables in arriving at a judgment of product quality.

In one study to examine these notions, DeBono and Rubin (1995) had high and low self-monitors taste and evaluate the quality of a cheese sample. For some participants, the cheese was a rather pleasant-tasting cheese; for others, it was much less pleasant tasting. Also manipulated in this study was the purported country of origin. Some participants were informed that the cheese was imported from Strausberg, France, a pretested image-enhancing country of origin for cheese. Others were told that the cheese was made in Mulberry, Kansas, a pretested much-less-desirable country of origin. The results were very consistent with expectations. The product quality ratings of high self-monitors were predicted only by the cheese's country of origin. Regardless of the actual taste of the cheese, high self-monitors evaluated the cheese more favorably when they thought it was imported from France than when they believed it came from Kansas. In contrast, for low self-monitors, only product performance seemed to matter. Irrespective of its country of origin, low self-monitors responded more favorably to the pleasant-tasting cheese than to the less-than-pleasant cheese.

In a conceptual replication, DeBono, Leavitt, and Backus (2003, Study 1) had high and low self-monitors sample and evaluate products that came from containers/packages that varied in their attractiveness. Although actual product quality was held constant (i.e., in reality, all containers/packages contained the identical product), the attractiveness of the product packaging significantly predicted the product quality ratings of high but not low self-monitors (see

also DeBono & Snyder, 1989). In a follow-up study (DeBono et al., 2003, Study 2), high and low self-monitoring men and women sampled and evaluated a perfume/cologne that varied in the pleasantness of its scent as well as the attractiveness of its packaging. As expected, the quality ratings of low self-monitors were influenced by the actual scent of the product regardless of the attractiveness of the bottle from which it came. The evaluations of high self-monitors, however, were not driven by the pleasantness of the fragrance. Rather, the product quality ratings of high self-monitors were a function of the bottle's attractiveness. They rated the perfumes/colognes from attractive bottles much more favorably than those that came from less attractive bottles.

Both country of origin and product packaging are attributes directly related to the product itself. Another means by which people can know that the products they use are conveying desirable images is through the reactions of others. Given their concerns with the impressions that their possessions project to others (Davis & Lennon, 1985), DeBono & Krim (1997) predicted that high self-monitors might be especially likely to use the reactions of others as an indication of a product's quality. In their study, high and low self-monitoring women evaluated a perfume that varied in the pleasantness of its aroma. In addition, for some women, upon applying the perfume, the experimenter remarked, "That smells great on you." For other participants, no feedback was given. Although the results indicated that both high and low self-monitoring women rendered more favorable evaluations to the perfume associated with a compliment, only for low self-monitors did the actual pleasantness of the perfume significantly influence product ratings (see also Becherer, Morgan, & Richard, 1979).

Other research, however, suggests that the influence of others' opinions on the product evaluations of high and low self-monitors might be affected by the extent to which the product is a luxury (e.g., golf clubs) or a necessity (e.g., toothpaste). Brinberg and Plimpton (1986) had high and low self-monitors report the extent to which they took into consideration the opinions of significant others (e.g., friends) when choosing luxury items and when choosing necessities. High self-monitors indicated that they were more likely to rely on normative considerations than were low self-monitors for luxury products but not for necessities. These results suggest the possibility that high self-monitors might be more likely to rely on the reactions of others or, perhaps, image variables in general when evaluating

products that are luxury items but may rely on other considerations when the product is more of a necessity.

Brand Image/Self-Image Congruence and Product Evaluation

Within the general area of product evaluation, a good deal of research has focused on the relations between consumers' self-images and their perceptions of the "personality" characteristics of (or the image associated with) various products and the extent to which the degree of consistency between the two influences product evaluations (Sirgy, 1982). Aaker (1999) was particularly interested in the impact of brand image/self-image consistency on the product evaluations of high and low self-monitors. In her study, high and low self-monitors first indicated their general preferences and usage likelihood for a number of products, some of which had a brand image of "exciting" and others of "rugged." Aaker found that among low self-monitors, those who had previously described themselves as "exciting" tended to prefer and were more likely to indicate the use of products with exciting brand images than did those who did not describe themselves as exciting. She found parallel results for the ruggedness dimension. For high self-monitors, however, brand-image/self-image consistency was not a significant predictor of either product preference or intended use. It appears, then, that low self-monitors are more likely than are high self-monitors to use the consistency between their own personalities and the perceived personality of the product as a guide for choosing among different brands.

Aaker also discovered, however, that brand image or product personality was, at times, also an important consideration for high self-monitors. As part of her study, she asked participants to imagine themselves in one of two dinner situations, one of which was a pretested exciting situation ("a fun dinner at a hip club with friends," Aaker, 1999, p. 46) and the other a pretested rugged situation ("an informal barbeque after river rafting," Aaker, 1999, p. 46). She then had subjects select, from an assortment of "exciting" brands and "rugged" brands, which brands they would likely use in such a situation. She found that high but not low self-monitors tended to select products whose brand image was consistent with the tenor of the situation. That is, high self-monitors tended to select the exciting brands when the dinner situation was an exciting one and tended to select the rugged brands when the dinner situation was a rugged one.

For low self-monitors, the characteristics of the situation did not seem to influence their product preferences.

