

Context effects in marketing practice: The case of mood

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Abstract

The role of individuals' affective state on information processing and decision making has attracted the attention of researchers in the social sciences. Building on the findings reported in the literature, the authors examine the effects of mood on marketing practice. Implications for advertising practices as well as the potential manipulation of elements of the physical store/retail environment (atmospherics) in which consumers operate in order to affect behaviour are discussed.

Keywords:

Mood, advertising, context effects, atmospherics

INTRODUCTION

Imagine oneself as the product manager for BMW Z3 Roadster asked to select an advertisement that will be broadcast at the end of the movie 'Animal House', what kind of an advertisement would be best? Would an image advertisement or one that presents several product attributes be recommended? Would the answer be different if it were to be broadcast after the movie 'Schindler's List'? Underlying this scenario is the notion that the affective state of consumers at the time when they process information may affect their judgment. A movie like 'Animal House' will probably make the audience laugh and, thus, put them in a good mood, while a movie such as 'Schindler's List' may put them in a bad mood. Research findings suggest that consumers' affective state, the type of information presented to them and the context in which this information is presented are factors that may affect

consumers' judgment and determine their choice.

This paper reviews the basic effects of consumers' affective state (mood) on attitude formation and identifies implications for marketing practitioners. Bakamitsos (2000) suggests that mood may function in two alternative ways, a direct one and an indirect one (Figure 1). On the one hand, mood may act as an *object*, that is, as a piece of information that people use in forming their evaluation. When mood functions as an object, consumers are most likely to use it as a heuristic cue and, thus, assimilation effects are observed. Often, when consumers are presented with difficult to process information and they lack either the ability or the motivation to process it, they resort to heuristic cues in order to render a judgment. The mood they are in at the time they form an evaluation may act as a heuristic cue. In such a case consumers would

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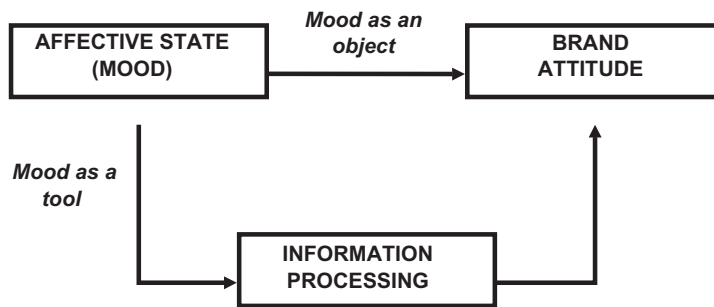


Figure 1: Direct and indirect effects of affective states on judgment

render a more favourable evaluation for a product or service when they are happy and a less favourable one when they are sad.

On the other hand, mood may act as a *tool*, that is, it can affect the information processing that takes place prior to the product evaluation and, thus, affect the outcome of this evaluation. The effects of mood on information processing are not only evident in the case of evaluations but it has been demonstrated that positive mood facilitates relational elaboration, or in other words, enhances individuals' ability to identify relationships between seemingly unrelated objects. As a result, individuals in a positive mood are better at creative tasks (Isen *et al.*, 1987), categorise information in a more flexible manner (Murray *et al.*, 1990) and exhibit superior brand name learning (Lee and Sternthal, 1999) (see Isen, 1993 for a discussion of this literature). These findings provide evidence against the popular belief that positive mood impairs cognitive capacity and, thus, results in heuristic processing. Superior creativity, flexible categorisation and enhanced learning are activities that require significant cognitive resources and thus cannot be the outcomes of heuristic processing. On the contrary, they suggest that individuals in a positive mood are strategic processors of information who judiciously decide when and how to deploy their cognitive resources.

THEORETICAL FINDINGS AND THEIR IMPLICATIONS FOR MANAGEMENT PRACTICE

Bakamitsos (2000) examines how consumers' affective state, advertisement type/ease of processing and presentation context may interact and affect brand attitudes. His findings identify conditions under which mood will serve as a cue and conditions under which it will affect information processing by facilitating relational elaboration. Consumers who were in a happy, a neutral or a sad mood were presented with one of two versions of an advertisement for a BMW. The one version was an easy to process advertisement (attribute) while the other was a difficult to process advertisement (abstract). Half of the consumers were exposed to the target advertisement (BMW) in the context of an advertisement for a Rolex watch and an advertisement for a Cartier necklace (relevant context), while the other half was exposed to the target advertisement in the context of an advertisement for Bertolli olive oil and an advertisement for Rite Aid pharmacies (irrelevant context). Consumers in a positive mood who were exposed to the easy to process BMW advertisement in the relevant context were able to engage in relational elaboration and form associations between the advertised products. These associations occurred due to the common membership that all three advertised products held to the same category (luxury products) and because

