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Consumer reactions to the decreased usage message: The role of elaborative processing

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Abstract

This research examines consumer reactions to an emerging trend among corporate social responsibility initiatives—the promotion of decreased usage of the company's own core products. The results across three experiments suggest that the presence of a decreased usage message that highlights incongruity between the marketing message and the company's goals leads to negative company evaluations. The authors demonstrate that elaborative processing underlies these effects by examining the moderating role of the need for cognition and cognitive load. Further, perceived incongruity and cognitive elaboration mediate the findings. The implications for marketers and consumers are discussed. © 2008 Society for Consumer Psychology. Published by Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Labatt Breweries of Canada is reconfirming its commitment to promoting responsible alcohol use this week by bringing its innovative Know When to Draw the Line message back to television. —Labatt Breweries of Canada, September 9, 2004

In what appears to be the most elaborate and costly effort of its kind by a tobacco company, Philip Morris U.S.A., the nation's largest cigarette maker, plans to spend at least \$100 million a year to discourage children and teenagers from smoking at a time when underage smoking has risen drastically. —New York Times, December 3, 1998

These quotes demonstrate an emerging phenomenon in corporate social responsibility (CSR) initiatives. A growing trend among CSR campaigns is the promotion of socially responsible use of the brand in ways that encourage decreased or moderate usage of the company's own core products. These decreased usage messages can take different forms. First, some companies have communicated that consumers should take care to not use their goods or services to excess. In the example above, Labatt Breweries promotes moderate consumption of its products. In other examples, Scotts encourages consumers to use their lawn care products in moderation (Scotts, 2007) and BP has implemented the *A+ For Energy* program, which

encourages education regarding energy conservation (BP, 2007). Further, some corporations advocate the avoidance of their products altogether, as is the case for Philip Morris who promotes smoking abstinence and cessation among youth (Philip Morris, 2006). In addition, casinos and lottery corporations often promote services to help consumers quit gambling. Indeed, companies across a broad range of industry categories have utilized decreased usage messages in their marketing campaigns (see Table 1 for examples).

Although decreased usage messages *per se* may not always be perceived negatively (government agencies and nonprofit organizations often promote decreased usage of products; e.g., Strahan, White, Fong, Fabrigar, Zanna, & Cameron, 2002; Szykman, Bloom, & Blazing, 2004), we propose that when the decreased usage message involves the company's own products and is clearly incongruent with the corporation's goals (i.e., to increase sales of their own products), negative consequences can emerge. Companies are becoming increasingly concerned with social responsibility (e.g., Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001) and are particularly attentive to consumer perceptions of their social responsibility initiatives (e.g., Yoon, Gürhan-Canli, & Schwartz, 2006). Examining consumer reactions to CSR messages promoting decreased usage is not only pertinent from a corporate image standpoint, but is growing in importance in this age of over-consumption. Indeed, consumer behaviors such as smoking cigarettes, drinking alcohol, over-eating, gambling, and others can have deleterious effects on individual consumers and

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Table 1
Examples of marketing campaigns using decreased usage messages across different industry categories

Industry category	Company	Product(s)	Campaign description	Website address
Alcoholic beverages	Crown Royal	Whiskey	“It’s About Quality not Quantity” taglines urge individuals to consume the product in moderation.	http://www.crownroyal.com
	Labatt Breweries	Beer	“Know When to Draw the Line” television and print advertisements promote drinking in moderation and drinking responsibly.	http://www.labatt.com/english/lbc_responsible/lbc_main.htm
	Miller	Beer	“With Great Beer Comes Great Responsibility” campaign promotes drinking responsibly and in moderation.	http://www.millercoors.com/what-we-believe.aspx
Energy industry	Beyond Petroleum (BP)	Energy products	“A+ for Energy” initiative encourages reduced energy consumption by supporting energy education and conservation activities in classrooms.	http://www.bp.com/productlanding.do?categoryId=9020145&contentId=7039882
	Enmax Corporation	Energy products	Advertising campaign featuring Dr. David Suzuki promotes energy conservation awareness and is designed to encourage decreased energy usage.	http://www.enmax.com/Energy/Res/Greenmax/Conservation/TVCommercials.htm
	Shell	Petroleum products	The “Fuel Save Challenge” encourages consumers to learn how to reduce their fuel consumption.	http://www.shell.com/home/content/products_services/on_the_road/fuels/fuel_save_challenge/fuel_save_challenge.html
Tobacco industry	Philip Morris	Cigarettes	“Think. Don’t Smoke” campaign encourages youth to abstain from and to quit smoking.	http://www.philipmorrisusa.com/en/cms/Home/default.aspx
	Lorillard Tobacco Company	Cigarettes	“Real Parents. Real Answers” campaign encourages smoking abstinence and cessation among youth.	http://www.lorillard.com/index.php?id=5
	RJ Reynolds Tobacco Company	Cigarettes	Website advocates decreased usage of cigarettes by encouraging consumers to switch to “lower risk products.”	http://www.rjrt.com/smoking/summaryCover.asp
Food	McDonald’s Restaurants	Fast food	“Healthy Choices” and “Stairway to Health” programs promote healthier lifestyles. The choice of healthier options is encouraged, while the choice of less healthy products such as Big Macs and fries is discouraged.	http://www.mcdonalds.ca/en/community/index.aspx
	President’s Choice Foods	Grocery store foods	Organics campaign promotes the choice of organic grocery products, while implicitly encouraging decreased usage of the non-organic alternatives.	http://www.presidentschoice.ca/FoodAndRecipes/Organics/Certification.aspx
	Kraft Foods	Food products	“Healthy Living” campaign encourages healthier options, while discouraging less healthy alternatives.	http://www.kraftfoods.com/kf/HealthyLiving
Gambling	British Columbia Lottery Corporation	Lottery tickets	“Play Responsibly” initiative provides consumers with information on how to decrease/quit gambling.	https://www.bclc.com/cm/playresponsibly/home.htm
	Las Vegas Sands Corp.	The Venetian Casino	Highlights that it is socially responsible by “partnering with experts, scholars, and doctors” to create a program that encourages decreased problem gambling.	http://www.lasvegassands.com/respam.html
Clothing	Kenneth Cole	Clothing	“Awearness” campaign features advertisements that encourage consumers to boycott designer t-shirts.	http://www.kennethcole.com/awearness/
	Gap Inc.	Clothing	The Gap promotes a new line of organic t-shirts, which implicitly encourages decreased usage of its traditional clothing lines.	http://gapinc.com/public/Media/Press_Releases/med_pr_OrganicT032107.shtml

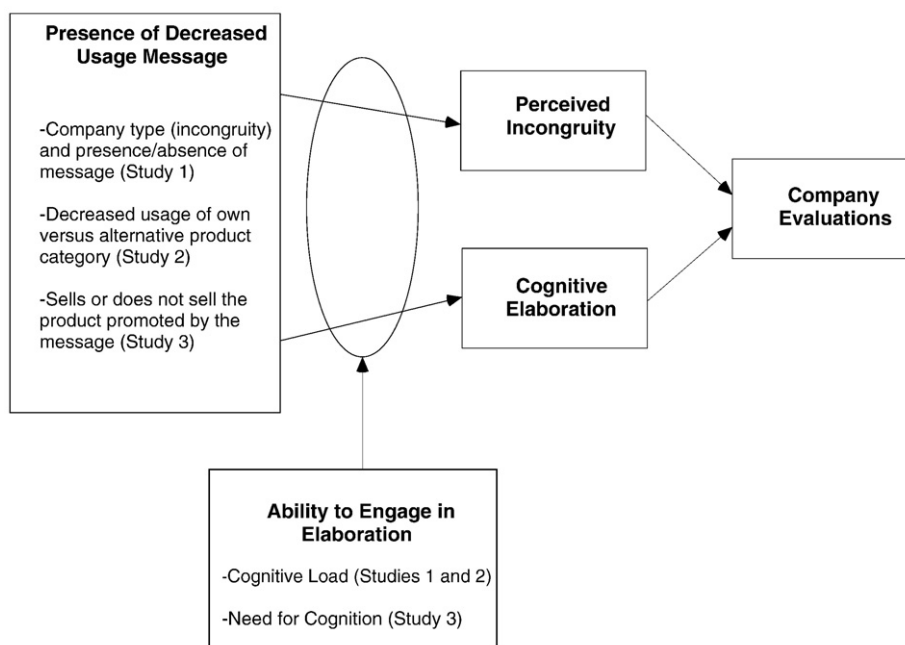
Table 1 (continued)

