



Hard Rocks Cannot Be Changed?

Exploring the Moderating Roles of Metaphorical Openness and Goal Orientation in Attitudes toward the Competitive Brands

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Abstract

This research explores the interaction effects of brand commitment and metaphorical openness on how either promotion-focused or prevention-focused consumers engender their attitudes toward the competitive brands. In Study1, a total of 116 undergraduates were randomly assigned to a 2 (brand commitment: low vs. high) $\times$ 2 (metaphorical openness: low vs. high) between-subjects factorial design. Results indicate that for highly-committed consumers, metaphorical openness does not differentially affect their attitudes toward the competitive brand; however, low-committed consumers exhibit more favorable attitudes toward the competitive brand when metaphorical openness is high than when metaphorical openness is low. Subsequently, a total of 232 undergraduates were randomly assigned to a 2 (brand commitment: low vs. high) $\times$ 2 (metaphorical openness: low vs. high) $\times$ 2 (goal orientation: prevention focus vs. promotion focus) between-subjects factorial design. Results demonstrate that prevention-focused consumers with high brand commitment do not exhibit differentially favorable attitudes toward the competitive brand, regardless of metaphorical openness; in contrast, prevention-focused consumers with low brand commitment exhibit more favorable attitudes toward the competitive brand when metaphorical openness is high than when metaphorical openness is low. In addition, promotion-focused consumers with high brand commitment engender more favorable attitudes toward the competitive brand when metaphorical openness is high than when metaphorical openness is low; alternatively, promotion-focused consumers with low brand commitment exhibit more favorable attitudes toward the competitive brand when metaphorical openness is high than when metaphorical openness is low.

Keywords: Brand Commitment; Metaphorical Openness; Goal Orientation

INTRODUCTION

Previous research has argued that metaphors facilitate consumers' information processing (Toncar & Munch, 2001); therefore, advertisers are increasingly applying metaphorical appeals in their advertisements. However, it is a challenging job for



advertisers to determine the extent of metaphorical openness to avoid consumers' rejections or failures to comprehend the advertisement.

The impact of metaphorical openness varies depending on consumers' personality traits. Goal orientation is one of the most popular personality traits examined in the recent research on consumer behavior. Goal orientation refers to the processes by which individuals set their goals, select the means to attain these goals, and assess their progresses toward these goals (Carver & Scheier, 1998). Consumers varying in goal orientation are assumed to engender different attitudes toward a specific advertisement.

In addition, the extent of consumers' brand commitment determines how consumers accept or reject competitive brands' ad appeals. An important task of advertising is to provide consumers with relevant information for them to determine the brand's true merits. Once committed to this preferred brand, consumers are likely to stay with it to avoid switching costs. Specifically, one of the most important advantages for the preferred existing brands is the brand commitment to which the loyal consumers attach. A new competitive brand, which attempts to cross the border to a category-specific area, has to overcome the favorable position of the existing brands and defend the attitudinal resistance to itself in consumers' minds. As Ahluwalia (2000) argued, brand commitment is a key determinant of attitudinal resistance when counterarguments about the preferred brand appear. In fact, the brand commitment effect occurs wherever the counter-attitudinal information is present (Raju, Unnava & Montgomery, 2009). Though for its importance, brand commitment has not received considerable attention in the literature on branding and marketing yet. This premise forms the first motivation for this research.

Previous research has contended that brand commitment may have a negative impact on the evaluations of competitive brands, especially for the new entrants into the same product category. As a consequence, marketers of new competitive brands may be interested in how to mitigate the inherent weakness resulting from the brand commitment attached to the established brands. However, the extent to which brand commitment has an effect on competitive brands has not received much research attention. Therefore, the first question addressed in this research is the interaction effect of brand commitment and advertising metaphorical openness on consumer attitudes toward the competitive brands.

It has not yet been confirmed whether an ad with high metaphorical openness leads to enhanced appreciation (Lagerwerf & Meijers, 2008) and positive attitudes. Therefore, this research attempts to apply the concept of goal orientation to examine



how consumers varying in brand commitment will evaluate the competitive brands. Specifically, Study 1 aims to explore how metaphorical openness affects the attitudes of low- and highly-committed consumers toward the competitive brand. Subsequently, Study 2 includes goal orientation as a manipulated moderator to examine the potential attitude changes in the preceding interaction in Study 1. Clearly, Study 2 aims to examine the moderating roles of goal orientation and metaphorical openness in the impact of brand commitment on attitudes toward the competitive brands.

BACKGROUND OVERVIEW AND THEORETICAL DEVELOPMENT

Brand Commitment

Brand commitment can be outlined by the principle of self-brand connections, which argues consumers choose brands that are congruent with their self-concepts (Chaplin & John, 2005; Schau, Muñiz, & Arnould, 2009). The process of self-brand connections is based on people's comparison of their own defining characteristics, such as self-identity and preferences, with characteristics that define a brand (Chaplin & John, 2005). Consumer commitment toward a brand is usually emotion-based and can last long once it is built; therefore, new competitive brands always attempt to dilute the consumer commitment toward the existing brand.

