

Before and after: Ad placement should reflect cultural conceptions of time

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Consumers respond more favorably to advertising when the placement of product images is consistent with the way they visualize time, according to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*.

"Whether a product's image is placed on the left or the right of an advertisement matters for products promising results occurring over time (weight loss aids or anti-aging creams) or products that are valued because they are old or new (antique furniture, modern art, wine, new technologies)," write authors Boyoun (Grace) Chae and JoAndrea Hoegg (both University of British Columbia).

Consumers who live in [cultures](#) that read from left to right think about time in terms of a horizontal timeline, with the past on the left and the future on the right. This is why we never see before and after pictures where the before picture appears on the right and the after on the left.

In one study, consumers evaluated a product related to the past (an antique) more favorably when its image was placed on the left side of an advertisement than when it was placed on the right side of the ad. On the other hand, consumers [evaluated](#) a product related to the future (modern art) more favorably when its image was placed on the right side of the ad than when it was placed on the left.

Interestingly, the opposite occurred when native Hebrew speakers in Israel (who read from right to left) were shown the same advertisements. Meanwhile, when consumers were encouraged to think about time

differently (from top to bottom as in a daytimer), the horizontal placement of products no longer had any effect.

"The position of a product in an advertisement is not going to make or break sales. But a product that is advertised in a manner that matches our [visual representation](#) of time is easier for our brains to process. In ads for products for which time is an important element, a very simple change in the position of the image can alter consumer evaluations of the product," the authors conclude.

More information: Boyoun (Grace) Chae and JoAndrea Hoegg. "The Future Looks "Right": Effects of the Horizontal Location of Advertising Images on Product Attitude." *Journal of Consumer Research*: August 2013.

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