Industry category	Company	Product(s)	Campaign description	Website address
Other industry categories e.g., lighting, garden care, automobile, and pharmaceuticals				
	General Electric (GE)	Light bulbs	“GE Energy Smart” campaign promotes the usage of compact florescent light bulbs and decreased usage of conventional light bulbs.	http://www.gelighting.com/na/home_lighting/products/energy_smart.htm
	Scotts	Lawn care products	Campaign promotes moderate usage of its lawn care products.	http://www.scotts.com
	Toyota Canada	Vehicles	As part of the “Toyota Make it Better” campaign, Toyota promotes its hybrid synergy drive vehicles and implicitly highlights decreased usage of gasoline-powered vehicles.	http://www.toyota.com/about/our_commitment/environment/vehicles/index.html
	Advil	Pain medication	“One is Often Enough” taglines promote moderate usage.	http://advil.ca/content/advil/default

societal well-being when done to excess. In addition, companies may wish to self-regulate their activities or to comply with industry-specific legislation in communicating decreased usage messages (King & Lenox, 2000). Thus, marketers do often desire to determine the most effective ways to communicate messages of decreased usage of their own products to consumers. We focus on consumer responses to CSR campaigns that promote decreased usage of the firm’s own core products.

This research demonstrates that the presence (vs. absence) of a decreased usage campaign that is incongruent with company goals leads to negative company evaluations. Further, when the

decreased usage message is coupled with high (vs. low) consumer ability to elaborate upon the message, the most negative company evaluations are exhibited (see Fig. 1). This research makes a number of contributions to the marketing and CSR literatures. First, past research has largely examined CSR in terms of support for internal company policies such as employee diversity and support (e.g., Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001), as well as activities related to causes external to the company, such as environmental and social causes (e.g., Bansal & Roth, 2000; Forehand & Grier, 2003; Godfrey, 2005). The current research expands on previous work by investigating a



Note: The figure depicts that the effect of a decreased usage message on company evaluations is moderated by the ability to engage in elaboration. The indirect effect of this interaction (between decreased usage and elaboration) on company evaluations is mediated by perceived incongruity and elaborative processing.

Fig. 1. Conceptual overview of the current research.

unique and emerging trend in the marketplace—firms promoting the socially responsible use of their own brand in ways that lead to decreased product usage. Second, while most of the literature focuses on the positive effects of CSR activities, we add to an emerging body of work that suggests that CSR can have unintended negative consequences (e.g., Yoon et al., 2006). Third, although past work demonstrates that consumers generally exhibit favorable responses when there is a sense of “fit” (e.g., Kim & John, 2007); for example, when the CSR cause is congruent with the company or product type (Ellen, Mohr, & Webb, 2000; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001), we demonstrate that CSR messages related to usage of the company’s own products may result in negative evaluations of the firm.

Furthermore, we test for the conditions under which the presence of a decreased usage is most likely to lead to unfavorable consumer responses. In particular, we examine the role of moderators that reflect the degree of incongruity between the decreased usage message and company goals—company type (Study 1), whether the decreased usage is for the company’s own products or not (Study 2), and whether the company produces and sells the product or not (Study 3). In addition, we examine the effects of the ability to engage in elaboration by investigating the moderating role of a contextual variable (i.e., cognitive load) and a pertinent individual difference (i.e., need for cognition). Finally, unlike past research that largely explains negative effects of CSR in terms of unfavorable attributions regarding the firm’s underlying motives (e.g., Forehand & Grier, 2003; Szykman et al., 2004; Yoon et al., 2006), we show that a different mechanism—cognitive elaboration on the incongruent message—underlies our effects.

Decreased product usage as corporate social responsibility

We focus on the notion of CSR as the company’s activities regarding its perceived social obligations (Brown & Dacin, 1997). Understanding the effective use of different forms of CSR is important because stakeholders now expect companies to conduct business in an ethical and socially responsible manner (Yoon et al., 2006). CSR also is positively associated with evaluations, choices, and recommendations regarding companies and their products (e.g., Brown & Dacin, 1997; Handelman & Arnold, 1999; Hoeffler & Lane Keller, 2002), and CSR is positively related to financial performance (Luo & Bhattacharya, 2006; Orlitzky, Schmidt, & Rynes, 2003; Pelozo, 2006). Despite emerging support for the benefits of CSR, there remain many unanswered questions regarding when specific CSR initiatives are most effective (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001; Smith, 2003). Thus, the current research examines a unique strategy—the promotion of decreased usage of the company’s own products as a socially responsible behavior.

Variables that have been shown to influence the effectiveness of CSR strategies in creating positive consumer perceptions include the quality of the company’s products (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001), consumer support for the specific CSR issues and beliefs about CSR in general (Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001), consistency between the firm’s stated motives and its support for a particular cause (Forehand & Grier, 2003), the

source through which consumers learn about the CSR activities (Yoon et al., 2006), the amount of CSR contributions relative to CSR-related advertising (Yoon et al., 2006), and the perceived congruency or fit between the company and the cause it supports (e.g., Becker-Olsen, Cudmore, & Hill, 2006; Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006). For example, when company–cause fit is low rather than high (i.e., Home Depot supporting an initiative regarding domestic violence vs. an initiative regarding homelessness), consumers report more negative thoughts about the company. However, high company–cause fit only appears to be effective if it does not trigger negative attributions regarding the firm’s underlying motives (e.g., Forehand & Grier, 2003; Yoon et al., 2006). For example, Forehand and Grier (2003) demonstrate that when there are salient benefits for the firm (i.e., when the firm supports a cause with high fit [e.g., a computer software firm supports a program to curb computer illiteracy]) and the firm espouses public-serving motives, consumers evaluate the firm negatively, a finding that is most pronounced when causal attribution occurs prior to evaluation. Thus, consumers evaluate the firm most negatively when benefit salience is high and is inconsistent with the firm’s expressed motives. Furthermore, Yoon et al. (2006) find that when a company uses its own advertising to promote a cause that has high benefit salience (i.e., high fit between the firm and the social cause), backfire effects can emerge wherein the company is rated even more negatively than if no CSR activities were undertaken at all.

The current research complements past work by examining a condition under which the CSR campaign is not high in benefit salience, yet negative firm evaluations emerge. A decreased usage message does have fit with the firm (in that it is related to the firm’s products and activities), but it does not readily communicate high benefit salience (i.e., promoting decreased usage of its own products). We propose that, rather than leading to a focus on the stated firm motives, this decreased usage strategy will instead highlight that an incongruity exists between the firm’s goals and the decreased usage message. We anticipate that, when consumers are able to elaborate on this incongruity, company evaluations will be the most negative.

