The Skillset Needed for Sales Success
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What’s the Best Thank You?
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Picturing Yourself In and Out of the House
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Peer-Based Learning and its Implications for the Real Estate Market
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Are Salespeople Born or Made?
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INSIDER: How the World Sees You
Margie McGregor, MBA Candidate

INSIDER: Being Real in Real Estate
Wesley Bryan, MBA Candidate
Have you ever imagined yourself in an exotic vacation location, experiencing all the benefits of a luxury resort? Consumers are often urged to imagine a consumption experience while viewing an ad (e.g., to picture themselves using the product or service being advertised). Real estate agents use similar strategies while persuading buyers to invest in a house. The implicit belief behind these sales strategies is that consumption-related self-imagery is a powerful persuasion tactic (cf., Escalas 2007). As the current research indicates, however, this is not always true.

Self-imagery can be activated spontaneously while watching television, browsing, or searching for information on the Internet (Schlosser 2003). Salespeople who are urging consumers to consider a purchase can also activate it. For instance, home buyers might be urged to imagine themselves in the home and asked to form a story of their experiences in it (e.g., "when I walk in, there is a big foyer and on the left is a beautiful living room with high ceilings where I can relax and look at the garden. I can then walk to the kitchen and make myself a cup of coffee and sit in the sun room"). Or, they might be urged to imagine using different aspects of the home with the objective of acquiring information about it (e.g., imagine how easy will it be to cook in this kitchen, imagine the convenience of having five bathrooms). How do these two different types of goals that drive self-imagery interact with the visuals that real estate agents provide?

**Self-Imagery Interacts with Visuals**

Ads usually show a product or service from multiple perspectives. Thus, an ad for a vacation resort might show pictures of the exterior along with images of the interior. These images prompt a person to imagine the experience from a particular perspective or point-of-view from which the pictures are taken. So, a picture of the exterior of a resort (e.g., the swimming pool) leads one to imagine the resort from the perspective of someone standing outside. Alternatively, a picture of the interior (e.g., the bedroom) makes one adopt the perspective of someone inside.
The use of pictures showing the advertised product or service from multiple perspectives in ads is very common. However, our research shows that these multiple-perspective ads can have negative as well as positive effects. When consumers engage in self-imagery with the objective of forming a story of their experience, ads that portray a resort from multiple perspectives can have a negative effect because consumers have to change their visual perspective (e.g., "I am now in the swimming pool" to "I am relaxing on the bed watching TV") and integrate these different scenes in order to form a story of the entire experience. This additional cognitive work increases the difficulty the consumers experience in forming their story and leads to negative evaluations. If, however, consumers are simply imagining themselves acquiring information (e.g., checking out different home features), presenting information from different perspectives might lead to an illusion of “more information available,” and subsequently result in positive product evaluations.

**Important Finding: More Pictures Isn’t Always Better**

We used four experiments to examine the interaction of self-imagery and visual images. In one study, participants reviewed two ads for a resort, each consisting of four pictures. In some conditions, the pictures in each ad were all taken from similar visual perspectives (depicting either the inside of the hotel or alternately the outside). In other conditions, each ad contained two pictures of the inside of the hotel and two of the outside. When participants were asked to use their imagination to form a story of their experience using different parts of the hotel, presenting pictures from different perspectives decreased their evaluations of the hotel. When they were asked to acquire as much information about the hotel as possible, however, presenting pictures from different perspectives increased their evaluation of the hotel.

These findings were replicated in several follow-up studies. An eye-tracking study, for example, showed that when participants were asked to use their imagination to form a story while viewing advertisements, their eyes shifted back and forth repeatedly between pictures depicting different perspectives as they tried to construct a story (suggesting processing difficulty). When participants were asked to acquire as much information about the hotel as possible, however, this was not the case.

In short, providing descriptions of a product from multiple visual perspectives might not always have a positive effect on reactions to the product. When consumers try to form a narrative or story about their experience, pictures from different perspectives can have a detrimental effect on consumers’ product evaluations. This is particularly likely when consumers have an objective of communicating about the product to others and are trying to immerse themselves in an experience and creating a story.
What Does this Research Mean for the Reader?

How does this research inform real estate professionals? We believe that the industry has moved toward a “more is better” frame of reference when you look at the sheer number of photos that are posted on the MLS home listings. Many of these pictures are quite “divergent” in terms of what the prospective home buyer is viewing.

Our results underscore the need to be careful about the usage of pictures in the home-buying process. First, agents may want to restrict themselves from using pictures from multiple visual perspectives if they want the prospective home buyers to imagine themselves living in those homes. Second, when pictures from multiple visual perspectives are included, agents should use encourage home buyers to see all that the home has to offer (an “information collection” approach) rather than encourage the home buyers to imagine their family’s life in this property (a “story-telling” approach). Giving the home buyer the right instructions avoids potential detrimental effects when selling a house that is represented by a large number of photos.

Recommended Readings


References


About the Authors

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Yuwei Jiang (PhD – Hong Kong University of Science and Technology) is an Assistant Professor of Marketing at the Hong Kong Polytechnic University. His research interests
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Rashmi Adaval is Professor of Marketing at the Hong Kong University of Science & Technology (HKUST). She received her PhD at the University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign. She has held faculty positions at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign and HKUST. Her research uses an information processing approach and focuses on how information that varies in type and structure influences people’s memory, judgment and decisions through the specific processing goals that they have. She has used this perspective to examine issues such as the impact of imagery and narratives on memory and judgments, the use of sensory inputs and subjective feelings (e.g., metacognitive feelings, moods and emotions) in judgment and the use of numerical information in magnitude and price perceptions. She is particularly interested in how these effects are spontaneous and occur without participants’ awareness of the inputs that influence them. Her work has appeared in academic journals such as *Journal of Consumer Research, Journal of Consumer Psychology, Journal of Marketing Research* and the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology*. She has served as the associate editor of the *Journal of Consumer Research* and is on the Editorial Review Boards of the *Journal of Consumer Research, Journal of Consumer Psychology* and *Basic and Applied Social Psychology*.

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Professor Robert S. Wyer, Jr. has research interests in social cognition, cognitive mediators of inferences, and beliefs about people and events. Dr. Wyer is a past editor of the *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology* and *Journal of Consumer Psychology*. He has received a number of awards, including the 2008 Distinguished Scientist Award (from the Society of Experimental Social Psychology), the 1998 Thomas M. Ostrom Award for Distinguished Contributions to Person Memory and Social Cognition, and the Alexander von Humboldt Special Research Prize for Distinguished Scientists. Dr. Wyer holds a BEE from Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute, a MEE from New York University, and a PhD from University of Colorado.