

EFFECTS OF PRIMING ALTERNATE MEANINGS OF ARGUMENT QUANTITY CUES ON PERSUASION

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Two studies were conducted to provide evidence for heuristic processing of persuasive messages, and to examine the hypothesis that peripheral persuasion cues have alternate meanings under different contexts and may have different persuasive impacts. A 3 (situational priming tasks) \times 2 (3 or 9 argument quantity cue) factorial design was used. Participants first performed different priming tasks designed to enhance the temporary accessibility of the length-strength or the scarcity heuristic, and were then exposed to an electronic pet ad (study 1) or a beeper ad (study 2) that contained the same arguments for the product. To increase the possibility that subjects rely on a heuristic strategy, the processing goal was directed to proof-reading in the first study, and directed to the layout design of the ad in 2nd study. In addition, subjects performed a cognitive loading task while reading the ad. Results showed a significant two-way interaction between situational priming and argument quantity cue on the attitude measures. After priming "the more the better" heuristic, subjects liked the product better when the argument quantity cue was nine rather than three. But after priming "the less the better" heuristic, the persuasive effect was larger when the argument quantity cue was three rather than nine. There was no significant differences between argument quantity cues in the control group where no particular heuristics had been primed. When the argument quantity cue was three, different situational priming resulted in different persuasive effects. However, when the argument quantity cue was nine, different situational priming had little differential impacts. These results indicate that subjects used a heuristic strategy to process the ad, and the effects of peripheral persuasion cues were influenced by the accessibility of the heuristic.

Keywords: Dual-process model, Heuristic processing, Peripheral persuasion cues, Situational priming, Argument quantity cues, Heuristics