Incongruity and elaborative processing

We predict that the presence (vs. absence) of a message that promotes decreased product usage of the company’s own products will induce perceptions of incongruity between the marketing message and the company’s goals, which will result in negative evaluations of the company. We further posit that as incongruity becomes more salient (for example, because the company type [e.g., cigarette manufacturer] is highly incongruent with the decreased usage message [e.g., smoking abstinence and cessation]), consumers will process the information more elaboratively, which will in turn lead to more negative perceptions of the company. Factors that increase elaboration should increase such negative evaluations, whereas factors that decrease elaboration should mitigate such negative evaluations. This reasoning is consistent with Friestad and Wright’s (1994) Persuasion Knowledge Model which suggests

that consumers often develop implicit beliefs about the tactics marketers use to influence them, as well as the appropriateness of using such tactics. Further, such implicit beliefs may only influence judgments and behaviors when the consumer can elaborate on the marketing message (Menon & Kahn, 2003).

Although past research in the consumer context finds that perceptions of incongruity often lead to elaboration in ways that encourage positive evaluations (Meyers-Levy & Tybout, 1989; Meyers-Levy, Louie, & Curren, 1994; Peracchio & Tybout, 1986; Priester, Godek, Nayakankuppum, & Park, 2004; Stayman, Alden, & Smith, 1992), we propose that messages that highlight a high degree of decreased usage will lead to greater perceptions of incongruity and increased elaborative processing in ways that foster negative evaluations. We make this prediction based on a theory proposed by Mandler (1982; see also Meyers-Levy & Tybout, 1989), which suggests that encountering a stimulus consistent with expectations is not very arousing, nor does it lead to elaborative processing. In contrast, when a stimulus highly incongruent with expectations is encountered, this leads to both arousal and cognitive elaboration. When the degree of incongruity is low to moderate, this can result in assimilation with prior knowledge and often prompt positive affect. If, however, the degree of incongruity is extreme and can only be resolved through more substantive changes to the individual's pre-existing schema, the incongruity is likely to remain unresolved and lead to negative feelings. Thus, situations that highlight a greater degree of incongruity (i.e., presence of a decreased usage message for the company's own products) should encourage increased elaborative processing, which, in turn, will engender negative evaluations. Moreover, conditions that allow for increased elaboration on that incongruity should augment negative evaluations, whereas circumstances that hinder such elaboration should attenuate the negativity of company evaluations. We examine this last prediction by investigating the moderating role of both a situational variable (i.e., cognitive load) and an individual difference variable (i.e., need for cognition) that reflect the degree to which the individual is able to elaborate upon the message.

The current research

In sum, we propose that factors that highlight a greater degree of incongruity between company goals and the decreased usage message should encourage increased elaborative processing, which, in turn, will lead to negative evaluations. As such, we manipulate factors that increase the perceived incongruity of the decreased usage message such as company type (Study 1), whether the company promotes decreased usage of its own vs. an alternative product category (Study 2), and whether the company produces and sells the product or not (Study 3). In addition to manipulating factors that should increase awareness of incongruity (and therefore elaboration), we also examine whether factors related to elaborative processing moderate our effects. Those who are situationally able to elaborate (i.e., those not under cognitive load; Studies 1 and 2) and those chronically predisposed to elaborate (i.e., those high in need for cognition; Study 3) are predicted to evaluate a company that promotes

decreased usage of its own products more negatively than those who are less able to engage in elaborative processing. Finally, we examine whether the effects are mediated by perceived incongruity and elaborative processing (Study 3).

Study 1

In Study 1, we predict that negative evaluations of campaigns promoting a high degree of decreased usage of the company's own products are a result of cognitive elaboration upon the message. Thus, when consumers are better able to elaborate upon a message communicating decreased usage of the company's own products, negative evaluations should be exhibited. Conversely, when consumers are unable to elaborate upon a decreased usage message, this should reduce the negativity of evaluations. We test our predictions by utilizing a situational manipulation of cognitive elaboration—cognitive load. Past research demonstrates that those who have their cognitive processing resources otherwise occupied (i.e., are placed under cognitive load) are less able to allocate those resources toward elaborating upon additional information with which they are presented (e.g., Drolet & Aaker, 2002; Gilbert, Pelham, & Krull, 1988; Shiv & Fedorikhin, 1999). We predict that when the message is present and the company promotes decreased usage of its own products (i.e., a cigarette company promotes decreased usage of cigarettes), those not under cognitive load will provide more negative evaluations of the company than will those under cognitive load. This is because these conditions create the highest degree of incongruity (i.e., campaign present and cigarette company) along with increased elaboration of the message (i.e., no cognitive load). We test for the importance of perceived incongruity by manipulating the degree to which the company is incongruent (i.e., cigarette manufacturer) vs. neutral (i.e., clothing manufacturer) vs. congruent (i.e., a health-food company) with regard to a smoking abstinence and cessation campaign. We do not predict differences in company evaluations as a function of cognitive load when the company is a clothing company or a health-food company. Under these conditions, incongruity should not be highlighted. Although we were not certain what effect congruity might have, it may be that a congruent company–CSR linkage either leads to more positive evaluations or to similarly valenced evaluations as compared to neutral conditions. However, our main prediction is that:

H1. In the presence of a decreased usage message, those not under cognitive load will have more negative evaluations of an incongruent company than will those under cognitive load. These differences will be eliminated when the company is neutral or congruent with regard to the decreased usage message.

In the absence of a decreased usage message, incongruity will not be highlighted, and additional elaborative processing will not occur for those not under cognitive load. Thus, in the campaign-absent condition, we predict a main effect for company type (i.e., the cigarette company will be evaluated more negatively than the other company types), but that this will not be moderated by cognitive load. In sum, we predict a three-way interaction between the decreased usage message,

company type, and cognitive load, with this interaction largely driven by those not under cognitive load demonstrating more negative company evaluations when in the cigarette company/decreased usage message present condition.

Method

Participants

One hundred ninety-eight participants (130 females and 68 males) took part in a study that used a 3 (company type: clothing vs. cigarette vs. health-food) \times 2 (decreased usage message: absent vs. present) \times 2 (cognitive load: no cognitive load vs. cognitive load) between-subjects experimental design.

Procedure

Participants were assigned to either the cognitive load condition or the no cognitive load condition. As part of our cover story, they were told that the researchers were interested in how memory ability relates to consumer evaluations of companies. Thus, participants were asked to hold a number in memory and to recall it at the end of the session. In the cognitive load condition, they held an eight-digit number in memory (i.e., 85491763). This task was adapted from past research and has been shown to influence the degree of elaborative effort that can be allocated to an alternative task (e.g., Gilbert et al., 1988; Pontari & Schlenker, 2000). In the no cognitive load condition participants remembered a one-digit number (i.e., 8).

Participants then completed a questionnaire package in which they read a company profile that provided general background information about a company based in Belgium, named Zenet (Yoon et al., 2006). Although participants were led to believe this was a real company, it was a fictitious company that allowed us to manipulate the variables of interest. As our manipulation of company type, the description highlighted that Zenet is well-known for being a cigarette manufacturer, a clothing manufacturer, or a health-food manufacturer. In a pretest, we identified that these were company categories that were viewed as being incongruent, neutral, and congruent, respectively, with a decreased smoking message. In the *decreased usage message present* condition, Zenet's CSR campaign was described as being "aimed at decreasing smoking rates among youth" and that the company "would commit a percentage of its profits to promote both smoking abstinence and smoking cessation." In the *decreased usage message absent* condition, no CSR campaign was mentioned. Participants evaluated the company using 9-point scales (extremely unfavorable/extremely favorable, extremely unlikeable/extremely likeable, and extremely bad/extremely good; adapted from White & Dahl, 2006). These items were averaged to create a company evaluation index ($\alpha = .89$).