Commitment is regarded as a feeling of psychological attachment to an attitude, an object or an attitudinal position (Kiesler, 1971). Prior psychology research suggests that commitment is a central relationship-specific motive, and feelings of commitment reliably promote pro-relational cognitions, motivations and behaviors (Rusbult, 1983; Rusbult & Buunk, 1993). Rusbult (1983) defines commitment level as a psychological state that represents the experience of dependence on a relationship, a long-term orientation toward it, feelings of attachment to a person or an object and a desire to maintain the relationship. Similarly, commitment has been defined as "an enduring desire to maintain a valued relationship" (Moorman, Zaltman & Deshpande, 1992). In the consumer behavior literature, Sargeant and Lee (2004) propose that commitment has been regarded as a key mediating influence on consumer behaviors.

A highly-committed person usually generates more emotional connections to the preferred brand and is less willing to switch to competitive brands (Raju et al., 2009) than a less committed consumer. This sense of being connected to a brand results in the attitudinal insistence on the brand to which consumers are currently committed and the increased resistance to attitude changes.



Moreover, brand commitment is mainly driven by consumers' experiences with a brand. Mick and Buhl (1992) further contend that consumers are committed to a brand across situation and usage experiences through how it fits into the consumers' life styles rather than how effective it is in meeting a specific need or solving a specific trouble. Brand commitment is deemed as a deeply-rooted thought in the minds of the committed consumers; hence, the sponsors of competitive brands have to figure out effective strategies to mitigate these negative impacts of brand commitment on them.

Goal Orientation

Goal orientation has been discussed in a comprehensive manner in the regulatory focus theory, which views self-regulation as a process by which people seek to align their behavior with relevant goals and standards. Two types of goal orientation have featured prominently in the literature: promotion-focus, which seeks to maximize positive outcomes; and prevention focus, which aims to minimize negative outcomes (Higgins, 1997 & 2002). A major difference between promotion focus and prevention focus is a differential sensitivity towards positive and negative outcomes (Higgins, 1998). The consumer psychology literature has demonstrated that goal orientation has an impact on endowment effect (Lieberman, Idson, Camacho & Higgins, 1999; Higgins, 2002), the status quo bias (Chernev, 2004), mental accounting (Pham & Avnet, 2004), brand extension (Yeo & Park, 2006), framing effect (Jain, Lindsey, Agrawal, Maheswaran, 2007), compromise effect, attractiveness effect (Mourali, Bckenholt & Laroche , 2007), the extent to which consumers use price information as an indicator of quality or sacrifice (Lin, Wu, Chuang & Kao, 2007), and variety seeking (Wu & Kao, 2011).

A major correlation of promotion versus prevention is a different propensity toward taking risks. In most situations, the activation of promotion entails greater risk-taking, whereas the activation of prevention entails greater risk aversion. Two sets of mechanisms contribute to the differences in risk propensity between the focuses. First, promotion goal centers on finding matches to desired ends, and creates an inherent drive to capture as many current opportunities as possible (Higgins, 1998), which generally translates into a more active form of exploration and thus greater risk-taking (Crowe & Higgins, 1997; Pham & Avnet, 2004). In contrast, prevention goal highlights the avoidance of mismatches to desired ends, and produces a drive to protect against potential mistakes, which generally translates into a more vigilant form of exploration and greater risk aversion. The difference in risk propensity is also a by-product of the differential attention to gains and losses of both focuses. In many domains, options (e.g., surgery) with greater potential upsides (the complete riddance of a medical condition)

also present greater potential downsides (life-threatening complications), whereas options (e.g., continuous medication) with smaller potential downsides (few side effects) have smaller potential upsides (relief of symptoms without complete cure). In a choice between a risky alternative with greater upsides and greater downsides and a conservative alternative with smaller downsides and smaller upsides, the promotion-oriented individuals focusing on positive outcomes would prefer the risky option, whereas the prevention-oriented individuals focusing on negative outcomes would favor the conservative option (Zhou & Pham, 2004).

Metaphorical Openness

When metaphors are applied in text or images in an advertisement, they are considered as rhetorical figures (Lagerwerf & Meijers, 2008). As Ang and Lim (2006) contended, “a metaphor asserts a similarity between two objects that one does not expect to be associated; in contrast, a non-metaphor describes the world literally”. Clearly, metaphors are linguistically defined as two distinct concepts presented as similar (Lagerwerf & Meijers, 2008). Put another way, conceptual similarity refers to the extent of relatedness between the two metaphorical objects and is about the semantic proximity of these objects in the audience’s mind. For example, a car and an aircraft are generally deemed as higher in conceptual proximity to each other than a car and a sun-bed or a television and a razor (Gkiouzepas & Hogg, 2011).

Previous research has indicated that the use of metaphors can lead to more extensive ad processing (Toncar & Munch, 2001), expand dimensional thinking (MacInnis, 2004), and enhance ad responses (McQuarrie & Phillips, 2005). Metaphors usually lead consumers to perceive the brand as imaginative and provoke more imaginations than straightforward expressions (Oliver, Robertson, & Mitchell, 1993).

