

## **GENERATIVE COMMUNICATION IMPACT ON THE CONSUMER: THE MODERATING EFFECT OF SELF-CONSTRUAL**

Abstract: This study aims to better understand the concept of generativity in marketing and the involvement of individuals in future generations by studying their consumption behaviour. By introducing and developing the concept of generative communication, we seek to understand the attitudinal reactions of individuals to generative advertising. In an experiment, we investigate how generative advertising influences the effectiveness of the ad and the contingency factors of this relative effectiveness. Our study focuses on the areas of banking and the banking products offered by banks. Our results shed light on the moderating effect of self-concept (independent vs. interdependent) on ad effectiveness variables.

Keywords: generativity, generative communication, self-construal, self-congruence to brand values.

## Introduction

The concept of generativity has its roots in the theory of the social psychological evolution of the individual developed by Erikson (1978, p. 143). It is defined as "concern for the establishment and guidance of future generations. This personal need to care for future generations drives individuals to undertake actions, to take care of a set of entities, -living and material, tangible or not, with the aim of ensuring or, at the very least, promoting the well-being of future generations (Erikson, 1978). The literature relating to generativity in social psychology is very important if we compare it to that which we find in marketing where it is little studied, yet the use of the concept of generativity corresponds to a fairly common practice of brands and advertisers (Appendix 1). The concept of generativity was used for the first time in marketing in 2003 where we find it in two theoretical articles (Urien, 2003; Hodge, 2003). Subsequently, empirical research has studied The link between generativity and consumer sensitivity towards corporate social performance of companies (Giacalone, Paul and Jurkiewicz, 2005); the relationship between generativity and environmentally responsible intentions and behaviours (Urien and Kilbourne, 2007; 2011); the impact of generative or non-generative product positioning on consumer behaviour ( Lacroix and Ouellet, 2008; Lacroix, 2011; Lacroix and Jolibert, 2015 ; 2017; 2018); the role of salespeople's generativity in their involvement in innovation processes implemented by employers (Lacroix, Lussier, & Ouellet, 2014); the relationship between generative disposition and bequest intentions to cultural organizations (Krebs, Rieunier, & Urien, 2015); the effectiveness of a generativity-based message in recruiting volunteers to improve their health behaviours (Tan et al. , 2010); the link, for Food Bank volunteers, between involvement and social and altruistic motivations and between generativity and parenthood (Agostino and Paço, 2012), the mediating role of mental imagery and situational generativity in the prosocial persuasive process (Assaf, 2018).

However, we note that the studies previously cited are oriented towards understanding the behaviour of the individual more or less generative. In our research, we wish to enrich the theoretical framework of the concept of generativity in marketing by introducing the concept of generative communication and to understand the attitudinal reactions of individuals when they are confronted with a generative communication (using a generative stimulus).

Given the significant amount of research conducted on generativity in social psychology, and as proposed in the existing marketing literature on the topic, we believe that generativity will be likely to influence the consumer behaviour. Moreover, given the already frequent use of generative communication in advertisements and brand speeches in several domains of activity, we would like to study the effect of generativity on consumer behaviour. We would like to study the effect of such communication on consumer behaviour and more specifically its adequacy with the modes of generative communication presented in advertisements: What is the relative effectiveness of generative communication? What are the mechanisms by which generative communication affects advertising effectiveness? What are the contingency factors of this relative effectiveness? To do so, this work will be organized as follows: first, we will present a synthesis of the literature on generativity, self-congruence to brand values and self-

construction, then we will present the methodology adopted in the research (here, the experiments) and then we will present the results of our study.