Results and discussion

Cognitive load

Consistent with past research (Pontari & Schlenker, 2000), 82% of participants in the cognitive load condition correctly

recalled the eight-digit number. Although some researchers have required perfect recall to consider participants cognitively busy (e.g., Gilbert & Osborne, 1989), this is usually in the context of less involving experimental tasks such as watching a videotape. In the present study, participants completed a more involving task (reading a company profile and evaluating a company) while rehearsing the number. Thus, we used less stringent guidelines for cognitive busyness, following Pontari and Schlenker (2000) and included all participants in the analyses.¹

Evaluations of the company

A 3 (company type: clothing vs. cigarette vs. health-food) \times 2 (decreased usage message: absent vs. present) \times 2 (cognitive load: no cognitive load vs. cognitive load) ANOVA on company evaluations revealed a significant three-way interaction, $F(2, 186) = 8.64, p < .001$. When selecting for the campaign present condition, a significant interaction between company type and cognitive load emerged, $F(2, 98) = 15.43, p < .001$. No interaction between company type and cognitive load emerged when selecting for the campaign absent condition, $F(2, 88) = .16, n.s.$ When the campaign was present and the company was a cigarette manufacturer those who were not under cognitive load reported more negative evaluations of the company ($M = 3.09$) than did those under cognitive load ($M = 4.94$), $t(186) = 6.40, p < .001$ (see Fig. 2). In addition, those who were not under cognitive load and evaluated the cigarette manufacturer reported more negative company evaluations when the campaign was present ($M = 3.09$) rather than absent ($M = 4.02$), $t(186) = 3.17, p < .01$. Conversely, those under cognitive load reported more positive evaluations of the cigarette manufacturer when the campaign was present ($M = 4.94$) vs. absent ($M = 3.87$), $t(185) = 3.36, p < .001$. The company was not viewed more favorably in any of the health-food manufacturer conditions compared with any of the clothing manufacturer conditions (all $ts < .66$). Thus, it was conditions of incongruity rather than congruity that had a greater impact on consumers' evaluations of the company. The three-way interaction qualified a main effect for company type, $F(1, 186) = 78.24, p < .001$, a main effect for campaign, $F(1, 186) = 4.30, p < .05$, a main effect for cognitive load, $F(1, 186) = 4.28, p < .05$, an interaction between company and cognitive load, $F(1, 186) = 5.50, p < .01$, and an interaction between campaign and cognitive load, $F(1, 186) = 4.17, p < .05$.

Study 1 demonstrates that conditions under which consumers are able to elaborate on the incongruity of the decreased usage message lead to the most negative company evaluations. Indeed, those not under cognitive load exhibit more negative evaluations of the company than those under cognitive load when the campaign is present and the company is a cigarette manufacturer (i.e., when incongruity was most highlighted). Also, for those not under cognitive load, the decreased usage campaign appears to backfire such that the cigarette company is evaluated more

¹ To ensure that including participants who did not recall the eight-digit number perfectly was not problematic, we analyzed the data both including and excluding the seven participants who recalled four or fewer digits correctly (Pontari & Schlenker, 2000). The pattern and significance of results remained the same regardless, and so we present the data including all of the cases.

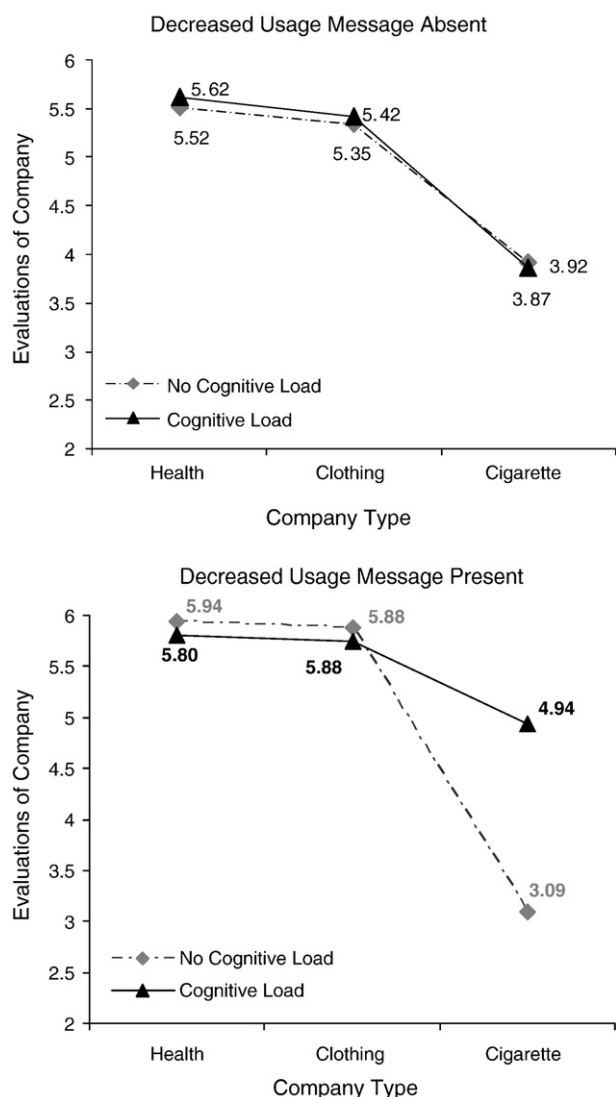


Fig. 2. Company evaluations as a function of decreased usage message, company type, and cognitive load (Study 1).

negatively when using a CSR campaign rather than when no CSR campaign is presented at all. It is also noteworthy that those not able to elaborate (i.e., those under cognitive load) actually demonstrate a preference for the incongruent company (i.e., cigarette manufacturer) when the decreased message is present rather than absent. It appears as if those under cognitive load may be using the presence of the decreased usage campaign as a peripheral cue rather than thinking more carefully about the message (e.g., Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). On the other hand, those whose cognitive resources are not occupied (i.e., those not under cognitive load) are further able to elaborate upon the decreased usage message when the company type is incongruent and, as a result, exhibit lower company evaluations.

Study 2

In Study 1, degree of congruence was operationalized via company type, which may suggest an alternative explanation for our findings. Because industry type varied across conditions,

consumers may have had negative reactions as a result of the decreased usage campaign coupled with a company type that is generally perceived negatively (i.e., cigarette manufacturer), rather than because of the promotion of decreased usage *per se*. To rule out this alternative, in Study 2 we select two company types that, according to pretesting, are evaluated similarly. We then examine the interaction between company type (i.e., clothing company vs. food company) and the type of decreased usage promotion (i.e., whether the company promotes decreased usage of its own product category vs. an alternative product category). This also allows us to increase generalizability by examining decreased usage messages in the context of companies that are not normally viewed negatively. Further, this methodology affords us the opportunity to test whether our effects emerge regardless of the industry type. We once again manipulate cognitive load to influence degree of cognitive elaboration and predict that consumers will exhibit the most negative company evaluations when elaboration is high (i.e., no cognitive load) and the company promotes decreased usage of its own products. In other words:

H2. When the company promotes decreased usage of its own product category, participants not under cognitive load will report more negative evaluations of the company than those under cognitive load. When the company promotes decreased usage of the alternative product category, differences in company evaluations between the cognitive load conditions will be eliminated.

Further, because we believe that our effects are not due to company category, but rather to elaboration upon the incongruity of the decreased message regarding the company's own products, we predict that company type will not moderate the effects.

Method

Participants

One hundred sixty-three undergraduates (79 females and 84 males) took part in this study in exchange for course credit. The study utilized a 2 (company type: clothing vs. food) × 2 (campaign type: decreased usage of own products vs. decreased usage of other products) × 2 (cognitive load: absent vs. present) design.

Procedure

As in Study 1, participants completed the cognitive load manipulation² and then read a company profile that provided general background information regarding a company named Zenet. As our manipulation of company type, participants either learned that Zenet was a clothing manufacturer or that Zenet was a food manufacturer. In the clothing manufacturer condition, it was noted that among the products it produces and sells, Zenet makes products using sweatshop labor, whereas

² Once again, the pattern and significance of results remained the same regardless of whether we excluded or included those who exhibited poor recall in the high load condition. As in Study 1, our analyses include all of the cases.