Verbal and visual metaphors are increasingly common in print advertisements. Compared with verbal metaphors, visual metaphors are more open to interpretation (Eco, 1976) and may elicit more meanings as they express the ad claim implicitly (McQuarrie & Phillips, 2005). Specifically, visually metaphorical openness leaves more room for consumers to invest more cognitive effort in the ad messages than verbally metaphorical openness. Metaphorical openness can be defined as the number and kind of visual cues eliciting particular thoughts (Lagerwerf & Meijers, 2008). In addition, metaphorical openness is a general property of visual and verbal expressions and can define interference of both expressions: Images are less open when combined with captions than without captions (Ketelaar & Van Gisbergen, 2006; Phillips, 2000). When the metaphorical openness in an advertisement is roomy, message recipients tend to



have a higher elicitation of thoughts. In other words, roomy metaphorical openness in advertisements elicits consumers' elaborative thoughts (Lagerwerf & Meijers, 2008).

HYPOTHESES

Raju et al., (2009) argue that highly-committed consumers are more likely to generate emotional connections to the brand and are less willing to switch to competitive brands than low-committed consumers. As compared with low-committed consumers, highly-committed consumers are more likely to emotionally adhere to the existing brands and generate attitudinal resistance to the competitive brands. Therefore, while highly-committed consumers are exposed to a competitive brand's advertisement characterized either by high or low metaphorical openness, they appear to spontaneously generate counterarguments in minds and attempt to reject the supporting arguments in the ad. Clearly, highly-committed consumers may not be concerned with the potential benefits demonstrated in the competitive brands' ads, regardless of how high the metaphorical openness is. Alternatively, low-committed consumers are less likely to emotionally adhere to the existing brands and are more concerned with product benefits than highly-committed consumers. In addition, a high metaphorical openness ad is usually regarded as more potential benefits or gains than a low metaphorical openness. Therefore, competitive brand's advertisements characterized by high metaphorical openness is predicted to elicit favorable attitudes than those characterized by low metaphorical openness for low-committed consumers.

- H₁: Highly-committed consumers will not exhibit differentially favorable attitudes toward the competitive brands, regardless of metaphorical openness. In contrast, low-committed consumers will engender more favorable attitudes toward the competitive brands when the metaphorical openness is high than when the metaphorical openness is low.

Highly-committed consumers are characterized as emotionally adhere to the existing brands and generate attitudinal resistance to the competitive brands. As indicated above, prevention-focused consumers tend to adopt avoidance strategies to regulate the achievement of desirable ends and seek minimum losses to the current states. Prevention-focused consumers are especially active in the pursuit of things that one ought to do; that is, the fulfillment of responsibilities, obligations, and duties (Higgins, 1998). Therefore, prevention-focused consumers with high brand commitment are likely to have emotional connections and attitudinal insistence on the existing brands, and adopt conservative strategies to process the messages in the competitive brand's advertisements. When these messages are metaphorically presented in the



advertisements sponsored by competitive brands, prevention-focused consumers with high brand commitment tend to engender attitudinal resistance and reject the persuasive information, no matter how many potential benefits are implied in the metaphorical advertisements.

In contrast, prevention-focused consumers with low brand commitment have slight emotional connections to the existing brand and tend to seek safer alternatives to fulfill their unsatisfied needs. It is predicted that metaphorical advertisements are more effective to alter consumers' attitudes than straightforward advertisements. Furthermore, high metaphorical openness is more likely to allow consumers to perceive implied potential benefits for their current states than low metaphorical openness. Therefore, it is predicted that prevention-focused consumers with low brand commitment are likely to engender more favorable attitudes toward the competitive brands characterized by high metaphorical openness than those by low metaphorical openness.

- H₂: Prevention-focused consumers with high brand commitment will not exhibit differentially favorable attitudes toward the competitive brands, regardless of metaphorical openness. In contrast, prevention-focused consumers with low brand commitment will exhibit more favorable attitudes toward the competitive brands when the metaphorical openness is high than when the metaphorical openness is low.

Promotion-focused consumers, whose personality traits are characterized as active in the pursuit of ideals, rely on the use of approach strategies to regulate the achievement of a desirable end and attempt to seek maximum gains. The extent of brand commitment depends on how consumers are emotionally attached to a brand. By definition, low-committed consumers are more likely to deviate from their initial choices than highly-committed consumers. As predicted in H₁, high metaphorical openness usually implies potential product benefits, and thus is more likely to allow consumers to expand dimensional thinking (MacInnis, 2004) and lead to more extensive ad processing (Toncar & Munch, 2001) than low metaphorical openness. Therefore, a high metaphorical openness ad is more likely to fulfill promotion-focused consumers' unsatisfied needs and thus elicit more favorable attitudes than a low metaphorical openness ad, regardless of the extent of brand commitment.

- H₃: Promotion-focused consumers will exhibit more favorable attitudes toward the competitive brands when the metaphorical openness is high



than when the metaphorical openness is low, regardless of brand commitment.

