



Utterly fresh perspectives on consumer research and advertising: Introducing the special issue from the 2013 La Londe conference



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ABSTRACT

This article provides an overview of the papers from the 40th La Londe Marketing Communications and Consumer Behavior Conference that were selected for this special issue of the *Journal of Business Research*. The La Londe conference is a biennial event that attracts top researchers from across the world. A small and selective conference, its intimacy combined with high-quality presentations serves as an incubator for new ideas and fresh perspectives on consumer research, and does so through an international lens that is reflected in the diversity of countries represented on the conference program, the co-chairs of the conference, and the La Londe Conference Scientific Committee.

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1. Introduction

This special section of the *Journal of Business Research* includes a selection of papers presented at the 40th International Research Conference in Marketing organized by the Aix Graduate School of Management (I.A.E. Aix-en-Provence), University Paul Cézanne in Aix-Marseille (France). Informally and widely known as the “La Londe Conference,” this biennial event is devoted to recent advances in Marketing Communications and Consumer Behavior.

The La Londe conference is an outlier among conferences in the broad marketing field. Participant numbers of the major international conferences have been exploding recently, reflecting the increase in the size of the field. But this expansion carries a cost in terms of reduced time to present and discuss individual research projects, and reduced audience involvement in any individual paper presentation.

The main objective of the La Londe conference is to be an alternative to the giant conferences. It continues as a small and selective conference, with an intensity of discussion and feedback unparalleled by any other conference in our field. The conference is set in the small French resort town of La Londe les Maures, by the Mediterranean Sea.

It brings together leading scholars in consumer behavior and marketing communications, from all over the world, in a relaxed and social atmosphere that encourages intense and friendly discussions and exchanges. A total of 82 manuscripts were submitted and double-blind reviewed by ad-hoc reviewers selected by the conference co-chairs, of which 40; were accepted. Authors of the papers represented 13 countries, attesting to the international nature of the conference.

Historically the La Londe Conference has always been chaired by prominent scholars in marketing communications and consumer research. For example, the 2007 Conference was chaired by Joseph Sirgy (Virginia Tech) and Søren Askegaard (University of Southern Denmark), the 2009 conference by Chris Janiszewski (University of Florida) and Stijn van Osselaer (then at Erasmus University, now at Cornell University), and the 2011 conference by Michel Pham (Columbia University) and Siegfried Dewitte (KU Leuven). The 2013 conference was chaired by L. J. Shrum (then at the University of Texas at San Antonio, now at HEC Paris) and Luk Warlop (KU Leuven and BI Norwegian Business School).

The traditional keynote address was delivered by John Lynch (University of Colorado). He presented evidence in support of his thought-provoking “general theory of resource slack” (Lynch, Spiller, & Zauberman, 2013), which attempts to explain why people often overestimate the availability of personal resources like time or money, but underestimate demands on these personal resources. The resulting biased perceptions of resource slack can explain behavioral phenomena related to opportunity cost neglect, task persistence, discounting of future resource expenditures, and procrastination.

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2. Overview of the papers

Two noteworthy aspects of the papers bear mentioning. The first is that while all papers selected for this special issue examine familiar research issues in consumer behavior and marketing communications, they succeed in offering new and innovative perspectives on each. For example, whereas most research on word-of-mouth effects looks at how it affects the receiver of the communication, Cowley examines how talking about consumption experiences changes the *sender's* memory for these experiences. Similarly, whereas most studies on celebrity endorsements in advertising look at the effect of the endorser on the brand, Rae, Silvera, and Pandelaere present an innovative reversed perspective by studying how the personality of the brand affects the public image of the endorser.

A second noteworthy aspect is that these positive attributes of the papers are a direct function of the conference itself. The small but highly interactive atmosphere that encourages diverse viewpoints is appealing to researchers because it encourages constructive exchanges and collaborations that foster creativity. Such a structure represents a welcome departure but also a clear complement to the more traditional larger conferences of the field.

In the first paper “Consumers telling consumption stories: Word of mouth and retrospective evaluations,” Elizabeth Cowley demonstrates that conversations with other consumers about a prior consumption experience can change the evaluation of this experience. She looks at peaks and troughs in the consumption experience, which are the most positive and the most negative moment in a (positive) consumption experience. The paper shows that talking about a prior experience increases the intensity in the reconstructed ‘trough’ of the experience, which in turn lowers post-conversational overall evaluations of the experience.

Often, consumers choose among alternatives that are presented in a multi-option multi-attribute table, with the alternatives hierarchically sorted on attribute levels. In the second paper, “When and why attribute sorting affects attribute weights in decision-making,” Simon Quaschnig, Mario Pandelaere, and Iris Vermeir demonstrate that it matters a lot which attribute is used for the sorting. In three experiments, using eye-tracking indicators as well as experimental manipulations of evaluation difficulty, they show that the attribute on which options are primarily sorted becomes more important in preference formation, but only if this attribute is hard to evaluate.

The third paper, “Brand trait transference: When celebrity endorsers acquire brand personality traits,” by Ashley Rae, David Silvera, and Mario Pandelaere, introduces an innovative perspective to the rich literature on celebrity endorsement effects. Most extant research has investigated how endorsers influence brand perceptions. In this paper, Rae et al. focus on the potential for traits associated with the brand to influence perceptions of the endorser. The authors label this phenomenon “brand trait transference.” Three studies demonstrate the existence of the effect but also show that such effects are likely to be limited to cases where the endorser does not have a prior consistent and clear, product-relevant image accessible from memory.

