

MIRANDA R. GOODE, DARREN W. DAHL, and C. PAGE MOREAU\*

Consumers desire products that provide meaningful experiences. Therefore, a marketer's success often depends on familiarizing consumers with the unique experience a product offers. Marketers recognize the value in communicating about a product experience through analogy, but little research has investigated if and why these analogies are persuasive. By comparing a product to a familiar but disparate experience, an analogy has the power to focus consumers on the evaluative, emotional, and multisensory information associated with the product experience. This focus on subjective product experience enables the identification of base preference (i.e., a consumer's liking for the comparison experience) as an important moderator of analogical persuasiveness. In addition, the emotional knowledge transfer perspective applied in this research contributes to a better understanding of the role of emotional knowledge and experienced emotion in analogical thinking.

*Keywords:* analogy, emotion, experiential, experience, hedonic

## The Effect of Experiential Analogies on Consumer Perceptions and Attitudes

The recent transition from a service economy to an "experience economy" (Pine and Gilmore 1998) has been driven largely by the convergence of consumers' increasing desire for products that provide meaningful experiences (Keinan and Kivetz 2008) and companies' desire for novel differentiation strategies. Marketers at the forefront of this change have determined that success depends on familiarizing consumers with the unique experience a product offers rather than focusing on the product's functional benefits. Although the power of analogical thinking to communicate functional knowledge has been well established in prior literature (e.g., Gregan-Paxton and Moreau 2003; Roehm and Sternthal 2001), we propose that analogy also is a powerful tool for conveying information and influencing attitudes about a product experience.

Marketers recognize the value in communicating a product experience through analogy, as evinced by the many advertisements that use these more experience-oriented comparisons rather than conventional simile and metaphor

appeals (see Table 1). For example, State Farm Insurance compares competitors' services to the experience of sitting between two "fat guys" on an economy class flight, Microsoft compares playing the Xbox 360 to participating in a citywide water balloon fight, Ford compares driving the Fusion to listening to an iPod and dancing at a club, and Alfa Romeo compares driving its Spider to a first kiss. Surprisingly, few of the analogies studied in marketing or psychology have involved emotional experiences.<sup>1</sup> Rather, the analogies examined have been primarily designed to highlight unemotional similarities. For example, research on new product learning has used analogies that focus exclusively on the transfer of functional knowledge in the context of technology products. Digital cameras have been compared to computer scanners, personal digital assistants to secretaries, and offline Web readers to VCRs.

By comparing a product to a familiar but disparate experience, an analogy has the power to focus consumers on the evaluative, emotional, and multisensory information associated with a product experience. This focus enables the identification of base preference (i.e., a consumer's liking for the comparison experience) as an important influence on analogical persuasiveness. Surprisingly, the power of an analogy to tap into the emotional knowledge that people have gained from their own prior experiences has received

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\*Miranda R. Goode is Assistant Professor of Marketing, Richard Ivey School of Business, University of Western Ontario (e-mail: mgoode@ivey.ca). Darren W. Dahl is Fred H. Siller Professor in Applied Marketing Research, Sauder School of Business, University of British Columbia (e-mail: darren.dahl@sauder.ubc.ca). C. Page Moreau is Associate Professor of Marketing, Leeds School of Business, University of Colorado (e-mail: page.moreau@colorado.edu). Dilip Soman served as associate editor for this article.

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<sup>1</sup>For ease of explication, we call a comparison between a target product and an experience an "experiential analogy."

Table 1  
OVERVIEW OF CHARACTERISTICS THAT DIFFERENTIATE NOVEL VERSUS CONVENTIONAL COMPARISONS IN ADVERTISEMENT APPEALS

	<i>Novel Experiential Analogy (e.g., like a first kiss ... the Bugatti sports car)</i>	<i>Novel Functional Analogy (e.g., not since the human body has anything worked like the Bugatti sports car)</i>	<i>Conventional Simile or Metaphor (e.g., fast as a speeding bullet ... the Bugatti sports car)</i>
Primary purpose	Persuade; provide unique perspective of target experience using the consumers' own experiential knowledge	Explain; enhance understanding of how a target product works	Persuade or inform with minimal elaboration
Base domain of knowledge	Personally relevant; acquired from direct or indirect experience with the base	More functional in nature; may be acquired from direct or indirect experience with the base	Generic; acquired as a learned convention
Preference for the base domain	A central influence on the transfer of knowledge from base to target	Generally not salient or of little relevance to the knowledge transfer process	Generally not salient
Emotionality of the base domain	Moderate to high (for an outline of the role of emotional knowledge and actual base-related emotions, see Figure 2)	Minimal to moderate	Minimal to moderate
Alignment between base and target during processing of the comparison	Requires identification of similarities between the base and target (mapping)	Requires identification of similarities between the base and target (mapping)	Involves relatively effortless access to abstract metaphoric category (Bowdle and Gentner 2005; Gentner et al. 2001)
Cognitive resources required to process comparison	Moderate to high	Moderate to high	Low to moderate
Type of knowledge transferred from base to target	Deeper relational information	Deeper relational information	Superficial, surface-level attribute information
Perspective of target after processing the comparison	Novel, enhanced understanding of the emotionality associated with the target product experience	Novel, enhanced understanding of the target product's attributes and functions	Cliché, information about the target is acquired

little research attention.<sup>2</sup> However, anecdotal evidence supporting the persuasiveness of this type of emotional transfer is compelling, given the prevalence of recent ad campaigns using experiential analogies. The knowledge transfer perspective that we employ in this research builds on previous speculation about the role of emotions in analogical thinking (Thagard and Shelley 2001) by defining and isolating the effects of base preference, emotional knowledge, and experienced emotion on consumer attitudes.

