

Selective Exposure and Consumer Behavior

by Inge Hutagalung

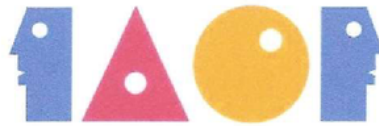
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**SELECTIVE EXPOSURE AND CONSUMER BEHAVIOR -
INTERPRETATIVE PHENOMENOLOGICAL ANALYSIS IN
CONSUMER BEHAVIOR OF Z GENERATION ADOLESCENT ON
THE AD INFORMATION OF SMARTPHONE SELECTION**

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Abstract

This research examines consumer behavior of the Z generation adolescent on the ad information of Smartphone selection. The method used is Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The results show that the audiences are not passive and have resistance in accepting ad information. The utility of information and support groups play an important role in the information selection process. The information which is contrary to one's belief may not always be rejected. An ad will still be chosen if having the benefit value. On the other way, the more contradictory the ad information to the internal reference in social group, the more it will be avoided, and vice versa.

Key words: selective exposure, belief, utility of information, social group

Introduction

Nowadays, by remarkable development in the field of information and communication media technology, people do not only live in the 'communication revolution' era, but are also still exploring what is known as the era of *communicative abundance* or *cornucopias of communication* (Neuman, 1991; John Keane, 1998).

One of the information which is necessary for attention related to the communicative abundance is Smartphone ad. Nowadays, the development of the Smartphone ad in the consumer has raised a variety of social and cultural issues, particularly regarding the sign used, the image displayed, the information submitted, the meanings obtained, and how all of these effect on the understanding perception and community behaviour.

There are often any controversies developing around the existence of the Smartphone ad related to the fact, that in the advertising, there is often a gap between what is described about the product and the reality of the product in actual. The advertisings often show the unreality of product. It shows the fake reality. Thus, there is a public lie by the ads. The ads are even caught up in the scheme of free play of signs, in order to create a false image of product, which is that the actual image is not an integral part, substantial, or functional of certain product, but by ad rhetoric, the image even becomes the reference model in consuming a product.

Given that ads are often caught up in the scheme of free play of signs and display the 'mask of reality', it is very interesting to examine how the selection process and information rejection (selective exposure) by Smartphone ads in adolescent generation Z. The researcher argumentation to choose this Z generation is because they are the fanatic social media users. Their lives are strongly affected by the technology development. This research will examine on how the Z generation adolescent conducts the selective exposure process for the Smartphone ads.

Literature Review

One of the theories regarding to one's selection and reason in selecting and rejecting information is the cognitive dissonance theory.

At the beginning of thought, Festinger (1957) had put a belief as the cause of selective exposure. Festinger

selective exposure process (1957) was based on a number of assumptions. First, the individual is a homo sapiens, and not a creature with passive reactions on the environment. Second, humans are the cognitive consistency seekers. Humans always keep their stability and cognitive consistency. In case of cognitive inconsistency, then they will get a dissonance, namely an inconvenience psychological condition. By receiving the supporting information, it will make convenience feeling, on the other way around, by receiving the contrary information with one's belief, it will into dissonant condition. Third, humans are the information processor, namely Humans are the creatures who likes to find self-justification or defence in solving any problems (Sears, et.al, 1985:156-157; West and Turner, 2007:139-140).

Several studies support the thought of Festinger (Ehrlich et al., 1957; Mills et al., 1959; Adams, 1960; Chaffee et.al, 2001; Redlawsk, 2002; Taber and Lodge, 2006).

By the time goes by, the literature shows that the cause of selective exposure based on the perspective of cognitive dissonance theory involves three aspects, namely, the psychological, message and social aspect (see the table of selective exposure aspect causes).

Moreover, the selective exposure in simple can be defined as an individual's efforts to preferentially and intentionally seek the desired and undesired information. There is abundance information availability, and an individual will select and choose the information to

be accessed and to be not accessed (Fischer et.al, 2011:51).

The studies on the *selective exposure* focus on what to be selected and avoided when processing information, the reasons to consume certain information, and others. It is also why someone will choose certain information, and not others; Why people prefer to some news, while other people prefer to other programs on television; Why one prefer comedy film, while others prefer and love drama film. All of the questions are related to the selective exposure process.

Research Method

In this study, the paradigm used is post-positivistic. The research reason in selecting the post-positivistic paradigm is because that the selective exposure is a positivistic concept but to deep more in it, it is necessary for qualitative analysis. The study with post-positivistic paradigm in this study helps to explore and understand what behind the phenomenon is, the background of individual thought or the research subject involved.

The research method used in this study is *interpretative phenomenological analysis* (IPA). According to Smith and Osborn (2009:97) this interpretative phenomenological analysis aims to measure how the participants interpret the personal and social world. IPA is a suitable approach when one is trying to find out how an individual percept certain situations. When, he or she has to face on new complexity, process, or something.