## **Literature review**

*Theoretical foundations of generativity.* Erikson (1963) is the first to have thought of and named generativity, which is at the heart of his theory of social-psychological development in eight stages that the individual experiences in succession. According to Erikson (1963), success in the preceding stage is a prerequisite for successful development in the subsequent stages. This reference model, which considers both biological and psychosocial dimensions, is the first to consider the development of the individual throughout his or her life and not just in the early stages (Hoare, 2002). This "concern for future generations" was then deepened by Kotre (1984) who distinguishes four major domains of generativity: biological, parental, technical and cultural. However, Kotre (1996) does not conceive of the temporality of generativity in the same way as Erikson, since Erikson sees generativity as particular and important moments in the individual and not as stages that must be overcome throughout life. Still according to Kotre (1984) generativity can be manifested in the individual under two generative "modes" based on the "modalities" of the human existence previously evoked by Bakan (1966), Kotre (1984) defines the two modes of generativity as follows: 1) the agentic, which he defines as the need to leave a positive trace of one's experience to future generations; a way of living eternally, of defying death by leaving one's imprint, such as a legacy or extension of oneself, so as to remain in the memory of others over time, and 2) the communal, which translates into the desire to take care of generative objects in an altruistic, selfless and loving way. These modalities are not totally antagonistic: there is "a fusion between charity and self-interest, between communion and agenticity". Kotre (1995, p. 36), drawing on the work of McAdams (1985), states that what makes a person generative is "a combination of agenticity and communion". It therefore seems more correct to speak of a dominant, agentic or communal orientation.

*Modeling generativity.* McAdams and de St. Aubin (1992) propose generativity as a system of seven interrelated elements: "a constellation of internal desire, cultural demand, conscious concern, belief, commitment, action, and narrative" (McAdams and de St. Aubin, 1998, p. 9). Internal desire here is an internal motivation and refers to two types of desires: desire for symbolic immortality (leaving a positive trace of oneself, an imprint beyond death) and the need to feel useful to others.

*Self-congruence with advertising values and self-construction.* Several studies have shown that consumers seek congruence between their self-image and the products and brands they purchase (Birdwell 1968; Dolich 1969; Erikson 1996; Grubb and Grathwohl 1967; Graef 1996; Levy 1959; Ross 1971; Landon 1974). According to Sirgy (1982), self-congruence positively affects attitudes toward a brand: the higher the degree of congruence between what the brand projects as an image and the image the consumer has or desires of himself, the more positively he will judge the brand. In the same way, a consumer will buy a product whose image of the brand corresponds most to the image he has of himself. Thus, the theory of self-congruence appeals to the construction of the self and its degree of correspondence with the brand image. Consumers develop favourable attitudes toward brands that contribute to their

self-perception, i.e., that contribute favourably to reinforcing their self-construct (Sirgy 1986). In other words, consumers will prefer products, brands, companies, stores, advertisements, etc., whose image is as close as possible to their own, i.e. congruent with the image they have of themselves or with the one they would like to have. For example, in the context of our study, an individual confronted with a generative advertisement will be able to define (1) whether or not he or she is a "generative" person; and (2) a degree of congruence between the values perceived in the advertisement and his or her self-concept. He will also associate (3) a value to this self-image. If the advertising image evokes a self-image with a positive value, then this value will be inferred to the advertisement. Conversely, a negative value will be attributed to it: (4) he will like or dislike the advertisement in question.

