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How and When Worldviews Blur or Highlight Persuasion – An Experimental Investigation of the Worldview Boomerang Effect on Threatening Information

Abstract

In marketing research, boomerang effects, reactions opposite to the intention of a claim, have so far been studied unsystematically and yielded mixed results. By operationalizing a consumer worldview based on attitude change through persuasion attempts, reactance and psychological distance, this paper argues for a more general, second-order perspective. In an experiment, valence-manipulated threatening claims elicited either reduced persuasion or a worldview boomerang effect, which can be attributed to varying reactance levels stemming from different consumer perspectives. Continuing this causal chain, a mediating relationship between these effects and essential downstream outcomes such as trust and WOM was found. In practice, these results emphasize the contrasting effects of information from different consumer perspectives, which not only explains contrary reactions to branding strategies, but can also have far-reaching consequences on customer relationships.

Key Words

Boomerang effect, Cognitive bias, Smartphone, Brand communities, Elaboration-likelihood model, Construal-level theory