METHODOLOGY

Pretests of Stimulus Material

According to Martin et al. (2003), a pretest for identifying an appropriate product is based on two criteria: (1) the product offered a range of attributes for manipulation, and (2) the product is relevant to the research sample. Hence, a pretest has been conducted to assure the appropriateness of the stimulus material for the following experiments. 20 undergraduates were asked to create a list of complex products. Next, 32 subjects rated the four most frequently mentioned products from stage one on five, seven-point scales (e.g., unimportant/important) for involvement, from which an average score was derived. The pretest revealed that digital cameras are among the highest involvement score ($M = 5.96$), most of the subjects previously or currently own a digital camera (93.75%), and a large number use a digital camera more than twice a week (90.63%), suggesting a pretty high frequency of use. Thus, digital cameras were selected as the stimulus material in this research.

Study 1:

Study 1 aims to investigate how brand commitment affects consumers attitudes toward the competitive brands after they view a competitive advertisement that varies in the metaphorical openness in the message appeal. A total of 116 undergraduates were randomly assigned to a 2 (brand commitment: low vs. high) $\times$ 2 (metaphorical openness: low vs. high) between-subjects factorial design, where brand commitment acted as the measured independent variable, metaphorical openness fulfilled as the manipulated moderator and attitudes toward the competitive brand acted as the dependent variable

Measurement of Brand Commitment

The measurement of brand commitment was adapted from the study of Raju et al., (2009). The participants were told that they were invited to join a market research for a digital camera targeting the student segment. They were given one booklet containing brand information of the target brand, and then were encouraged to list some positive attributes and suggest a slogan for this target brand.

Subsequently, the measurement of brand commitment for the target brand started. Subjects were asked to assume that this target brand nearly fulfilled the

unsatisfied needs in all aspects, followed by asking if their slogan and testimonials could potentially be adopted by this target brand for its advertising.

The competitive brand was introduced at this point by handing out another folder containing the advertisement for the competitive brand. Participants were told that this brand was a competitive brand to the target brand. Following ad exposure, they were asked to rate their attitudes toward the competitive brand.

Participants' commitment to the target brand was measured using a three-item brand commitment scale used in previous research (Agrawal & Maheswaran, 2005; Ahluwalia, Unnava, & Burnkrant, 2001). The three items are (1) if (brand name) are not available at the store, it would make little difference to me if I have to choose another brand; (2) I can see myself as being loyal to (brand name); and (3) I will be more likely to purchase a brand that is on sale than (brand name). Participants expressed their agreement with each statement using a 7-point scale anchored by 1 = agree / 7 = disagree ($\alpha = .92$). Participants with a mean commitment score above the midpoint (4 on the 7-point scale) were classified as highly-committed and those below the midpoint were classified as low-committed. High-commitment and low-commitment consumers exhibited significantly different scores ($M_{\text{high BC}} = 5.05$ $M_{\text{low BC}} = 2.24$, $t(114) = -26.48$, $p < .001$).

Manipulation for Metaphorical Openness

Two versions of print advertisements were created for manipulating metaphorical openness. Each advertisement consists of verbal copy and an image of advertised product. As Lagerwerf and Meijers (2008) implied, the incongruity in the combination of verbal and visual expressions attracts attention and prompts consumers to invest more cognitive effort in processing the advertisements. Therefore, in the primed condition of low metaphorical openness, the verbal copy and the image were manipulated to convey consistent expressions to constrain the number of thoughts elicited by the metaphors. In contrast, in the primed condition of high metaphorical openness, the verbal copy and the image were manipulated to convey inconsistent expressions to allow the number of thoughts elicited by the metaphors. Subjects were asked to view the advertisement and read the ad copy about the ad appeals of a fictitious digital camera brand (*Leikon*). The following excerpt showed the main ad copy of the low metaphorical openness in the Leikon advertisement:

~~ As the vivid image shown beside, Leikon always gives you the finest photo quality and enriches your photographic life.



In contrast, the main ad copy of the high metaphorical openness in the Leikon advertisement reads:

~~ Besides exploring the world (as illustrated), Leikon always gives you the finest photo quality and enriches your photographic life.

Dependent Variable

Attitudes toward the competitive brand were measured with three 7-point scales anchored by bad/good, not nice/nice, unlikable/likable ($\alpha = .75$) (Zhang & Zinkhan, 2006). The scales were summed to form a single attitude measure.

RESULTS

Manipulation Check for Metaphorical Openness

Metaphorical openness is thought to be related to the imagistic and discursive forms of elaboration. Therefore, the manipulation check for metaphorical openness was adapted from the study of McQuarrie and Mick (1999) to measure thought elaboration. Respondents were asked to rate the ad by six seven-point scales anchored by “not imagery provoking / provokes imagery”, “dull/vivid”, “boring / interesting” (Unnava & Burnkrant, 1991), “I had few/many thoughts”, “the ad has one/multiple meaning(s)” and “the ad has simple/complex meaning(s)” (Gkiouzepas & Hogg, 2011). As expected, the low metaphorical openness valence and the high metaphorical openness valence were regarded as being different ($M_{\text{low MO}} = 2.96$, $M_{\text{high MO}} = 5.00$, $t(114) = -25.28$, $p < .001$). Therefore, the manipulation of metaphorical openness was effective.