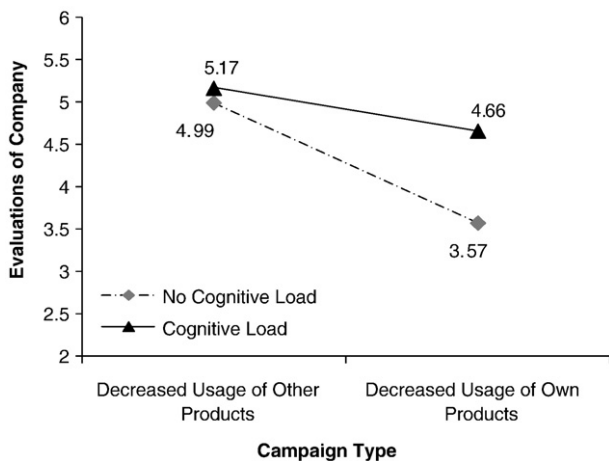


Fig. 3. Company evaluations as a function of campaign type and cognitive load (Study 2).

in the food manufacturer condition it was noted that among its products, Zenet produces and sells non-organic food products. In addition, participants learned of Zenet's new CSR campaign that either advocated decreased usage of the company's own product category or the alternative product category (e.g., clothing made in sweatshops vs. non-organic food products for the clothing manufacturer). Participants then evaluated the company using the same scales as in Study 1 ($\alpha=90$). Manipulation checks for company type and campaign type were included and were successful.

Results and discussion

A 2 (company type: clothing vs. food) \times 2 (campaign type: decreased usage of own products vs. decreased usage of other products) \times 2 (cognitive load: absent vs. present) ANOVA revealed a significant interaction between campaign type and cognitive load, $F(1, 155)=4.79, p<.05$. As predicted in H2, when the company promoted decreased usage of its own products, those not under cognitive load reported significantly more negative evaluations ($M=3.57$) than those under cognitive load ($M=4.66$), $t(155)=3.84, p<.05$ (refer to Fig. 3). Further, when the company promoted decreased usage of the alternative product category, those not under cognitive load and those under cognitive load demonstrated similar company evaluations ($M_s=4.99$ and 5.17 , respectively), $t(155)=.61, n.s.$). Among those not under cognitive load, the company was evaluated more negatively when it promoted decreased usage of its own products vs. other products, $t(155)=5.34, p<.001$. Main effects emerged for cognitive load, $F(1, 155)=9.28, p<.01$ ($M_{load}=4.92$ vs. $M_{no\ load}=4.28$), and campaign type, $F(1, 155)=21.37, p<.001$ ($M_{own\ products}=4.11$ vs. $M_{other\ products}=5.08$). Importantly, no significant three-way interaction emerged between company type, campaign type, and cognitive load, $F(1, 155)=2.03, n.s.$

Taken together, Studies 1 and 2 provide converging evidence that, compared to those not able to elaborate upon the message, those able to elaborate upon an incongruent decreased usage message exhibit more negative company evaluations. Indeed,

Study 2 shows that when the CSR campaign promotes decreased usage of the company's own products, those not under cognitive load demonstrate more negative company evaluations than those under cognitive load. When the decreased usage campaign focuses on an alternative product type, differences as a function of cognitive load condition are eliminated. These effects emerge regardless of company type and do not appear to be driven by industry category.

Study 3

Study 3 has several goals. First, we wish to test our hypotheses using an alternative methodology. We hold company type constant and manipulate whether or not it produces and sells the particular product highlighted by the decreased usage campaign. Second, we examine our predictions regarding cognitive elaboration in a different way—by utilizing an individual difference measure of need for cognition (NFC; Cacioppo & Petty, 1982). While contextual factors such as cognitive load (along with company type and campaign type, for example) can influence consumer reactions, preferences often reflect both the situation (context, frame, etc.) as well as more enduring characteristics of the decision maker (e.g., Bettman, Luce, & Payne, 2008; Smith, 2008; Kivetz, Netzer, & Schrift, 2008; Simonson, 2008). NFC assesses individual differences in the chronic tendency to elaborate upon information. Whereas those high in NFC tend to engage in and enjoy effortful information processing, those low in NFC do not (Cacioppo, Petty, Kao, & Rodriguez, 1986; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986). Research suggests that, compared to low NFC persons, those high in NFC are more likely to elaborate upon advertising information (Priester et al., 2004) and to be influenced by message-relevant information rather than peripheral cues (Haugtvedt, Petty, & Cacioppo, 1992; Petty & Cacioppo, 1986; Zhang, 1996).

We predict that consumers who characteristically tend to engage in elaborative processing of the message (i.e., those higher in NFC) will have more negative reactions to a decreased usage message when it is for a product the company produces than will those who do not tend to engage in elaborative processing.

H3. When the company promotes decreased usage of a product it produces and sells, participants high in NFC will report more negative evaluations of the company than those low in NFC. When the company promotes decreased usage of a product it does not produce or sell, differences in company evaluations between those low and high in NFC will be eliminated.

The third goal of Study 3 is to examine the mechanism underlying our effects. Our framework suggests that conditions that allow for elaboration upon incongruity lead to the most negative company evaluations. As such, we propose that both perceived incongruity and elaboration will mediate the effects (refer to Fig. 5):

H4. Perceived incongruity and cognitive elaboration will mediate the relationship between the interaction (between

product association [i.e., whether or not the company produces and sells the product] and NFC) and elaboration.

Finally, we test for some rival explanations for our findings. Our conceptualization suggests that the effects should not be mediated by other variables such as perceived motives. As noted in the introduction, past research finds that consumers will negatively evaluate the company when the CSR campaign reflects high firm-benefit salience (Forehand & Grier, 2003; Yoon et al., 2006), particularly when this leads to attributions of firm-serving (vs. society-serving) motives (Forehand & Grier, 2003). In the current research, we do not believe that the presence of a decreased usage message will necessarily increase firm-benefit salience (i.e., decreased usage of the company's own products does not highlight benefits to the company) and predict that company motives will not mediate the results. Further, we wish to rule out the role of message credibility, which has been shown to mediate attitude effects in past research (Holbrook, 1978).

Method

Participants

Eighty undergraduates (53 females and 27 males) took part in this study in exchange for course credit. The study held decreased usage campaign constant, held company type constant as a clothing manufacturer, and utilized a 2 (product association: sells product vs. does not sell product) × NFC between-subjects design.

Procedure

Participants read a company profile that provided them with background information regarding a company named Zenet, which was described as a large manufacturing and distributing company that is best known as one of the largest clothing manufacturers in Belgium. After reading some background information on the company, participants learned that Zenet was introducing a new CSR campaign encouraging consumers to decrease usage of clothing made in sweatshops. They then learned that, among the products Zenet offers, Zenet does manufacture and sell products made in sweatshops (sells product condition) or that they do not manufacture and sell products made in sweatshops (does not sell product condition).

After reading the company description, participants were asked to answer an open-ended question regarding what factors they took into account while evaluating the company. Participants' open-ended responses were later coded by two trained coders who were unaware of the study's hypotheses. Coders first decomposed participants' thoughts into conceptual units or "stated ideas" (Cacioppo & Petty, 1981) and then coded each thought as to whether or not it reflected elaborative processing, peripheral processing, firm-serving motives, and society-serving motives. To assess the degree of elaboration (i.e., central route processing), the number of thoughts that were central to the social responsibility message (i.e., thoughts that referred directly to aspects of the social responsibility campaign itself) were recorded (inter-rater reliability: $r = .94$, $p < .001$).