Overall, then, Aaker's results indicate that low self-monitors may choose particular brands of products on the basis of how well the perceived personality of the brand matches their own and that high self-monitors may choose brands on the basis of how well the perceived brand personality matches the characteristics of the situations in which they are likely to use the product. These findings could also very well have implications for strategies that high and low self-monitors use to determine product quality. Perhaps it is the case that low self-monitors evaluate the quality of a product on the basis of how well the brand image matches their own dispositions, but high self-monitors evaluate the quality of a product as a function of how well the brand image matches the particular situations in which the product is likely to be used. That is, the results of this study may represent a limiting condition on the general strategies identified by DeBono and colleagues by which high and low self-monitors assess product quality.

Although Aaker did not find evidence that self-image/brand-image consistency played an important role in high self-monitors' evaluations, other research suggests that, under certain circumstances, it might. Graeff (1996) explored the relations among self-monitoring propensity, the image projected by different brands of products, participants' actual self-images, and their ideal self-images. In his study, however, he also took into account whether a product is one that is generally consumed in public or whether it is one that is generally used in more private settings. In particular, he had high and low self-monitors evaluate brands of four different products. Two of the brands were for products that tended to be consumed publicly (Reebok athletic shoes, Chevy Camaro cars), and two were for products that are more likely to be used in private (Budweiser beer, *Reader's Digest* magazine). He found that for publicly consumed products, the consistency between the image projected by a product and participants' own self-image (both real and ideal) better predicted the evaluations made by high self-monitors than it did for low self-monitors. For privately consumed items, there were no systematic differences between high and low self-monitors in the extent to which self-image/brand-image congruence predicted product evaluations. That is, high self-monitors, more so than low self-monitors, relied on the images projected by products and the extent to which

that image matched their self-images to evaluate products when those products were ones that were likely to be used in the presence of others. Although, as with Aaker's study, the methodology employed in this study was quite different than that used by DeBono and colleagues to study perceptions of product quality, the results generated raise the intriguing possibility that the different strategies used by high and low self-monitors for assessing product quality may be more evident when the product is a publicly rather than privately consumed one (see also Ratner & Kahn, 2002). That is, the image-enhancing potential of a product may be a more acute concern for high self-monitors when that product is a more publicly consumed one.

GENERAL CONCLUSIONS

Two conclusions about the relations between self-monitoring and consumer behavior appear warranted. First, self-monitoring is clearly a variable that can provide consumer psychologists with a non-trivial degree of explanatory power regarding important aspects of consumer behavior. Be it in understanding consumers' reactions to advertisements, their general evaluations of common consumer products, or their more focused assessments of product quality, research indicates that individual differences in self-monitoring can and do account for significant portions in the variability of these diverse kinds of judgments. Second, it is equally evident that much more work needs to be done before a clearer understanding of the specific role that self-monitoring differences play in consumer behavior can be achieved. Although general trends regarding high and low self-monitors' responses to advertisements and perceptions of products have been uncovered, the delimiting conditions on these relations need further exploration.

For example, two such conditions have been identified regarding self-monitoring differences in terms of reactions to image and quality-based advertising strategies: information-processing strategies in response to matched versus mismatched ads (Petty & Wegener, 1998b) and the functional flexibility of the product itself (Shavitt, 1990). This brief list is surely not exhaustive, and other possibilities readily suggest themselves. For example, in light of the work on product evaluation, perhaps high self-monitors' preferences for image-based advertising are especially keen for luxury products, for

ones that are likely to be used in public situations, or for ones whose images are consistent with the situation in which the product is likely to be used. Moreover, this research also indicates that not all images are likely to be equally desirable for high self-monitors and that the specific image that high self-monitors may be interested in projecting could very well influence the extent to which they respond favorably to particular image-based advertisements (Slama & Singley, 1996). In addition, research from other, related, domains suggests that factors such as gender (Covell et al., 1994), the specific image cue employed (Lammers, 1991), or the explicitness of a message's conclusion (Stayman & Kardes, 1992) might also represent factors that moderate self-monitoring/ad effectiveness relations. There appear, then, to be many potentially fruitful avenues for future researchers to travel.

It should also be noted that although traditionally important areas of consumer psychology have been addressed in the reviewed research, there appears to be one fundamental domain that has been relatively neglected. The majority of research to date examining self-monitoring and consumer psychology has generally addressed affective and cognitive reactions. There is a relative dearth of research on the actual consumptive behavior of high and low self-monitors. Although some studies have assessed hypothetical product choice (Aakers, 1999; Ratner & Kahn, 2002) and others have looked at behavioral intentions (Darley & Lim, 1992), very few, if any, have examined actual consumer behaviors (Cash & Wunderle, 1987). It seems that before we can have a complete understanding of the extent to which self-monitoring differences affect consumer behavior, research needs to begin to address issues related to actual consumption.

Many years ago, Kurt Lewin (1951) suggested, "There is nothing so practical as a good theory" (p. 169), and the research on the relations between self-monitoring and consumer behavior certainly attests to the validity of that statement. Although the self-monitoring construct was originally developed as an attempt to capture and delineate individual differences in people's abilities to monitor their expressive behaviors (Snyder, 1974), it has since demonstrated its ability to further our understanding of a number of "practical" domains. In addition to aspects of consumer behavior, the self-monitoring construct has, for example, successfully enhanced our knowledge in areas ranging from friendships and romantic relationships (e.g., Snyder, Simpson, & Gangestad, 1986) to workplace and

organizational behaviors (e.g., Snyder, Berscheid, & Matwychuk, 1988). What is particularly notable about the extent to which the construct has demonstrated its wide-ranging practical value is that it was developed only 30 years ago. Given its track record, one can confidently speculate that chances are rather high that when a retrospective similar to the current volume is compiled again 30 years hence, the range of applied domains in which the self-monitoring construct has shown its utility will likely have expanded greatly.

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