Hypothesis testing and results

The results from the ANOVA analysis indicated that a two-way interaction effect and two main effects were all significant. In more detail, the interaction effect of brand commitment $\times$ metaphorical openness ($F(1, 112) = 84.62$, $p = .000$, $\eta_p^2 = .430$, see Table 1) on attitudes toward the competitive brand was significant. These interactions provide initial evidence of differentiations across the experimental conditions. The main effects of brand commitment ($F(1, 112) = 65.41$, $p = .000$, $\eta_p^2 = .369$) and metaphorical openness ($F(1, 112) = 111.46$, $p = .000$, $\eta_p^2 = .499$) on attitudes toward the competitive brand were also significant (see Table 1).



TABLE 1

Univariate Analysis of the Effects of Brand Commitment and Metaphorical Openness on Attitudes toward Competitive Brands

Source of Variance	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	η_p^2
Brand Commitment × Metaphorical Openness	84.62	.000***	.430
Brand commitment	65.41	.000***	.369
Metaphorical Openness	111.46	.000***	.499

H_1 : Effects of Brand Commitment and Metaphorical Openness on Attitudes toward the Competitive Brand

An independent-samples *t* test revealed that for highly-committed consumers, metaphorical openness did not differentially affect their attitudes toward the competitive brand ($M_{low\ MO} = 3.15$, $M_{high\ MO} = 3.28$, $t(56) = -1.21$, $p = .23$, see Table 2 and Figure 1). Alternatively, low-committed consumers exhibited more favorable attitudes toward the competitive brand when the metaphorical openness was high than when the metaphorical openness was low ($M_{low\ MO} = 3.05$, $M_{high\ MO} = 4.89$, $t(56) = -11.92$, $p = .000$, see Table 2 and Figure 1). Hence, H_1 was supported.

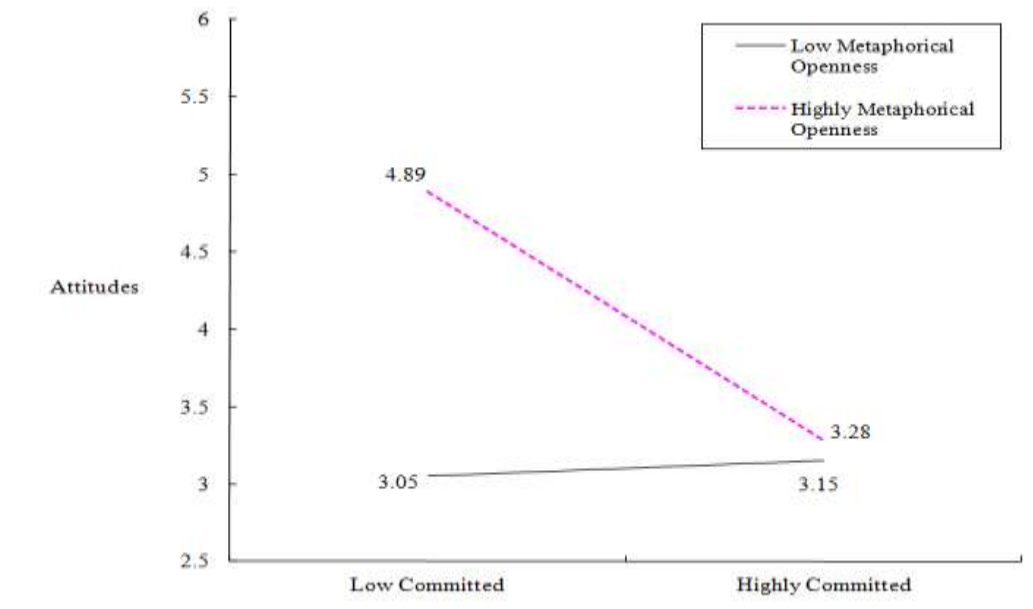
TABLE 2

Dependent Measure across Brand Commitment × Metaphorical Openness

Attitudes toward the Competitive Brands	Low-Committed		Highly-Committed	
	Low Metaphorical Openness	High Metaphorical Openness	Low Metaphorical Openness	High Metaphorical Openness
Mean	3.05	4.89	3.15	3.28
S.D.	.68	.47	.32	.46
<i>t</i>	-11.92		-1.21	
<i>p</i>	.000***		.23	

FIGURE 1

Interactions of Brand Commitment × Metaphorical Openness on Attitudes toward the Competitive Brands



Study 2:

Study 2 aims to investigate how consumers varying in goal orientations and brand commitment evaluate the competitive brand on viewing a competitive advertisement that varies in the metaphorical openness in the message appeal. A total of 232 undergraduates were randomly assigned to a 2 (brand commitment: low vs. high) × 2 (metaphorical openness: low vs. high) × 2 (goal orientation: prevention focus vs. promotion focus) between-subjects factorial design, where brand commitment acted as the measured independent variable, goal orientation and metaphorical openness fulfilled as the manipulated moderator and attitudes toward the competitive brand acted as the dependent variable.