For comparison sake, the number of thoughts peripheral to the social responsibility message (i.e., thoughts that referred to factors external to the message, such as layout of the company profile, company factors, etc.) were also recorded ($r = .91$, $p < .001$). This coding has been utilized successfully in past research (Bosmans & Baumgartner, 2005) and follows Petty and Cacioppo's conceptualization of the central route vs. the peripheral route, in that the central route (high elaboration) focuses on thoughtful consideration of the key attitude issue at hand, whereas the peripheral route (low elaboration) focuses on aspects that are tangential to the attitude issue (Petty & Cacioppo, 1984). In addition, we coded for the number of firm-serving motives (i.e., attributions to motives that benefit the firm itself; $r = .88$, $p < .001$) and public-serving motives (i.e., attributions to motives that focus on helping others outside of the firm; $r = .90$, $p < .001$; see Forehand & Grier, 2003).

Participants completed measures of company evaluations (as in Studies 1 and 2; $\alpha = .89$) and perceived incongruity: "How consistent are the company's social responsibility activities with the company's overall goals?" and "How congruent are the company's social responsibility activities with the company's overall goals?" on seven-point scales (reverse scored to create an incongruity index, $r = .91$, $p < .001$). Participants also evaluated the perceived credibility of the CSR campaign: "How skeptical are you of the company's social responsibility activities?" (reverse scored), "How credible are the company's social responsibility activities?", and "How believable are the company's social responsibility activities?" on seven-point scales ($\alpha = .70$). Embedded in some filler items, participants completed the NFC scale ($\alpha = .88$; Cacioppo & Petty, 1982), which was mean-centered for analysis. A manipulation check for product association confirmed that this manipulation was successful.

Results and discussion

In order to utilize the continuous NFC index, regression analysis was used. As anticipated in H3, the interaction between

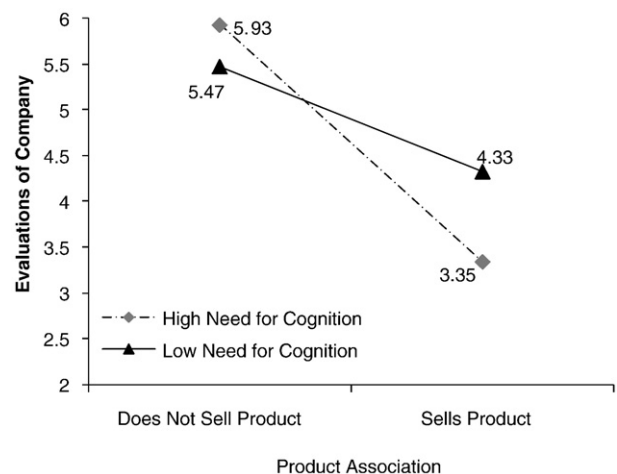
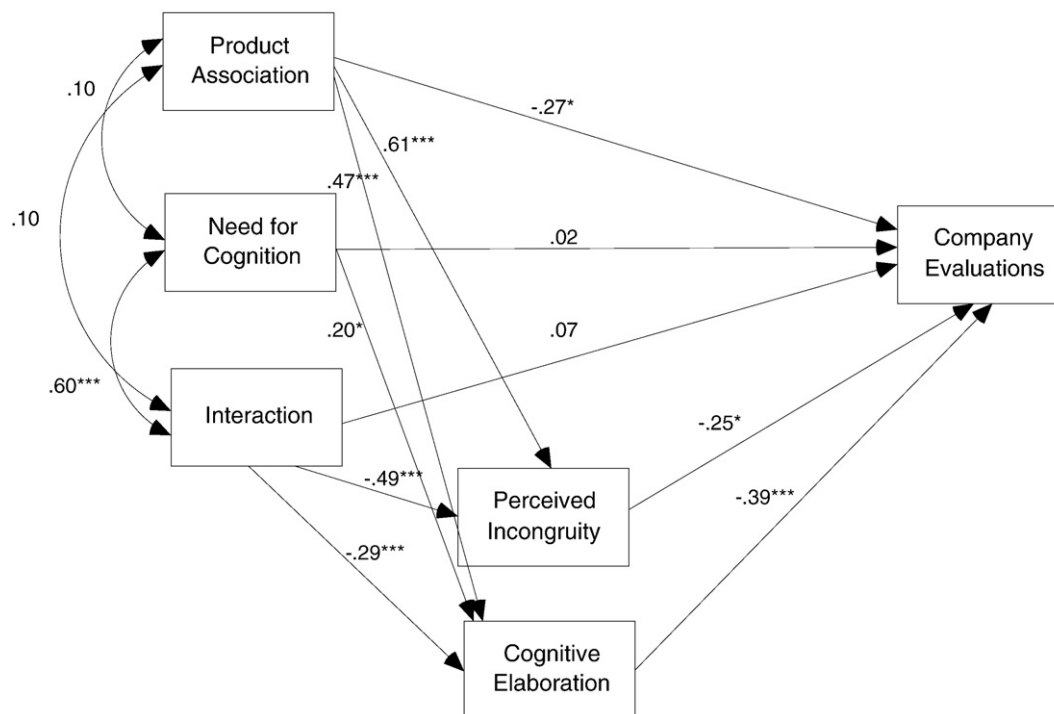


Fig. 4. Company evaluations as a function of product association and need for cognition (Study 3).



Note: In estimating the model we predicted a mediated moderation effect (Baron & Kenny, 1986). As such, we allowed the main effects for both product association and need for cognition to predict company evaluations and allowed the interaction term to predict company evaluations both directly and indirectly through the proposed mediators (Wu & Zumbo, 2007). The main effect for product association was hypothesized to produce perceptions of incongruity (i.e., when the company promotes decreased usage for a product it does sell this should increase incongruity perceptions) and cognitive elaboration (such promotions should increase elaboration on the message), and we thus allowed product association to predict both perceived incongruity and elaboration. Finally, need for cognition was hypothesized to predict cognitive elaboration (given that it measures the tendency to engage in effortful thinking). However, there was no *a priori* theoretical basis to hypothesize that need for cognition predicts perceived incongruity. As such, we estimated the model to allow need for cognition to predict cognitive elaboration, but not perceived incongruity.

Fig. 5. Mediated moderation model (Study 3).

product association and the centered NFC index (including the main effects in the analysis) significantly predicted product evaluations, $t(76)=3.27$, $p<.01$, $\beta=.35$. A main effect for product association also emerged, $t(76)=7.27$, $p<.001$, $\beta=-.62$. To examine the means by condition, we conducted a median split on the NFC index. Analysis using ANOVA also confirmed that the predicted product association \times NFC interaction was significant, $F(1, 76)=8.03$, $p<.01$. When the company promoted decreased usage of a product it sells, those high in NFC exhibited significantly more negative evaluations ($M=3.35$) than did those low in NFC ($M=4.33$), $t(73)=2.72$, $p<.01$ (see Fig. 4). When the company promoted decreased usage of a product it does not sell, differences in company evaluations between those low and high in NFC did not emerge ($M_s=5.47$ vs. 5.93 respectively), $t(73)=1.31$, $p<.20$.

Structural equation modeling (SEM) was used to test for mediation (Jacobucci, Saldanha, & Deng, 2008; Wu & Zumbo, 2007; see also Klein & Dawar, 2004). Recall that we predicted that both perceived incongruity and cognitive elaboration would mediate the effects. The model in Fig. 5 depicts a mediated moderation effect (e.g., Baron & Kenny, 1986; Wu &

Zumbo, 2007), whereby the indirect effect of the interaction (between product association and NFC) on company evaluations is mediated by both perceived incongruity and cognitive elaboration³ (CFI=.988; GFI=.987; NNFI=.984; RMR=.032). Product association was coded such that the *does not sell product* condition was coded as 0 and the *sells product* condition was coded as 1, and the NFC scale was mean-centered for analysis. When examining the model without the inclusion of the mediators, the relationship between the interaction term and company evaluations was statistically significant, $\beta=.35$; $p<.001$. When the mediators were included in the model the interaction term significantly predicted the

³ Although we used the scale ratings of incongruity and credibility in the analyses presented, we also coded the open-ended data for the number of thoughts regarding incongruity (i.e., thoughts that mentioned inconsistency or incongruity between the marketing message and the decreased usage message) and non-credibility (i.e., thoughts mentioning that the company/marketing message did not seem credible or believable). Examining the data in this fashion also supports our framework, and the results are displayed in Table 2 along with our other process-related measures.