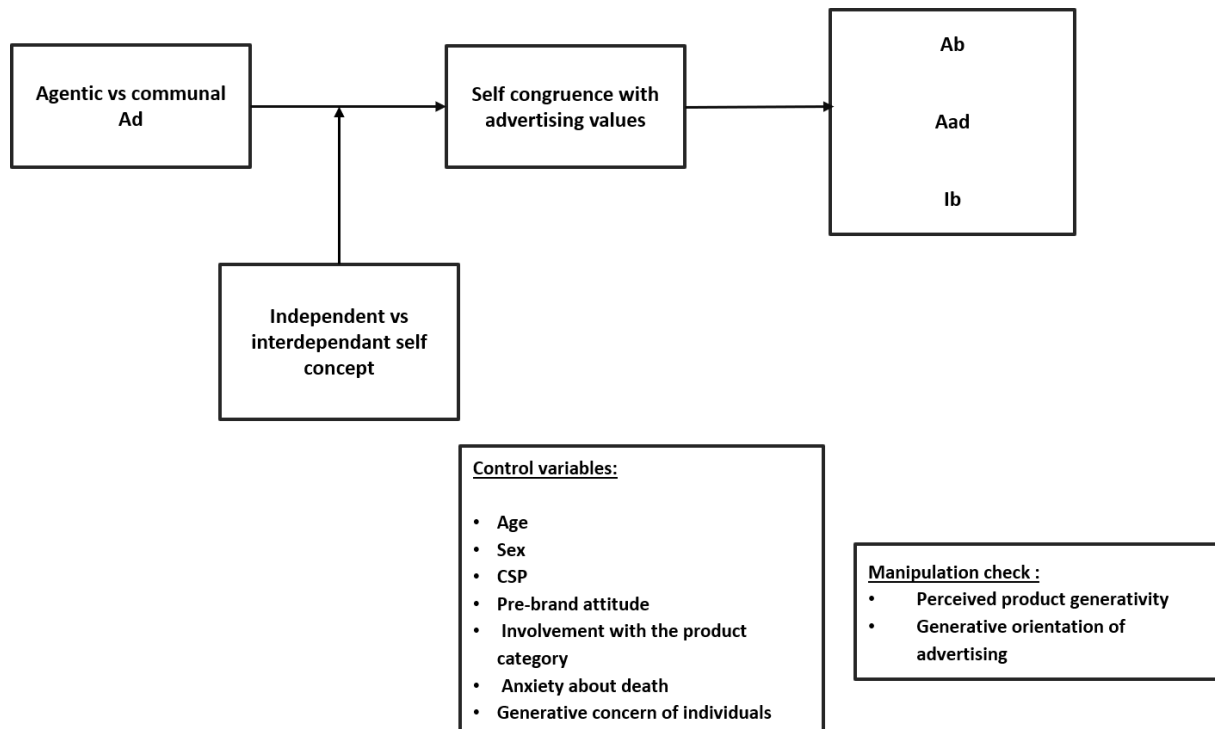
*The Self Concept.* The different representations of the self, have been developed by Markus and Kitayama (1991) who recognize two types of self-descriptions by introducing the concept of the "self-construct": the interdependent self which is formed by being linked to others or the independent self which is separated from others. The independent/interdependent self-construct is thus characterized by a fundamental difference with respect to the psychological and social relations between the self and others. An individual with an independent self-construct is more inclined to seek autonomy and his or her behaviour is primarily shaped by his or her own thoughts, feelings, and actions, rather than being influenced by those of others, whereas a person with an interdependent self-construct seeks affiliation, having behaviours based on the relationships he or she may have with other people.

## **Methodology**

*Methodological approach adopted.* Within the framework of our research, we wanted to test the mediating effects of the congruence of the self with the values of the brand induced by a generative advertisement and the moderating role that the construction of the self will have. To do this, we chose to set up an experiment allowing us to verify what impact a generative advertisement will have on the variables of effectiveness of the ad. To do this, we presented generative advertisements to two groups of individuals aged 35 and over (N=252), in order to respect Erikson's (1978) definition of the stages of generativity. The two groups of individuals responded to a questionnaire after being confronted with posters advertising the CAISSE D'ÉPARGNE BANK (Appendix 2) with modified slogans. The slogans were either agentic generative or communal generative. Data collection was conducted between October 10<sup>TH</sup> and 30<sup>TH</sup> 2021. We collected returns from 252 respondents via the Panelabs data collection platform.

The purpose of our research is to conduct an exploratory study of the effects of generative advertising on advertising effectiveness variables, as well as on attitudes toward advertising and toward advertising affect. The conceptual model suggests that self-congruence with brand values is considered a mediator in the relationship between generative advertising and advertising effectiveness, and that in this context, self-construction and culture moderate the relationship between generative advertising and advertising effectiveness.