Manipulation of Goal Orientation

The manipulation of goal orientation was adapted from the study of Liberman et al. (1999). While promotion-focused participants were asked to write down and explain how their “hopes and aspirations” differed from those they had in their childhood, prevention-focused participants were asked to write down and explain how their “duties and obligations” differed from those they had in their childhood.

Measurement of Brand Commitment and Manipulations of Metaphorical Openness

The measurement of brand commitment and the manipulation of metaphorical openness were identical to those in Study 1. For the measurement of brand commitment, participants were asked to express their agreement with each statement using a 7-point scale anchored by 1 = agree / 7 = disagree ($\alpha = .82$). Participants with a mean commitment score above the midpoint (4 on the 7-point scale) were classified as highly-committed and those below the midpoint were classified as low-committed. High-committed and low-committed individuals exhibited significantly different scores ($M_{\text{high BC}} = 5.01$, $M_{\text{low BC}} = 2.69$, $t(230) = -32.62$, $p < .001$). Subjects who are either high or low in brand commitment were asked to view the advertisement and read the ad copy about the metaphorical openness of *Leikon*. The main ad copies of the low and high metaphorical openness are identical to those in Study 1.

Dependent Variable

As in Study 1, the attitudes toward the competitive brand were measured with three 7-point scales anchored by bad/good, not nice/nice, unlikable/likable ($\alpha = .78$) (Zhang & Zinkhan, 2006). The scales were summed to form a single attitude measure.

RESULTS

Manipulation Check for Metaphorical Openness

Metaphorical openness is thought to be related to the imagistic and discursive forms of elaboration. As in Study 1, the manipulation check for metaphorical openness was adapted from the study of McQuarrie and Mick (1999) to measure thought elaboration. Respondents were asked to rate the ad by six seven-point scales anchored by “not imagery provoking / provokes imagery”, “dull/vivid”, “boring / interesting” (Unnava & Burnkrant, 1991), “I had few/many thoughts”, “the ad has one/multiple meaning(s)” and “the ad has simple/complex meaning(s)” (Gkiouzepas & Hogg, 2011). As expected, the low metaphorical openness valence and the high metaphorical openness valence were regarded as being different ($M_{\text{low MO}} = 2.43$, $M_{\text{high MO}} = 5.06$, $t(230) = -46.64$, $p < .001$). Therefore, the manipulation of metaphorical openness was effective.

Manipulation Check for Goal Orientation

The manipulation check of goal orientation was conducted by asking participants to rate the extent to which they focused on their hopes, aspirations, responsibilities and obligations on separate seven-point scale items for each of these goals, with the scales items anchored by 1 = “not at all” and 7 = “a lot” (Lieberman et al. 2001). Hopes and

aspirations were averaged to form a promotion index (Cronbach's $\alpha = .80$), and responsibilities and obligations were averaged to form a prevention index (Cronbach's $\alpha = .79$). A paired-samples t test was administered for the manipulation check for orientation goal. The promotion index was significantly higher than the prevention index for promotion-focused individuals ($M_{\text{promotion}} = 5.28$, $M_{\text{prevention}} = 3.02$, $t(115) = 31.64$, $p = .000$); in contrast, the prevention index was significantly higher than the promotion index for prevention-focused individuals ($M_{\text{promotion}} = 2.78$, $M_{\text{prevention}} = 4.88$, $t(115) = -29.09$, $p = .000$). Therefore, the manipulation of goal orientation was satisfactory.

Hypothesis testing and results

The results from the ANOVA analysis indicated that, except the interaction effect of brand commitment $\times$ goal orientation, all interaction effects and main effects were significant. In more detail, the interaction effects of brand commitment $\times$ metaphorical openness $\times$ goal orientation ($F(1, 224) = 18.47$, $p = .000$, $\eta_p^2 = .076$), brand commitment $\times$ metaphorical openness ($F(1, 224) = 21.61$, $p = .000$, $\eta_p^2 = .088$) and metaphorical openness $\times$ goal orientation ($F(1, 224) = 51.73$, $p = .000$, $\eta_p^2 = .188$, see Table 3) on attitudes toward the competitive brand were significant; in contrast, the interaction effect of brand commitment $\times$ goal orientation ($F(1, 224) = 1.73$, $p = .19$, $\eta_p^2 = .008$) was insignificant (see Table 3). These interactions provide initial evidence of differentiations across the experimental conditions.

TABLE 3

Univariate Analysis of the Interaction Effects of Brand Commitment, Metaphorical Openness and Goal Orientation on Attitudes toward the Competitive Brands

Source of Variance	<i>F</i>	<i>p</i>	η_p^2
Brand Commitment $\times$ Metaphorical Openness $\times$ Goal Orientation	18.47	.000***	.076
Brand Commitment $\times$ Metaphorical Openness	21.61	.000***	.088
Brand Commitment $\times$ Goal Orientation	1.73	.190	.008
Metaphorical Openness $\times$ Goal Orientation	51.73	.000***	.188

H₂: Effects of Brand Commitment, Metaphorical Openness and Prevention Focus on Attitudes toward the Competitive Brand

For prevention-focused individuals, the simple interaction effects of brand commitment $\times$ metaphorical openness on attitudes toward the competitive brands ($F(1, 112) = 48.28$, $p = .000$, $\eta_p^2 = .301$) was significant. The further t-test revealed that highly-committed individuals did not exhibit differentially favorable attitudes toward the



competitive brand, regardless of metaphorical openness ($M_{low\ MO} = 2.85$, $M_{high\ MO} = 2.82$, $F(1, 57) = .04$, $p = .835$, see Table 4 and Figure 2). Alternatively, low-committed individuals exhibited more favorable attitudes toward the competitive brand when the metaphorical openness was high than when the metaphorical openness was low ($M_{low\ MO} = 2.94$, $M_{high\ MO} = 4.10$, $F(1, 57) = 80.69$, $p = .000$, see Table 4 and Figure 2). Therefore, H_2 was supported.