Table 2
Proposed and alternative process measures as a function of product association and need for cognition

Experimental condition				
Possible mediators	Does not sell product/low NFC	Does not sell product/high NFC	Sells product/low NFC	Sells product/high NFC
Number of central route thoughts	$M=2.79_a$	$M=2.41_a$	$M=2.74_a$	$M=3.94_b^*$
Number of peripheral thoughts	$M=1.68_a$	$M=1.71_a$	$M=1.04_a$	$M=1.38_a$
Total number of thoughts	$M=4.47_a$	$M=4.12_a$	$M=3.78_a$	$M=5.32_c^*$
Incongruity ratings	$M=2.95_a$	$M=2.35_a$	$M=4.30_b$	$M=5.63_c^*$
Number of incongruent thoughts	$M=0.01_a$	$M=0.12_a$	$M=0.87_b$	$M=1.63_c^*$
Number of firm-serving thoughts	$M=0.58_a$	$M=0.18_b$	$M=0.09_b$	$M=0.06_b$
Number of society-serving thoughts	$M=0.11_a$	$M=0.06_a$	$M=0.13_a$	$M=0.13_a$
Credibility ratings	$M=4.03_a$	$M=3.94_a$	$M=4.57_b$	$M=4.90_b$
Number of non-credible thoughts	$M=0.05_a$	$M=0.01_a$	$M=0.17_a$	$M=0.31_a$

Note. Means are displayed on the basis of the median split on the need for cognition index. Within rows, means with differing subscripts differ at the $p < .05$ level.

Number of incongruent thoughts and number of non-credible thoughts were not used in the analyses; however, we include the means here for sake of completeness.

* denotes that the overall ANOVA is significant at the $p < .05$ level.

proposed mediators—perceived incongruity, $\beta = -.29$; $p < .001$, and cognitive elaboration, $\beta = -.49$; $p < .001$. Further, company evaluations were significantly predicted by perceived incongruity, $\beta = -.39$; $p < .001$, and cognitive elaboration, $\beta = -.25$; $p < .05$. Finally, the inclusion of the mediators in the model led the original relationship between the interaction term and company evaluations to fall from significance, $\beta = .07$; *n.s.* Thus, as predicted in H4, the indirect effect of the interaction (between product association and NFC) on company evaluations was mediated by both perceived incongruity and cognitive elaboration (see Table 2 for the means of our proposed and alternative mediators by condition).⁴

One alternative to our proposed model is the following mediational pathway: interaction (product association \times NFC) \rightarrow perceived incongruity \rightarrow cognitive elaboration \rightarrow company evaluations. Analysis confirmed that this conceptualization of perceived incongruity and cognitive elaboration was not as strong a possibility for explaining the findings as was our preferred model. When conceptualizing the mediators in this alternative

⁴ Our measure of elaboration is the number of central thoughts reported. One alternative measure of elaboration is the total number of thoughts (both peripheral and central). When using this approach to assessing elaboration, elaboration mediated the effects. However, we also examined the mediational role of peripheral thoughts alone. Number of peripheral thoughts did not mediate the relationship between the need for cognition \times product association interaction and company evaluations. Thus, although our findings hold regardless of the way in which elaboration is measured, consistent with our conceptualization, the effects appear to be driven by central (elaborative) rather than peripheral thoughts.

way, SEM analysis (as above) revealed that the inclusion of the mediators in the model only reduced the original relationship between the interaction term and company evaluations to marginal significance, $\beta = .17$; $p = .08$. Further, this alternative model produced a poorer fit than did our preferred model (CFI = .880; GFI = .907; NNFI = .974; RMR = .118). Thus, this alternative model did not appear to account for the results as well as our preferred model.

In addition, we utilized structural equation modeling to test whether firm-serving motives, society-serving motives, or perceived credibility mediated the effects. In all cases, the analyses confirmed that these constructs did not mediate. In a model with firm-serving motives as a mediator, the interaction term did not predict firm-serving motives, $\beta = .04$; $p = .72$, and firm-serving motives did not significantly predict company evaluations, $\beta = -.11$; $p = .20$. In a model with society-serving motives as a mediator, the interaction term did not significantly predict society serving motives, $\beta = -.01$; $p = .95$, and society serving motives did not significantly predict company evaluations, $\beta = .03$; $p = .75$.^{5,6} Finally, in a model with credibility as a mediator, the interaction term did not significantly predict credibility motives, $\beta = -.29$; $p = .27$, and credibility did not significantly predict company evaluations, $\beta = -.23$; $p = .12$.

The results of Study 3 demonstrate that those able to elaborate, in this case those high in NFC, have the most negative evaluations of a company when incongruity is highlighted (i.e., when the company produces and sells the product highlighted by a decreased usage campaign). In addition to contextual factors that influence the degree of elaboration (i.e., Studies 1 and 2), individual differences in the tendency to elaborate also moderate the effects of decreased usage campaigns on company evaluations. Although past research has not found evidence that NFC relates to company evaluations in CSR contexts (Forehand & Grier, 2003), we find that in the context of decreased usage messages, individual differences in cognitive processing moderate the effect of product association on company evaluations.⁷

⁵ We also tested for the role of motives by creating an index of the extent of firm-serving motives (i.e., number of firm-serving motives minus number of society-serving motives, divided by the total number of motives ascribed to the company). We note that the extent of firm-serving motives did not mediate the effects in this study, even when taking this alternative approach to the data.

⁶ Although firm-serving motives, society-serving motives, and credibility did not readily account for the interaction, we do note that the main effect for product association was significant when predicting credibility, $F(1, 74) = 16.24$; $p < .001$, and firm-serving motives, $F(1, 75) = 7.21$; $p < .01$, but not society-serving motives, $F(1, 75) = .07$; *n.s.*

⁷ We have additional data that also speak to this issue. One hundred seventy-one participants took part in a 2 (company type: clothing vs. cigarette) \times 2 (usage message: absent vs. present) \times need for cognition design. The procedure was similar to Study 1, with the exception that no health-food company condition was included and need for cognition was measured (rather than manipulating cognitive load). The results revealed a significant three-way interaction, and showed that the company was evaluated most negatively when incongruity was highlighted (i.e., decreased usage message present/cigarette manufacturer condition) and when consumers tended to characteristically engage in elaboration (i.e., they were high in need for cognition). Taken together with the results of Study 3, these data suggest that individual differences in NFC moderate consumer reactions to CSR messages communicating decreased usage.

We also find support for the notion that decreased usage of the company's own products coupled with increased consumer elaboration leads to perceptions of incongruity and elaboration, which, in turn, predict company evaluations. Indeed, both perceived incongruity and elaboration mediated the relationship between the interaction (between product association and NFC) and company evaluations. Further analysis suggested that alternative explanations such as attributions to firm-serving motives, attributions to society-serving motives, and perceived credibility did not readily account for the observed effects in this study.

General discussion

The current findings extend previous CSR research by examining an emerging strategy—the promotion of decreased usage of the company's own products. The results show that the presence of a decreased usage campaign that highlights an incongruity between the message and the company goals leads to negative company evaluations. We demonstrate the conditions under which decreased usage messages are most likely to lead to unfavorable consumer responses by examining the moderating role of factors that highlight the degree of incongruity between the decreased usage message and the company goals—company type (Study 1), whether the promoted decreased usage is for the company's own products or not (Study 2), and whether the company produces the product or not (Study 3). We suggest that our effects are driven by elaborative processing of the message. In particular, we find evidence that cognitive elaboration augments our effects, such that those able to elaborate upon the message (i.e., those not under cognitive load and those high in NFC) exhibit the most negative company evaluations when the decreased usage message is incongruent with company goals. Further, in Study 3 we show that both perceived incongruity and cognitive elaboration mediate the findings.