The research aims to analyse how the selective exposure process is conducted by the Z generation adolescent. Thus, the researcher uses a semi-structured interview method as a data collection method. A semi structured interview is a flexible data collection instrument. This type of interview allows any researchers and informants to conduct any dialogues, and the questions which have been compiled previously can be modified according to the informant responses (Smith and Osborn, 2009:105).

Research Results

The informants in this study consist of eight people who are the generation Z adolescent joined in certain peer groups, such as dance group, study group, discussion group, and hobby group.

Based on the research results, it is known that the selective exposure in ad information is conducted by the informant to meet the need of information. The informants will not only look at the consonant information or based on their belief, but also at the dissonant information or contrary to their belief. The dissonant information will still be selected, if such information has its benefits or use. For example, it is useful to give useful argumentation or objection to more convince any decision, opinion or belief. The dissonant information will also be advised if such information is useful to add any knowledge, and further understanding related to a contrary matter. Meanwhile, if consonant information is considered as unqualified one, then

the information will not be selected and avoided, as it will weaken the belief.

In other words, only the useful information will be selected, even the information is the dissonant one, and vice versa. In the case of the Smartphone ads, as far as the information about the Smartphone has any benefits, then the information will be selected. The benefits related to the information can be intended as instructions (how to assess something), confirmation (reconfirmation on an attitude), and performance (how to conduct something). By other words, the selection on Smartphone ad information will be created based on certain purposeful. The more information Smartphone ads can meet the purpose, the more the information will be selected, and vice versa. In this case, the informants are considered to be able to assess the useful information or the useless one for them, and thus, the information selection process will be seen as an attempt with particular purpose related to the usefulness of an information.

The research results also show that the supporting groups effect on the selective exposure process. That is, when members of the group get any support on the selected information from other members, there will be self-assurance that the choices taken are the correct ones. The supporting group will only be meaningful if the social group is the main identity, where the group member attitude and behaviour are the relevant references for individual attitudes and behaviour getting the support.

In the case of the Smartphone ads, the informants having a sense of social identity from a group which is admired and related to oneself, they will select or reject the Smartphone ad information based on the norms of social groups where the informant is the member of the group. The information getting the group support will be the choice, while the information getting less support will be avoided or rejected. This is conducted because the informants are trying to reach the cognition balance and harmony with the social environment, as the social creature embodiment.

Discussion

The research results show that there is a role of support groups related to the information selection or rejection process on Smartphone Ad information. This is based on the thinking of communication theoretician stating that in the information-processing system, individuals are not only affected by self-cognition system but also by outside factors, such as social environment as well as the message characteristics (Littlejohn, 2009:64; McQuail, 1996:33; Griffin, 2006).

One of the communication models related to the information processing is based on a cognitive dissonance theory perspective described by McQuail in his book of *Communication Models for The Study of Mass Communication* (1996). A major feature of communication process from the McQuail consonant and dissonant model theory indicates that the incoming messages will be observed and filtered by the message recipient, by the effects generally to lower

the chance of dissonant, and to maintain the consonant to the environment (A). If there is a new opinion or contrary opinion, so there will be dissonant (B). The dissonance will move the social process (in the form of group norm) and psychological (in the form of *ego-involvement*). In this case, there will be two possibilities, namely (1) to change the perceptions on the information sources (C), and (2) to change an opinion or attitude owned (D). The smaller the difference between messages and opinions or attitudes owned (*small differences*), so the smaller the chance of the change. If the difference is medium, then there will be an adjustment which likely will be followed by opinion or attitude revision owned. However, if the differences are considerable, then it will usually involve a group norm and self-ego (such as commitment, belief, attitudes, opinions and others), which will cause a message or resource rejection and strengthening on the opinion or attitude owned (McQuail and Windahl, 1996:33-35).

Furthermore, the researcher argues that the role of reference group is also caused by the informant environment which the majority is a collective cultural community. In the collective cultural community, selecting and rejecting information is the group responsibility and not an individual matter. The community or group plays an important role in determining which information should and should not be consumed. The collective cultural community always takes decisions by collective bargaining. The adherence to the rules (conformity) is considered as the characteristic of maturity and personal maturity. A community with a collective culture emphasizes

on the group responsibility, not on the individual.

The researcher argues that at this point, the social judgement theory can complete Festinger selective exposure process. The social judgement theory is a theory developed by Muzafer Sherif, et.al., (1965), about how an individual give judgement based on a ego-reference and ego-involvement. The internal reference or reference point always is in the individual and effects on one's way to respond on message or information. Each individual will have references or an standard.

On this study, the informant internal reference is the group norm. In other words, there is a strong ego involvement among the informants with the norm formed in the group, so that the informant behavior always refers to the group norm.