they were of positive valence for that particular group of consumers. Consumers in this experimental condition rendered a more favourable evaluation of BMW as opposed to consumers who were exposed to the same advertisement in the irrelevant context. It is worth noticing that consumers who were exposed to the difficult to process BMW advertisement, irrespective of the context in which this was presented to them, rendered a judgment symmetric with their mood. Those who were in a positive mood rendered a more favourable evaluation of BMW than those who were in a negative or a neutral mood. A summary of these findings appears in Table 1.

In conclusion, as depicted in Figure 2, it appears that when consumers were in a positive mood and easy to process information was presented to them in a context that facilitated relational elaboration, they formed associations between the target and the context stimuli and they used them to form their attitude. In this instance mood acted as a *tool* that affected information processing; however, if any of the three conditions was not present, then consumers used their mood as a heuristic cue and rendered a mood congruent judgment. In this instance, mood acted as an *object*.

In addition to the insights that this piece of research provides on how

Table 1 Attitude towards BMW (from Bakamitsos, 2000)

	Easy to Process Advertisement		Difficult to Process Advertisement	
	Relevant context	Irrelevant context	Relevant context	Irrelevant context
Positive mood	High	Average	High	High
Neutral mood	Average	Average	Average	Average
Negative mood	Average	Average	Low	Low

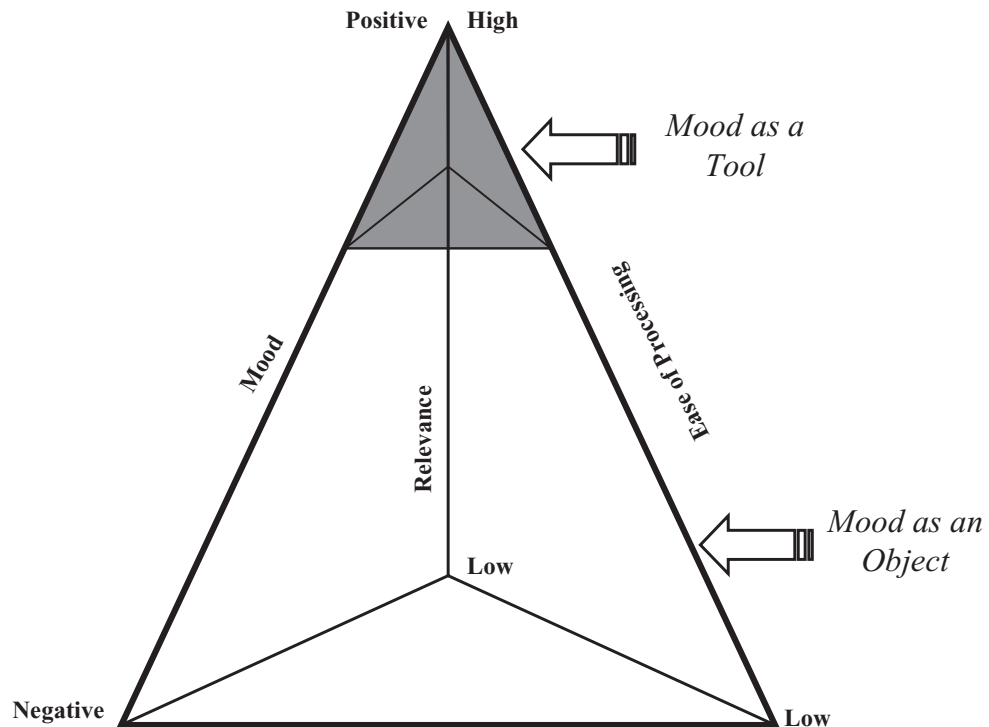


Figure 2: Summary of the findings of Bakamitsos (2000)

mood affects judgment, there are a number of managerial implications that arise from this body of work. On the one hand, the theoretical issues addressed earlier have direct applications for managerial practices such as advertisement creation, copy testing, media selection and advertisement placement. On the other hand, the successful manipulation of mood states raises the question of whether such manipulations would be feasible in real-life settings. To address this issue this paper will examine atmospherics and their use as mood induction vehicles.

