

The art of persuasion: Are consumers interested in abstract or concrete features?

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What types of messages are most persuasive? For example, would you be more likely to buy a TiVo if an ad described it as offering you freedom or if it explained how you could replay sports events? A new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research* says the key to an effective message is finding the fit between the consumers' goals and the level of abstraction.

"Informing people that TiVo promotes freedom of expression is an abstract, high-level benefit of the brand, whereas the replay and slow motion features represent concrete, low-level benefits," write authors Angela Y. Lee (Northwestern University), Punam Anand Keller (Dartmouth College), and Brian Sternthal (Northwestern University).

"Our research indicates that whether consumers are more persuaded by abstract or concrete benefit information depends on their goals."

For example, the researchers found that when consumers aimed to fulfill aspirations and satisfy achievement goals, more abstract messages (like highlighting the TiVo's freedom aspects) stimulated favorable brand evaluations.

On the other hand, [consumers](#) who sought to fulfill their responsibilities and satisfy their security goals, concrete messages (such as the replay and slow-motion features of TiVo) were more persuasive.

People experience a heightened sense of engagement when they process information that fits with their goals, the authors explain. When the level

of abstraction fits the goal, people understand messages better and are more easily persuaded.

And, it seems, this message fit can benefit people in tasks beyond choosing products. "Our research shows that not only do people become more engrossed in fit information, they are also energized by fit messages to perform better in a subsequent task (e.g., solving anagrams), even if the task is unrelated to the message."

More information: Angela Y. Lee, Punam Anand Keller, and Brian Sternthal. "Value from Regulatory Construal Fit: The Persuasive Impact of Fit between Consumer Goals and Message Concreteness." [Journal of Consumer Research](#): February 2010 (published online July 21, 2009).

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