

I'm a believer: Some product claims work better than others

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Consumers face a barrage of product claims each day. What makes those claims believable? A new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research* says both marketers and consumers can benefit from information about the way people process product claims.

Authors Elise Chandon (Virginia Tech) and Chris Janiszewski (University of Florida) began their research by identifying four different structures of product claims. The first format mentions the brand, then its associated benefit, such as "Pantene Pro-V: For Hair So Healthy It Shines." The second format mentions the lack of an important benefit, for example: "If it is not trail rated, it is not a Jeep 4X4". The third type of claim mentions the benefit, then the brand: "How do you spell relief? R-O-L-A-I-D-S." The fourth strategy is to focus on the failure to buy the brand: "If you haven't relaxed on a French Quarter balcony, you haven't lived yet."

While these formats seem similar, the authors say consumers employ different logical strategies to counteract the various pitches. "The believability of product claims depends on the consumer's ability to generate disabling conditions (i.e., other events blocking a cause from having its effect) and alternative causes (i.e., other events causing the outcome)," they write.

"A person's ability to think of alternative causes can make a claim less believable. For example, knowing that good oral hygiene also prevents cavities may reduce a person's willingness to believe that Crest prevents

cavities," the authors explain. "Second, a person's ability to think of disabling conditions can make a claim less believable. For example, knowing that people with high-sugar diets are more likely to have cavities may decrease a person's willingness to believe that Crest prevents cavities." In the course of their experiments, the authors found that the first two ad formats worked better when participants were able to come up with more alternative causes than disabling conditions.

This research can help marketers determine what types of claims are more effective in different situations. It can also help consumers understand why they find some claims convincing while they remain skeptical of others.

More info: Elise Chandon and Chris Janiszewski. "The Influence of Causal Conditional Reasoning on the Acceptance of Product Claims." *Journal of Consumer Research*: April 2009.

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