The findings reported above indicate that different types of advertisements may evoke different types of processing by consumers and may have different effects on consumers' attitudes towards the advertised product/service. In addition, the context in which an advertisement is presented, given the consumers' mood and the type of advertisement, may also affect consumers' attitudes towards the advertised product. These findings are of theoretical interest, not only for demonstrating the alternative ways in which mood can operate, but also because they identify conditions under which mood will operate in each of the alternative ways identified. Beyond their theoretical interest, the reported findings raise several issues regarding the creation, testing and placement of advertisements. What kinds of advertisements are more effective? Should firms try to develop advertisement campaigns that provide ample information to consumers or should they favour campaigns that promote a brand's image? Given the fact that the context in which an advertisement is presented may affect consumers' attitudes towards the advertised product/service, how should advertisements be tested? Is placement in a neutral context the optimal method of testing different executions, or should a variety of contexts be used in the evaluation process? Finally, given the

powerful effect that the context in which an advertisement is presented may have on consumers' evaluations, in what contexts should firms try to place their advertisements? Alternatively, if a firm cannot control the context in which its advertisement will be presented, can the firm control for the effect of context by selecting the kind of advertisement to be presented?

THE EFFECTS OF MOOD ON ADVERTISING PRACTICE

The three sections that follow address these questions and the theoretical findings reported earlier are employed in order to provide answers. The first section deals with issues related to the type of advertisement and discusses how firms can use different types of advertisements to achieve different objectives. The second section examines the copy testing process and the issues related to this process and offers recommendations on how this process may be improved. The last section addresses issues related to media selection and advertisement placement and offers recommendations on how firms may optimise the effectiveness of their campaigns by carefully selecting the media in which they advertise and by carefully planning their placement.

Type of advertisement

The empirical findings reported in the literature demonstrate the important role that the type of advertisement can play (Yi, 1990, 1991; Malaviya *et al.*, 1996). Malaviya *et al.* (1996) postulate that the kind of information presented in an advertisement may affect the type of elaboration that consumers will engage in. The authors demonstrated that attribute-specific information will be more likely to evoke item-specific elaboration, that is, elaboration on specific features that the advertised product/service possesses. Alternatively, when the information presented is image oriented, consumers are more likely to engage in relational

elaboration, that is, elaboration that facilitates processing of information associated with the categories to which the advertised product/service belongs. (For a more detailed discussion of the types of elaboration see Myers-Levy 1991.)

Bakamitsos's (2000) findings are consistent with the claim that different types of advertisements can evoke different processing strategies by consumers. In particular, when research participants were exposed to advertisements that presented product-specific information based on which they could form a judgment about the advertised product (a car), they did so. To the contrary, when the advertisements presented information that was either difficult to comprehend or was impoverished, then research participants relied on the use of contextual cues in rendering their judgment, in this case, their mood. In addition, it was demonstrated that under certain conditions the information increased the respondents' ability to form associations between the information presented in the target advertisement and the information presented in other advertisements accompanying the target one.

Based on these findings, one can argue that the type of advertisement to be used in a campaign should be carefully considered. Advertisements that present information that is hard to evaluate or ambiguous will be more likely to induce heuristic processing compared with those that present easy to process information. A direct consequence of this effect is related to the context in which advertisements are presented. If a certain type of advertisement is more likely to induce heuristic processing, the context in which such an advertisement is placed becomes of paramount importance since it may act as a source of contextual cues that consumers can use to process the advertisements.

In addition, one could also argue that

different types of advertisements should be used in order to achieve different objectives in campaigns. For example, if the goal of a campaign is to build awareness of a new product/service or to educate consumers about the benefits that result from using a particular product or service, an advertisement with easy to process information should be used; however, if the goal of the campaign is to build membership of a brand in a category, then image advertisement or an advertisement that facilitates relational elaboration is more suitable. Along the same lines, in the early stages of a product's life cycle, when consumers need to be educated about the attributes of the new product/service and the benefits it offers, an advertisement which presents easy to process information would be suitable. Later on, however, when a product has been established in the minds of consumers, more image advertising that is more likely to induce relational elaboration can be employed.