TABLE 4

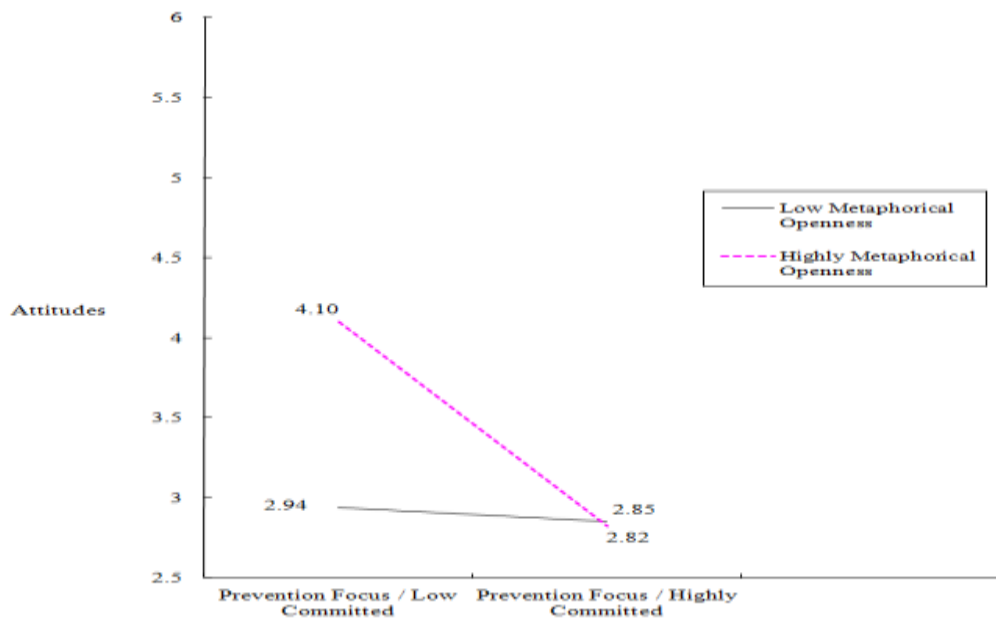
Dependent Measure across Goal Orientation $\times$ Brand Commitment $\times$ Metaphorical Openness

Attitudes toward Competitive Brands	Prevention-Focused				Promotion-Focused			
	Low-Committed		Highly-Committed		Low-Committed		Highly-Committed	
	Low MO	High MO	Low MO	High MO	Low MO	High MO	Low MO	High MO
Mean	2.94	4.10	2.85	2.82	4.05	5.57	3.21	4.69
S.D.	.44	.53	.46	.37	.58	.60	.42	.54
<i>F</i>	80.69		.04		97.46		135.37	
<i>p</i>	.000***		.835		.000***		.000***	

Note: MO denotes metaphorical openness.

FIGURE 2

Interactions of Brand Commitment $\times$ Prevention Focus $\times$ Metaphorical Openness on Attitudes toward the Competitive Brands

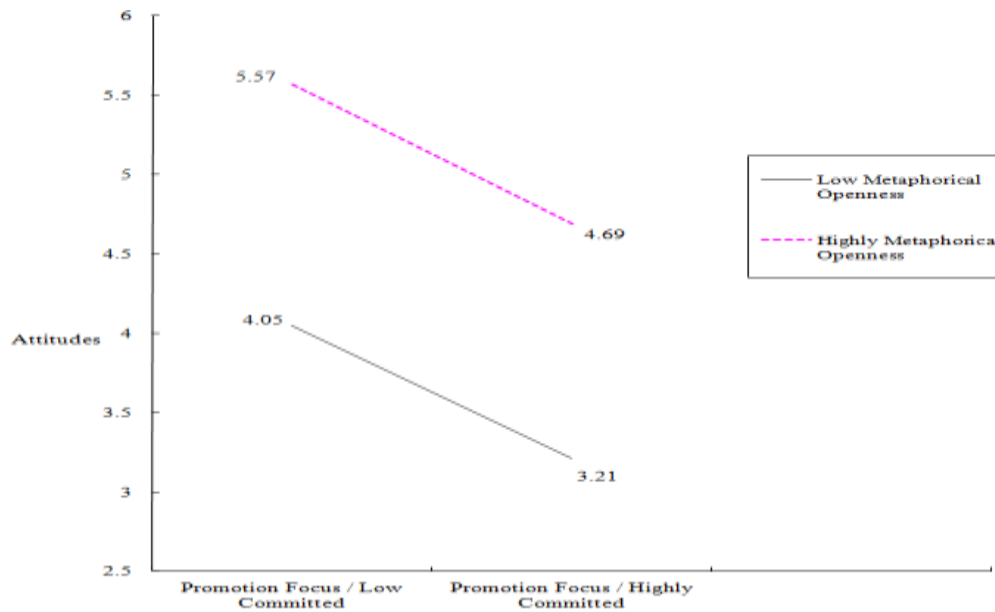


H₃: Effects of Brand Commitment, Metaphorical Openness and Promotion Focus on Attitudes toward the Competitive Brand