The following figure presents the conceptual model of this study:



**Figure 1: Our conceptual model**

The purpose of this study is to assess the impact of generative advertising on self-congruence and its posterior effect on advertising effectiveness variables. In other words, it wishes to analyse the impact of agentic and community generative advertising on self-congruence and the moderating impacts of self-concept and culture on this relationship. In addition, the mediating role played by self-congruence with brand values in the relationship between generative advertising and advertising effectiveness variables will also be analysed. Hypotheses 1 support the idea that agentic and communal generative advertising can have a fairly significant effect on self-congruence to the values communicated in advertisements. In this context, the concept of self-congruence is presented as the level of alignment of a consumer's self-image to the values or characteristics shared by the brand in its advertising communications. Agentic generative advertising, generally featuring individuals with assertive or dominant behaviours, may have a greater impact on people who see themselves as independent and autonomous individuals. On the other hand, community-based generative advertising, featuring behaviours that are seen as both cooperative and interdependent, may have a more intense effect on individuals who see themselves as part of a larger community.

Hypotheses 3 and 4 support the idea that the effects of shared values in agentic generative advertisements on self-congruence is a function of the independent or interdependent attribute of the self. Thus, when consumers are marked by an independent self-concept, they tend to be attracted to an agentic generative ad. In this case, the described values may be consistent with their own self-concept, automatically generating a more positive effect on self-congruence. On the other hand, individuals characterized by an interdependent self-concept have the possibility

of perceiving the values shared in agentic generative advertising as not being part of their self-concept. This may result in a less positive effect on self-congruence.

**H1. Agentic (vs. communal) advertising will promote greater self-congruence with the values of the ad if the receiver has an independent (vs. interdependent) self.**

The hypotheses 2(a), 2(b) and 2(c) regarding the mediating role of self-congruence with advertising values, assume that this variable mediates the impact of generative advertising on ad effectiveness variables.

**H2a. Self-congruence to advertising values mediates the effect of generative (agentic vs. communal) advertising on attitude toward the brand.**

**H2b. Self-congruence to advertising values mediates the effect of generative (agentic vs. communal) advertising on purchase intention.**

**H2c. Self-congruence with advertising values mediates the effect of generative (agentic vs. communal) advertising on purchase intention.**

Finally, Hypotheses 3(a), 3(b) and 3(c) support the idea that self-congruence with the brand's shared values can have a positive effect on advertising effectiveness variables, specifically attitude toward the ad, attitude toward the brand, and purchase intention. Thus, when an individual considers that the brand's values align with his or her own self-concept, he or she will tend to react positively to the advertisement and to the product concerned

**H3(a). The stronger (weaker) the congruence of self with the values of the advertisement, the more (less) positive the attitude toward the brand (Ab).**

**H3(b). The stronger (weaker) the congruence of self with the values of the advertisement, the more (less) positive the attitude toward the advertisement (Aad).**

**H3(c). The stronger (weaker) the congruence of self with the values of the advertisement, the more (less) positive the purchase intention towards the promoted product will be (Ib).**

## **Results and discussion**

*The generative orientation of advertising.* First, from the results obtained in our experiments, we find that agentic Savings Bank advertising is perceived as more agentic (mean: 4.80) than communal advertising (mean: 3.98) ( $t=4.129$ ,  $p=.000$ ).

*Perceived product generativity.* We find that there is no significantly different perception of the generativity of the banking product offered by the evaluated savings bank advertisement ( $t=-.525$ ,  $p>.6$ ).

*The mediating effect of self-congruence to advertising-induced brand values.* We find a direct effect of stimulus type (Agentic vs. Communal) on the perceived congruence of the ad's values with self (coeff=4.3,  $p<.05$ ). The advertisement where we can read the communal generative slogan is more congruent with the individual's own values than the advertisement where the agentic generative slogan is written.