As mentioned earlier, different types of advertisements induce different types of processing. Advertisements that provide detailed attribute information about the advertised product or service usually induce systematic processing, while those that provide impoverished information usually induce heuristic processing. Nevertheless, not all advertisements that provide attribute information will induce systematic processing. When Bakamitsos (2000) presented consumers with an advertisement that featured difficult to process technical information, consumers engaged in heuristic processing. This finding suggests that the information provided in an advertisement should be carefully selected so that it can be easily processed by the targeted consumers. Consumers' knowledge about the product category to which the advertised product or service belongs may affect their ability to process the information provided to them.

Consumers with high expertise in the product category will be more likely to understand the information presented to them even if it is highly technical, while consumers with low expertise will not be able to process such information and will resort to heuristic processing. Although advertising agencies employ various techniques such as message discrepancy, threat and humorous appeals to motivate message elaboration, the information presented should be carefully selected so as to reflect the target audiences' processing ability. This finding highlights the important role that copy testing should play in the evaluation of an advertisement campaign because it gives marketing practitioners the opportunity to understand how an advertisement will be perceived by the targeted audience.

Advertisement copy testing

Copy testing is another area in which the reported findings seem to have direct implications. Copy testing is the process by which different advertisement copies are evaluated in order to assess their effectiveness. During copy testing both the execution and the effect of a particular advertisement on the advertised brand can be evaluated. Copy testing can take various forms depending on the kind of advertisement being assessed, the point in time during the campaign development process when the assessment takes place and the dimensions over which a firm wants the advertisement to be evaluated. In general, advertising agencies will use a variety of qualitative and quantitative research techniques to assess the effectiveness of an advertisement. Concept testing and focus groups are some of the most popular qualitative techniques used during the early stages of campaign development.

Concept testing is used during the early stages of campaign development in an attempt to identify concepts that

are appealing and relevant to the targeted segment. Consumers are presented with different concepts, asked to rank them in terms of appeal and provide feedback on why they ranked them in a particular order.

During subsequent phases of the campaign development process, firms ought to decide between competing concepts in order to proceed to the production stage. At this point in time, focus groups can provide valuable insights for copy selection. Consumers are now presented with more elaborate forms of the competing concepts in the form of storyboards or animatics and are asked to evaluate them. The goal is to evaluate the probable success of each concept.

During the final stages of campaign development, when firms try to decide between alternative executions of an advertisement that have been produced, a combination of measures that aim to assess both the appeal of the various advertisements to the targeted segment as well as their effects on the advertised brand are used. For instance, television commercials are usually evaluated by consumers who have been recruited by an agency. They are usually asked to watch a pilot segment of a television show and during the commercial breaks they are exposed to the target advertisement(s) and filler advertisements. In terms of execution, commercials are evaluated by consumers indicating which copy, or even which parts of the copy, they liked the most and which parts they did not like. In terms of effectiveness, several measures that vary from attitude towards a brand and purchase intention to simple recall are collected both before and after participants' exposure to the advertisements. The differences among these attitude and choice measures are used to assess the performance of each copy tested. Likewise, print advertisements are evaluated by consumers who are asked to go through a booklet that contains the target

advertisement(s) among others and editorial pieces.

The findings reported earlier clearly indicate that consumers' attitudes towards a brand may be affected by several factors, such as their mood at the time of the evaluation, the type of advertisement they were exposed to and the context in which the advertisement was presented to them. In particular, it was demonstrated that advertisements that provide little information upon which consumers can form a judgment (abstract or technical advertisements) are susceptible to the use of external cues, such as one's mood, during the judgment formation process. In addition, it was demonstrated that the context in which an advertisement was presented could facilitate the creation of associations among the various pieces of information, thus indirectly affecting consumers' judgments. At the same time, Yi (1990, 1991) demonstrated that the context in which an advertisement is presented may induce a particular mood state to consumers.

These findings have direct implications for the way in which the copy testing of finished advertisements is conducted and give rise to several important issues related to this process. First, if different executions perform differently depending on a viewer's mood state, copy testing should control for this effect. Testing different executions in a neutral context may not be the optimal way of evaluating their performance. If an execution is placed in a context that presents products/services related to the advertised brand, consumers may be able to form associations among the advertised products/services and the attributes or benefits that they share. In turn, these associations may affect their judgment. As a result, this execution will be evaluated differently from the same execution placed in a neutral context. If the associations formed are positive, then the judgment that consumers will render will be more favourable

compared to the judgment of consumers exposed to the same execution in a neutral context. Alternatively, if the associations formed are negative, consumers' judgments of the advertised product/service will be less favourable.

