

How Does Hand Orientation Help Consumers Imagine Using Products?

Oct. 21, 2011 — Consumers need a little help when it comes to imagining using products, according to a new study in the *Journal of Consumer Research*. Sometimes that means orienting an advertisement toward a dominant hand or helping them picture using the product (like putting a spoon in a soup advertisement).

"Across four studies we show that by simply orienting a product toward one's dominant (vs. non-dominant hand) in a visual advertisement leads to increases in imagined product use," write authors Ryan S. Elder (Brigham Young University) and Aradhna Krishna (University of Michigan).

The authors created advertisements that depicted products with handles (like mugs) or utensils to eat the product (forks, spoons) oriented toward the right or the left. They created the images by flipping images so they were mirror images of themselves.

Simply orienting a product toward a person's dominant hand leads to more imagined product use and higher purchase intentions, the authors found -- but only for positive products. Specifically, if a right-handed person saw an ad with a bowl of tomato soup with asiago cheese oriented to the right, she was more likely to choose it. She was less likely to want to consume a negative product (cottage cheese with tomato soup) when it was oriented toward her.

The authors also found that participants who held a clamp in one hand while viewing an advertisement were affected by the visual orientation of the ad. "When not holding a clamp, participants have higher purchase intentions for the product when it is oriented toward their dominant hand," the authors write. "However, when participants are holding a clamp in their dominant hand, they prefer the orientation toward their non-dominant hand, as this hand is free to mentally imagine interaction with the product."

The authors also found that ads need to be quite literal to help consumers imagine how to interact with a product. "Our studies show that the lack of an instrument to encourage imagined interaction (e.g., spoon) reduced the impact of the visual depiction on purchase in a manner similar to orienting the product toward a participant's non-dominant hand," the authors conclude.

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Journal Reference:

1. Ryan S. Elder, Aradhna Krishna. **The 'Visual Depiction Effect' in Advertising: Facilitating Embodied Mental Simulation Through Product Orientation.** *Journal of Consumer Research*, April 2012 (published online June 29, 2011) [[link](#)]

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