Similarly, for promotion-focused individuals, the simple interaction effect of brand commitment $\times$ metaphorical openness on the attitudes toward the competitive brand ($F(1, 112) = .053, p = .819$) was not significant. The further t-test revealed that highly-committed individuals engendered more favorable attitudes toward the competitive brand when the metaphorical openness was high than when the metaphorical openness was low ($M_{low\ MO} = 3.21, M_{high\ MO} = 4.69, F(1, 57) = 135.37, p = .000$, see Table 4 and Figure 3). In a similarly vein, low-committed individuals exhibited more favorable attitudes toward the competitive brand when the metaphorical openness was high than when the metaphorical openness was low ($M_{low\ MO} = 4.05, M_{high\ MO} = 5.57, F(1, 57) = 97.46, p = .000$, see Table 4 and Figure 3). Therefore, H₃ was supported.

FIGURE 3

Interactions of Brand Commitment $\times$ Promotion Focus $\times$ Metaphorical Openness on Attitudes toward the Competitive Brands



DISCUSSION

Theoretical contributions

This research differs from the prior research in three main respects, which contribute to the advertising literature. First, from an academic perspective, theoretical



understanding of the effects of metaphorical openness is promising but underdeveloped. While advertising literature focuses on the evaluations of metaphorical and straightforward ads, this research further explores the extent of metaphor and examines its impact on consumer attitudes toward the competitive brands. In this research, the extent of metaphor is called “metaphorical openness”, which is defined as the number and kind of visual cues eliciting particular thoughts (Lagerwerf & Meijers, 2008). Comprehensive understanding the effect of metaphorical openness on consumer attitudes helps broaden the horizon of advertising literature.

Second, recent empirical studies in the literature of advertising have examined how brand commitment is moderated by other factors. Specifically, brand commitment is usually regarded as a moderator (e.g., Raju, Unnava & Montgomery, 2009; Iglesias, Singh & Batista-Foguet, 2011) or a dependent variable (e.g., Burmann & König, 2011; Srivastava & Owens, 2010) in these studies. In contrast, this research treats brand commitment as an independent variable and examines its effects interacted with metaphorical openness (in Study 1) and goal orientation (in Study 2).

At last, while the brand commitment literature has mostly confined itself to studying the effect of brand commitment to the existing brands (e.g., Iglesias, Singh & Batista-Foguet, 2011) and rarely investigated how the competitive brands overcome the brand commitment effect (Raju et., al, 2009), this research examines the consumer attitudes toward the competitive brands by manipulating consumers’ brand commitment to the existing brand and metaphorical openness in the competitive brand’s advertisement. Accordingly, the roles of brand commitment and metaphorical openness in the advertising research can be further clarified.

Practical implications

Findings in this research have extremely important practical implications as they imply that, if the sponsors of competitive brands seek to “grasp” consumers from the existing brands, they need to work better on understanding those consumers’ goal orientation and thereby devising their advertising strategies (i.e., a high metaphorical openness ad) in order to reduce those consumers’ counterarguments. For example, even though the highly-committed consumers tend to stick to their existing brands, competitive brands can get into the market by applying a higher metaphorical openness strategy to target those low-committed consumers, who have lower attitudinal resistance to the competitive brands.

Aforementioned, the low-committed consumers can be categorized into prevention-focused and promotion-focused groups. Competitive brands are advised to



apply a high metaphorical openness strategy to pinpoint the prevention-focused consumers with low brand commitment as their entry to step into larger market segments in the future. In addition, the research findings indicate that promotion-focused consumers with either high or low brand commitment are the market segments suitable for a high metaphorical openness strategy.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

This research contributes to the psychology literature and the marketing practices. However, some limitations need to be mentioned for future research. First, even though this research indicates that low-committed consumers are subject to the advertising metaphorical openness, it is difficult for competitive brands to predict consumers' brand commitment to the existing brands before their advertising strategy is devised. Second, the consumers' goal orientations are also seemingly unpredictable and this research does not address any solutions to predict consumers' orientation goal for competitive brands. Future research is expected to fill in the research gap. At last, goal orientation was manipulated instead of being measured in this research. Future research is expected to apply the scale developed by Lockwood, Jordan and Kunda (2002) to measure consumers' orientation goal and examine its effect on consumer attitudes toward the competitive brands. By comparing the results emerged from the measured goal orientation with those emerged from the manipulated goal orientation, researchers are expected to gain new insight into goal orientation.

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