The current research contributes to the literature by demonstrating the conditions under which promoting decreased usage leads to negative company evaluations. Further, this research shows that unintended negative consequences of CSR initiatives can be related to cognitive elaboration on incongruent messages, independent of attributions to company motives (e.g., Forehand & Grier, 2003; Szykman et al., 2004; Yoon et al., 2006). Indeed, perceived incongruity and elaboration played a meditational role in predicting company evaluations, whereas company motives and perceived credibility did not mediate our effects. We note, however, that although the elaboration-congruity framework largely fits our account of the data across studies (i.e., given the moderating role of NFC and cognitive load, and the mediating role of elaboration), perceived credibility and motives may have played a role, particularly in Studies 1 and 2 where we did not directly examine these constructs.

Moreover, the results suggest that incongruity has more influence on consumers' evaluations than does congruity. That is, in Study 1 participants did not differentially evaluate the clothing (i.e., neutral) and health-food (i.e., congruent)

manufacturers when the decreased usage message was present. It was only when incongruity was highlighted that participants who were able to elaborate on the message shifted their evaluations in a negative direction. This is consistent with the pervasive finding that people are more likely to pay attention to, and be influenced by, negative rather than positive information (e.g., Baumeister, Bratslavsky, & Finkenauer, 2001). Thus, marketers should be aware that avoiding the activation of incongruity may be more important than assuring congruity when implementing decreased usage messages.

The current research also has other important implications for marketers. Although messages that promote decreased usage of the firm's own products are likely motivated by the desire to be, or to appear, socially responsible, our Study 1 shows that such messages can lead to even more negative reactions from consumers than no CSR message at all. Although research commonly espouses that firms should promote corporate social responsibility initiatives that have organizational fit (Becker-Olsen et al., 2006; Sen & Bhattacharya, 2001; Simmons & Becker-Olsen, 2006), the current research suggests that this is not necessarily the case with respect to corporate responsibility initiatives that promote decreased usage of the firm's own products. As such, marketers should choose CSR initiatives with care, being wary not to promote decreased usage in ways that instill perceptions of incongruity, coupled with elaboration upon that incongruity. For example, Philip Morris' "Think. Don't Smoke" campaign clearly promotes a high degree of decreased product usage, which likely activates perceptions of incongruity. Conversely, other marketing messages such as the tagline "Advil—One is Often Enough," do not necessarily invoke perceptions of incongruity. We note that companies may often wish to promote decreased product usage in ways that protect consumers, and that some industries are regulated such that companies are required to communicate decreased usage messages. If companies wish to promote decreased product usage, this should be approached in ways that are not incongruent with the brand image or company goals.

In another example, Crown Royal has used the tagline "It's About Quality not Quantity" to promote drinking in moderation, and this tactic reinforces their positioning strategy rather than highlighting incongruity. Such a campaign also focuses on a more moderate degree of decreased usage. Recent research shows that a low or moderate degree of promoted decreased usage is perceived much more positively than a high degree of decreased usage (Willness & White, 2007). For instance, decreased usage messages in the context of alcoholic beverage promotions are perceived positively if moderate or responsible drinking is promoted, but are not well-received if higher levels of decreased usage are espoused. Thus, marketers wishing to communicate decreased usage should avoid messages that communicate a high degree of decreased usage, presumably because these also activate perceptions of incongruity.

This research also has implications for public policy makers and social marketers. Evidence suggests that the Philip Morris "Think. Don't Smoke" campaign did not reduce youth smoking rates or intentions, but, rather, was related to increased

intentions to smoke in the next year (Farrelly, Healton, Davis, Messeri, Hersey, & Haviland, 2002). This campaign, although highly incongruent with company goals (i.e., presumably Philip Morris did want consumers to smoke or else they would not have manufactured the products), was not necessarily associated with negative company evaluations. Marketers and public policy makers wishing to encourage smoking abstinence and cessation, for example, would do well to use these types of campaigns to their advantage. If they could highlight that these campaigns are in fact incongruent with company goals and encourage consumers to elaborate upon that incongruity, it might be possible to encourage negative perceptions of the company and its products.

Stemming from this, one promising direction for future research would be to examine the conditions under which consumers do not respond negatively (and even respond positively) to incongruity (Menon & Kahn, 2003). It would be interesting to explore the particular aspects of these types of campaigns that can lead to positive consumer evaluations, even in the face of extreme incongruity. For example, it has been suggested that decreased usage messages in the context of tobacco labeling do not lead to negative reactions from consumers, either because they are not noticed by consumers (Wander & Malone, 2006) or because the labeling creates other positive associations (i.e., such as being *American* for people in developing nations [Wander & Malone, 2006] or being *adult* for young smokers [Farrelly et al., 2002]). Future research might empirically test such possibilities. Further, it would be interesting to examine which aspects of counter-marketing campaigns can help to reverse such effects (Farrelly et al., 2002).

Because promoting decreased product usage is a unique approach to CSR, it seems likely that differences in product characteristics will influence consumer perceptions of a company that promotes such messages. For example, some products such as cigarettes are generally recognized as being dangerous for consumers even in moderation, whereas other products might be viewed as safe for consumers when taken in moderation (e.g., red wine). In addition, some products may be seen as a necessity (i.e., medication), whereas other products may not (i.e., alcohol). Finally, while decreased usage messages are mandated for some products, they are not for others. Thus, future research could examine whether product characteristics such as perceived dangerousness, degree of necessity, and formal regulations moderate reactions to decreased usage messages.

One emerging strategy is for companies to simultaneously offer alternative options that consumers can choose from in tandem with a decreased usage campaign. For example, McDonald's fast food chain and Kraft foods (Kraft, 2007; Rendon, 2003) both promote reducing childhood obesity and encouraging healthy lifestyles. The McDonald's campaign, for example, promotes decreased usage of some of the firm's core products (e.g., Big Macs and french fries), but at the same time highlights that consumers can instead choose from a new line of healthier options (including McDonald's salads and wraps). It may be that consumers evaluate this approach somewhat

positively because it does not make incongruity with company goals salient. However, it is also conceivable that such an approach could backfire. Indeed, companies that implicitly promote decreased usage of one of their core products through the promotion of a new product line (e.g., a new clothing line of organic wear for babies by Old Navy; hybrid vehicles by Ford) might undermine consumers' confidence in the products these companies are better known for producing (i.e., non-organic clothing; gasoline-fueled trucks). It would be worthwhile to examine consumer reactions to these different types of decreased usage strategies. Further, future research might compare decreased usage messages to other types of CSR messages. Indeed, researchers have called upon marketers to make better linkages between the various forms of CSR (Maignan & Ferrell, 2004).

Although the current research focuses on companies promoting decreased product usage of their own brand, it is often the case that public policy makers and non-profit marketers also wish to encourage decreased product usage. Messages regarding decreased product usage are indeed relevant across a wide range of consumer behaviors such as drinking alcoholic beverages, smoking cigarettes, gambling, over-eating, energy consumption, and using pharmaceuticals. Thus, the topic is both timely and of great importance to consumer and societal well-being. Future research should continue to examine specific factors that influence consumer perceptions of decreased usage messages that do not necessarily come from the company itself (e.g., Hammond, Geoffrey, McDonald, Brown, & 2004; Pechmann & Knight, 2002; Strahan et al., 2002). That is, research should further examine how to make meaningful decreased usage messages that will be perceived positively on the part of the consumer, and ultimately result in desirable behavior change.

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