Secondly, different types of advertisements evoke different types of processing. In particular, as reported earlier, lack of product-specific information in an advertisement leads consumers to render evaluations based on some contextual cue, in this case, their mood. Given the fact that mood can be one of the contextual cues that consumers may use, the role of context as a mood-inducing technique is very important. The context within which an advertisement is presented can induce mood states. For example, sitcoms would probably induce a positive mood, while a documentary on famished children dying of starvation would probably induce a negative mood. As a result, in order to understand better the potential that an execution being tested may have, various contexts should be employed.

This recommendation should be viewed with caution. Although it is advisable for an execution to be tested in multiple contexts, one should keep in mind that doing so entails significant costs. The valuable insights that such a copy testing process can yield do not come free. It is the responsibility of the decision maker to exercise prudent judgment and decide how much information is necessary and at what cost this information should be obtained before making a decision.

Media selection and advertisement placement

Media selection and advertisement placement are two more domains that are also affected by context and the effects it may have on brand evaluations. Given the fact that context may affect the interpretation of information presented in an advertisement, either by facilitating associations between the advertised

brand and other pieces of information presented alongside them, or by providing cues which consumers may use to interpret information presented in the advertisements, careful consideration of where and when to advertise is required. Marketing practitioners seem to be aware of the importance that context may play in the effectiveness of an advertisement campaign, that is why they try to cluster together advertisements for similar products, hoping that by doing so they can reach their targeted audience most effectively.

Another managerial practice that confirms the importance that marketing practitioners attribute to contextual effects is product placement. Product placement refers to the use of branded products in movies or other events as a way of getting publicity for the brand and establishing a brand identity. For example, Starbucks, the coffee shop chain, was promoted heavily in the movie 'Austin Powers: The Spy Who Shagged Me', while Rolex and Omega watches, as well as Aston Martin and BMW cars, are among the favourite products that James Bond uses in his movie adventures around the world.

Product placement is one of several non-traditional media that firms can employ in an attempt to reach their target audience and build brand equity. Firms employ non-traditional media such as event sponsorship, cause marketing and programme sponsorship in an attempt to build favourable associations between their brand and an event or a cause in the hope of creating a more favourable evaluation of their brand in consumers' minds. Recent technological developments such as personal digital recorders (PDRs) that allow consumers effortlessly to edit commercials out of television programming, as well as the saturation of consumers with advertising messages, are some of the forces that drive the increased use of non-traditional media.

Non-traditional media are an excellent way in which to generate awareness but are not without limitations. First, they usually cannot translate awareness into action and thus ought to be used synergistically with other elements of the promotional mix that can move consumers from awareness to adoption and loyalty. Secondly, in certain cases marketers have limited control over the way in which their brand is portrayed and thus the resulting associations may not be the ones marketers had hoped for. Despite their limitations, the increased popularity of non-traditional media highlights the importance that marketers place on context effects and their attempts to use them as an integral part of their communication strategy.

The research findings reported earlier shed more light on how the context in which an advertisement is placed can affect consumers' attitudes. Furthermore, taking into account the fact that different types of advertisements are affected differently by contextual effects can lead to optimal media selection and advertisement placement decisions. It is obvious that similar products should be advertised together in media that target consumers who belong to the targeted segment. Nevertheless, firms may decide to advertise alongside products that may not be similar, but share similar characteristics or values. One may expect to find a car advertisement in a car magazine such as 'Car and Driver', alongside other car advertisements, but should also expect to find a luxury car advertisement in an opera programme, alongside those for upmarket jewellery and exclusive restaurants.

Moreover, given the powerful effect that context can have on the interpretation of information presented in an advertisement, it is recommended that the context of the programming in which television and radio commercials are aired, as well as the editorial pieces that appear alongside print

advertisements, are checked in order to identify what might be the potential effects of the content on the advertised product/service. For example, an abstract advertisement that is more difficult to process than an advertisement that emphasises actual product attributes may do well after a sitcom like 'Seinfeld', but not after a movie like 'Missing'. If consumers are to use their mood as a cue in their efforts to interpret the information presented to them in an abstract advertisement, they are more likely to be in a positive mood after watching 'Seinfeld' and, thus, their evaluation will be more favourable compared to consumers who were exposed to the same advertisement after watching 'Missing', a movie that would probably put them in a negative mood and would result in a more negative evaluation. In the latter case, an advertisement that provides plenty of information upon which consumers can form an opinion about the brand, and one that is not susceptible to the use of external cues, will be more suitable.