By integrating Festinger selective exposure process with the social judgement theory, the researcher argues that the dynamics and communication process to achieve the cognitive consistency can be further explained well. That is, there will be dissonance while an individual gets cognitive inconsistency. This imbalance situation will motivate individuals to achieve harmony. Referring to the internal reference or standard and paying attention to the ego involvement, so the dissonance can be minimized. The norm will play the role depending on the extent of as a reference by the individual judgement, and how strong the ego involvement is formed on the existing norm.

Table 1. Aspects of Selective Exposure Causes

SELECTIVE EXPOSURE CAUSES	
Psychological	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. <i>Belief</i>: Festinger, 1957; Ehrlich et.al., 1957; Mills et.al., 1959; Adams, 1961; Mills, 1965a; Rosen, 1961; McFarland and Warren, 1992; Chafee et.al., 2001; Redlawsk 2002; Taber and Lodge, 2006, Bobkowski, 2007. 2. <i>Commitment</i>: Brehm and Cohen, 1962; Mills and Ross, 1964; Mills, 1965; Behling, 1971; Lawson, 1969. 3. <i>Self-confidence</i>: Festinger, 1964; Freedman, 1965; Lowin, 1969; Thayer, 1969; Schultz, 1974. 4. <i>Mood</i>: Zillman, 1985; Anderson et.al., 1996, Hawkin et.al., 2001, Davies, 2004. 5. <i>Motivation</i>: Chaiken et.al., 1996; Chen et.al., 1999.
Message	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. The concept of information assurance: Mills and Ross, 1964. 2. The concept of information relevance: Mills and Jellison, 1968. 3. Utility of Information: Festinger, 1964; Cannon, 1964; Freedman and Sears, 1965; Freedman, 1965a, Charles Atkin, 1973; Katz, 1968; Cotton, 1985; Frey, 1986; Knobloch et.al., 2003, 2005. 4. Utility of Social: Chaffee and McLeod, 1968. 5. <i>Refutability</i>: Lowin, 1967; Brock and Balloun, 1967.
Social	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Social Norms: Sears, 1965; Klapper, 1960; David, 2005. 2. Group Support: Schulman, 1971; Dohyun, 2010.

The research results also show the role of utility of information. The researcher assumes that the role of utility of information on the selective exposure process is the effect of today human life in an era of abundance of information, as a result of technology and informatics progress and sophistication.

The technology and informatics development results in an explosion of information which constantly flows into private life. Anticipating this abundance of information, the individual will select the information considered to have benefits based on the interests and needs. The selection information based on interests and needs also prove that the individual is an active creature in the information processing process.

These findings also reinforce the Atkin idea (1973) which was presented in the utility of information theory. That, one's motivation in selecting and avoiding information is not caused by whether the information creates consonance or dissonance, but rather by the utility of information for an individual. The utility of information can only be felt when someone has an orientation purpose and self-adaptability purpose to be achieved by the information acquisition, both negative and positive information (threat or opportunity), because each of the information is believed to have benefits.

Conclusion

Based on the research results, it is known that there is a selective process

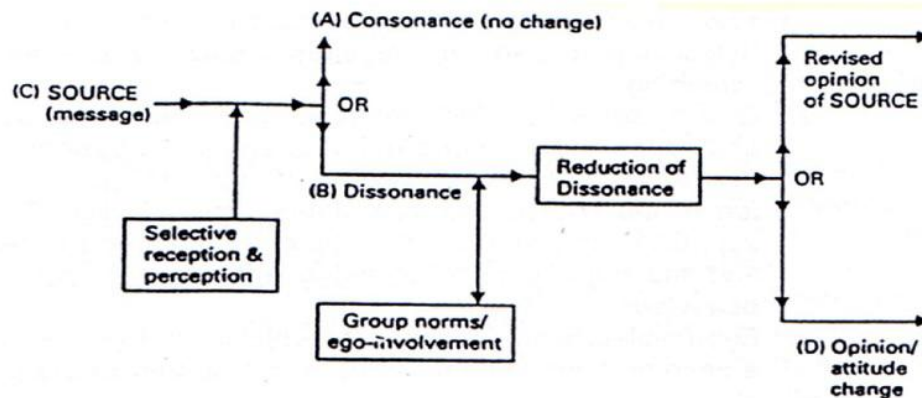


Figure 1. Model Theory Of Consonant And Dissonant

in the ad information (selective exposure) conducted by an individual. On the other hand, the supporting group also plays a role in determining a selection on an information, as far as the group is the group of reference. In the end, although this research is not intended to examine the media effects, but the study results show that humans are not passive in the information processing related to the

mass communication effects. The development in the informatics and communication technology world has made the audiences plenty of options on the information or news, and conduct a selection based on the interests and needs. The communicative abundance or cornucopias of communication creates the audience as active creatures in selecting and rejecting information based on self-cognitive processing.

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