In the fourth paper, “The material-semiotics of fatherhood: The co-emergence of technology and contemporary fatherhood,” Shona Bettany, Ben Kerrane, and Margaret Hogg apply actor–network theory (ANT) to examine how new fathers use technology in a family setting to co-enable different forms of fathering and masculinity. The paper explores the processes through which these objects, together with emerging fatherhood, enact a material-semiotic struggle over identity, processes, and action. In doing so, the paper derives insights of potential value to marketers, technological innovators, and policy makers alike.

Cobranding, or the use of two brand names on a single product, is a well-known brand strategy and generally coincides with higher purchase intentions when the consumers experiences some congruency between the two co-branding products. In the fifth paper, “Beyond

brand attitude: Individual drivers of purchase for symbolic cobranded products,” Marc Mazodier and Dwight Merunka examine the specific case in which the secondary brand adds a symbolic association (instead of an ingredient) to the product. They show that the critical driver for consumer acceptance of symbolic co-branding is how much self-congruity the consumer experiences with the secondary brand, and this effect is largest when the consumer is heavily involved with the product category of the primary brand. They suggest that managers rely on self-congruity, instead of attitude toward the secondary brand, when choosing a partner for symbolic cobranded products.

Consumers often react negatively to positioning changes of the brands with which they are familiar. Robert Jewell and Christina Saenger, in the sixth paper, “Associative and dissociative comparative advertising strategies in broadening brand positioning,” show that companies can use comparative advertising to broaden the positioning of familiar brands. Across two studies, they also test which specific sequencing of associative and dissociative comparative advertising strategies is most effective in broadening the positioning.

In the final paper “Using imagine instructions to induce consumers to generate ad-supporting content,” David Silvera, Bruce Pfeiffer, Frank Kardes, Ashley Rae, and Justin Goss test whether the persuasiveness of an ad can be increased by directly asking consumers to imagine arguments supporting the ad's message. The authors show that imagine instructions are most effective when there is a lack of fit between consumers' regulatory orientation and the ad content, when consumers are dispositionally oriented toward high need for cognitive closure, and when consumers are at a high construal level. These results are consistent with the possibility that the imagine strategy is most effective when used to enhance the motivation level of otherwise unmotivated consumers.

3. Kudos

As co-chairs of this conference and co-editors of this special issue, we express our profound gratitude to Dwight Merunka and Virginie De Barnier (University Paul Cézanne in Aix-Marseille, France) for their outstanding organization of the conference. We extend our thanks to Hayley Davis-Gomez for her superb administrative support and the highly positive energy she brought to the conference. We also greatly appreciate the support of the international scientific committee members of the La Londe Conference who, year after year, have contributed to the paper selection process and helped guarantee the quality of the contributions through their reviews. The scientific committee is composed of the following distinguished scholars: Gerald Albaum (University of New Mexico), Søren Askegaard (University of Southern Denmark, Odense), Rajeev Batra (University of Michigan), Russell Belk (York University), Elizabeth Cowley (University of Sydney), Christian Derbaix (FUCaM, Mons), Siegfried Dewitte (KU Leuven), Curt Haugtvedt (Ohio State University), Wayne D. Hoyer (University of Texas at Austin), Chris Janiszewski (University of Florida), Alain Jolibert (INSEEC, Paris), Lynn R. Kahle (University of Oregon), Michel Laroche (Concordia University, Montreal), Gilles Laurent (INSEEC Paris), Sidney J. Levy (University of Arizona), Richard J. Lutz (University of Florida), Hans Mühlbacher (University of Innsbruck), Robert Peterson (University of Texas at Austin), Michel Pham (Columbia University), Rik Pieters (Tilburg University), Bernard Pras (University of Paris-Dauphine and ESSEC), Don Schultz (Northwestern University), Joseph Sirgy (Virginia Polytechnic Institute & State University), Jan-Benedict Steenkamp (University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill), Pierre Valette-Florence (University of Grenoble), Stijn van Osselaer (Cornell University), Fred van Raaij (Tilburg University), Luk Warlop (KU Leuven & BI Norwegian Business School), Arch Woodside (Boston College), and Judy Zaichkowsky (Simon Fraser University).

Above all, we thank the large and dedicated group of 150 ad hoc reviewers who evaluated the submissions for the 2013 conference, including the seven papers that were selected for this special issue.

Although they are too numerous to identify here by name (they are identified and acknowledged on the conference website¹), they did an outstanding job of reviewing the submissions in a constructive and timely manner. Finally, we thank Arch Woodside, editor in chief of the *Journal of Business Research*, for initiating and approving this special issue.

4. Conclusion

The 40th edition of the La Londe Conference was a huge success. The conference featured dozens of outstanding papers from many different countries and international institutions. Much of the high quality work that was presented will find its way to other leading journals, and benefitted from the in-depth discussions during the conference. The

seven articles that appear in this special issue are a testimony to the vibrancy and quality of consumer behavior and marketing communication research that is being conducted around the world.

We look forward to the 2015 edition of the La Londe Conference on Marketing Communication and Consumer Behavior. Two outstanding researchers, Margaret Campbell, (University of Colorado, USA) and Elisabeth Cowley (University of Sydney, Australia), will co-chair the next conference. As always, the 2015 Conference will take place from in the cozy and beautiful resort of La Londe les Maures on the French Mediterranean coast. The dates are May 26–29, 2015.

Reference

- Lynch, J. G., Jr., Spiller, S. A., & Zauberman, G. (2013). *Resource slack: A theory of perceived supply and demand*. *Working paper*.

¹ http://www.cerog.org/lalondeCB/CB/2013_lalonde_seminar/program/reviewing_committee.phpv.