APPLYING MOOD INDUCTION TECHNIQUES TO STORE ATMOSPHERICS

Up to this point the discussion has focused on the effect of mood on advertising practice. Nevertheless, given the profound effect that affective states may have on judgment and decision making, it is worth considering how marketers can manipulate consumers' mood to maximise the effectiveness of their marketing efforts. In this section the authors briefly examine the potential of manipulating the physical environment in which consumers operate as a means of inducing mood.

The idea that the physical environment may affect the way in which people process information is not a new one. Researchers in both psychology and marketing have recognised the importance of the physical environment on cognition and

have tried to shed more light on this issue. Kotler (1974) was the first to introduce the idea that the physical environment which consumers encounter may affect their behaviour. He used the term 'atmospherics' to refer to the process of manipulating elements of the physical environment in an attempt to affect consumer behaviour. Since then, researchers have studied issues such as the effect of music on consumer behaviour (Milliman, 1982; Miller, 1991), the effects of odours on the way in which consumers process information and make their choices (Mitchell *et al.*, 1995; Fiore *et al.*, 2000) and the effect of shopping centre design on shoppers' circulation (Brown, 1991). The effects of atmospherics also have been studied in the context of personal selling (McElroy *et al.*, 1990). In their work, McElroy *et al.* examine factors such as personal space, appearance and office layout and their effects on personal selling. Similar investigations have concentrated on service sectors like healthcare that traditionally were not perceived as relying on marketing techniques. Hutton and Richardson (1995) examine the role of the physical environment in the healthcare industry. Their work tries to identify the effect of 'healthscapes' on patient satisfaction, quality assessments, intention to return and willingness to recommend a healthcare provider to others. Along the same lines, Andrus (1986) and Paul (1997) examine the effects of the physical ambience of dental practices on consumer/patient attitudes.

In the context of experimental methodology, the physical environment has also received attention. Gardner and Siomkos (1986) investigated the feasibility of creating effective manipulations of a shopping environment in an experimental laboratory either via role playing or by asking participants to imagine how other people would respond in a given situation. Schwarz *et al.* (1987) successfully manipulated the physical

environment in which the experimental task was performed as a means of inducing mood states.

Marketing practitioners seem to be aware of the powerful effect that the physical environment can have on consumer behaviour and try to manipulate it in order to take advantage of it. Upmarket hotels exhibit luxurious lobbies in an attempt to convey their status by manipulating ambience. Along the same lines, law firms try to create an image of experience, tradition and authority by using traditional furniture and displaying volumes of law books. Finally, the most representative example of businesses that rely extensively on the manipulation of the physical environment is that of theme restaurants such as Hard Rock Cafe and Rainforest Cafe, as well as theme parks such as Disneyland and Universal Studios. Such businesses manipulate the physical environment not only in an attempt to affect consumer behaviour but also because they consider ambience to be part of the product/service they offer to their customers.

Manipulating the physical environment as a means of inducing mood states is one of the ways in which firms can affect how consumers process information and consequently their attitude. Store layout, music, lighting and scenting are some of the elements that marketing practitioners can control in their efforts to manipulate the physical environment in order to affect consumer behaviour. Although the findings reported in the literature indicate that the manipulation of the physical environment can be a powerful way of affecting consumer perception, they also indicate that, when consumers are aware of the intended manipulation, they take this effort into account and correct for the perceived distorting effect of the environment on their judgment. This finding suggests that, although the manipulation of the physical environment may have a powerful effect on consumer behaviour,

it needs to be done in a subtle way so that consumers will not try to block out its effects.

CONCLUSION

This paper has dealt with the managerial implications that arise from the effect of mood on consumer behaviour. Although the discussion presented above did not aim at exhaustively analysing the issues that arise from this body of research, it identifies areas in managerial practice that may be affected by it. Issues related to advertisement creation, copy testing, media selection and advertisement placement were discussed and recommendations were offered. How different types of advertisements are suited to achieve different goals, how firms should test for the effects that different executions may have on different consumer segments and where and when firms should advertise are some of the issues that were addressed. In addition, implications in the domain of 'atmospherics', the manipulation of the physical environment in an attempt to influence consumer behaviour, were considered. The importance of elements such as music, lighting and odours as a means of manipulating the physical environment in which consumers act was identified and the importance of careful manipulation of these elements was discussed. Further research is required in order to identify the underlying mechanisms that produce the observed effects and improve an understanding of these effects.

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