*Moderating effect of self-construction.* The moderating role on independent self is significant ( $t=-2.08$ ,  $p<.05$ ). According to the figure (Appendix 2), when the self is weakly independent communal advertising is more congruent with self whereas when the self is strongly independent agentic advertising is more congruent with self-values. We find, however, that the interdependent self has no moderating effect ( $t=-1.32$ ,  $p>.1$ ).

*The effect on ad effectiveness variables.* We find a moderated mediation with an indirect impact of ad type (agentic vs. communal slogan) on attitude toward the ad, attitude toward the brand, and purchase intention.

Our results contribute to the literature on generativity in marketing. Indeed, we tried to understand the attitudinal reactions of individuals when they are confronted with an advertisement using generative stimuli (agentic slogan or communal slogan). Our study has enabled us first of all to observe that consumers understand and perceive better the advertisements whose slogan is agentic than those whose slogan is communal and this even if the proposed product (banking service) is not especially perceived as more agentic than communal. Here we can conclude that the product category does not influence its generative orientation, it is simply perceived as generative (vs. non-generative). The study carried out in the continuity of Lacroix's (2011) work allows us to make a new contribution to the understanding of generativity in marketing since we find that the generative slogan constitutes a more important stimulus in the understanding of the message delivered by the brand than the perceived generative orientation (agentic or communal) of the product it offers. Moreover, we find that the advertisement where we can read the communal generative slogan is more congruent with the individual's own values than the advertisement where the agentic generative slogan is written. This information is relevant because although the advertisement with the agentic generative slogan is better understood by the individuals, it is less congruent with their own values. Moreover, only individuals' generative orientation and prior attitude toward the brand has a significant impact on the advertising-induced self-congruence to the brand values.

Having found that the interdependent self-construct was a non-significant moderator variable in our study ( $t=-1.32$ ,  $p>.1$ ), we turned our attention to the independent self-construct and its effect on ad liking (Agentic Generative Slogan vs. Communal Generative Slogan). We find that the more independent the individual whose self is strongly independent, the more he or she will appreciate the advertisement whose slogan is agentic generative, conversely, the individual whose self is weakly independent will appreciate more the advertisement whose slogan is communal generative. According to Nisbett et al. (2001), independents and interdependents process information in different ways. Here, it was interesting to study the stronger or weaker level of independent self of individuals because it highlights differences in

consumption behaviour that may exist within the same study group (Strong independent self vs. Weak independent self).

Finally, we find that the stronger or weaker level of the individual's independent self indirectly impacts the effect on the ad effectiveness variables ( $A_b$ ,  $A_{ad}$ , and  $I_b$ ). The stronger the individual's independent self, the more the advertisement with the communal generative slogan will have a negative effect on the individual's attitude toward the ad, attitude toward the brand, and purchase intention.

*Limitations and future directions of the research.* This study has allowed us to analyse the relevance of generative (agentic or communal) slogans as a communication strategy for brands through experimentation. However, and this is both a limitation and an avenue for future research, it would be interesting to replicate this study to another industry (e.g., donations to a non-profit foundation) in order to test whether the perceived generativity of this industry will have a different impact on self-construction and the effect on ad effectiveness variables. Additionally, it would be interesting in future research to investigate the moderating effect that culture (collectivist or individualist) may have on the effectiveness variables of a generative ad.



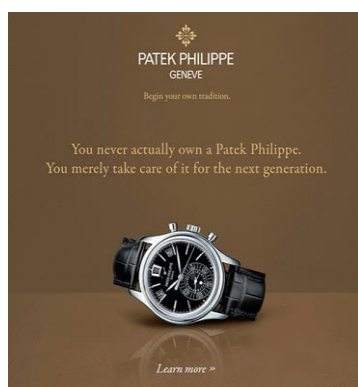
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## Appendix 1: Examples of generative brand communications



## Appendix 2: Generative advertising stimuli

### Publicité agentique



### Publicité communale



### Appendix 3: Moderating role of the independent self

