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Targeting Confident Consumers? Focus on High-Level Product Features

Confident consumers pay more attention to advertisements and product information that focus on high-level features of a product, according to a new study in the [Journal of Consumer Research](#). Less confident consumers, however, focus on the basics.

“When we feel confident, we think that abstract information is more relevant to us. But when we feel doubtful, we think that concrete information is more relevant. The more relevant we perceive information to be, the more we will focus on it,” write authors Echo Wen Wan (University of Hong Kong) and Derek D. Rucker (Kellogg School of Management – Northwestern University).

The authors conducted a series of experiments to examine how psychological confidence affects consumers’ attention and scrutiny of product information.

In one experiment, the authors induced participants to feel either confident or doubtful and then asked them to describe the action of “locking the door.” Confident people tended to describe it in terms of its high-level meaning of “securing the house,” whereas doubtful people tended to describe it in terms of its concrete action of “putting a key in the lock.”

In another experiment, confident consumers paid more attention to an ad for a health club when the message was focused on the idea of long-term health, a high-level and abstract benefit. They paid less attention to the ad when the message was focused on the idea that they could enjoy daily workouts, a low-level and concrete benefit. When consumers felt doubtful, the opposite occurred and they paid more attention to an ad when it discussed concrete as opposed to abstract benefits.

“Feeling highly confident prompts consumers to consider things from a global perspective and focus on the high-level and essential aspects of products, whereas feeling less confident or uncertain makes people focus on low-level and contextual details,” the authors conclude.

Echo Wen Wan and Derek D. Rucker. “Confidence and Construal Framing: When Confidence Increases Versus Decreases Information Processing.” *Journal of Consumer Research*: February 2013. For more information, contact Echo Wen Wan (ewan@business.hku.hk) or visit <http://ejcr.org/>.



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