The contribution of this research is threefold. First, analogy researchers have highlighted the need to move beyond the identification of factors that affect analogy comprehension to those that affect an analogy's persuasiveness (Perrott, Gentner, and Bodenhausen 2005). To address this demand, we establish base preference as an important influence on an analogy's persuasiveness.<sup>3</sup> This research is the first to examine how preference for a disparate base is integrated into a target product evaluation. Second, we demonstrate that product attitudes can be influenced significantly by directing people to consider their own subjective experience as a basis for understanding the emotions they might experience when using a new product. We find evidence that this involves the cognitive consideration of emotions, which

we label emotional knowledge transfer. This perhaps surprising finding should be of central interest to marketers because we show that the persuasiveness of an experiential analogy is not limited to emotional reactions. Third, on a broader level, this research provides the first known empirical investigation of analogies that involve experiential comparisons, thus establishing their value for persuasion.

#### CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

Analogical processing is based on the idea that new information or a novel perspective can be acquired by comparing a target (e.g., product) to a disparate domain of knowledge (base) (Gentner 1989). Substantial support indicates that analogy-based knowledge transfer consists of three stages: access, mapping, and transfer (Gentner and Markman 1997; Gregan-Paxton and John 1997). Research has also shown that these stages are governed by structural constraints, including preference for structural consistency and systematicity. With an experiential analogy, the knowledge base used for a comparison to the target centers in an experience, for example, comparing the experience of driving a sports car to a first kiss or a weekend in Venice or the experience of an airline flight to an evening of watching television and drinking wine, as featured in recent advertisements. We build on the fundamentals of previous analogy research by making specific predictions about the moderating effect of base preference on the persuasiveness of this type of analogy. To do this, the role of emotional knowledge transfer in

<sup>2</sup>Emotional knowledge refers to information acquired and stored in memory as a result of reflecting on the correlates and causes of emotional experiences (Salovey et al. 2000; Shaver et al. 1987).

<sup>3</sup>Although functional analogies could involve preferences and emotions associated with a product experience, they are often designed to communicate how a product works; we focus specifically on experiential analogies.

the processing and persuasiveness of an experiential analogy is established.

When processing an experiential analogy, it is anticipated that consumers will access their knowledge of the base experience and any knowledge they might have of the target product experience. With the Alfa Romeo Spider comparison, consumers are prompted to think about their first kiss (base) and the experience of driving a sports car (target). When knowledge of the base and target has been accessed from memory, potential similarities between the two experiences are identified. This mapping process signals that the base and target may share other similarities that are not immediately apparent, thus enabling the generation of target product inferences. By encouraging consumers to access knowledge of a familiar experience, an experiential analogy invites consumers to view the target product in terms of the experience it offers, not just as a bundle of functional attributes and benefits.

#### *Experience and Emotional Knowledge*

An experience can be characterized as all the thoughts, emotions, activities, and appraisals that occur during or as a result of an event. Indeed, these elements are central to the TEAV model of consumption experience (Hirschman and Holbrook 1985). The TEAV model proposes that the thoughts, emotions, activities, and evaluations that occur during an experience are deeply interconnected and feed into one another as the experience unfolds. Afterward, what occurred during the experience may be stored as knowledge or information that may be accessed from memory at a later time (Comblain, D'Argembeau, and Van der Linden 2005). For example, consider the following scenario: Recall the last time you flew with a particular airline. The experience of an overbooked flight might have put you on edge, especially if the airline suggested that your seat was not guaranteed. The events that transpired during the unpleasant experience, the thoughts you had about the airline's reliability, and the negative emotions you felt may have been stored in memory, proving to be useful information when booking a future flight. For example, when choosing a prospective airline, you might remember how frustrated and angry you were about the overbooked flight. Consistent with this, the current research adopts the position that emotions gleaned from an experience may be stored as knowledge useful for evaluating products and prospective consumption experiences. Although consumer behavior research has tended to conceptualize knowledge as information pertaining to a product's benefits, attributes, and functionality, other types of nonmarket information, such as knowledge of emotions, have been shown to play a role in persuasion (Ruth 2001). The idea that previously experienced emotions can be stored as knowledge is also consistent with findings that show that emotions are represented in memory as a type of categorical knowledge (Salovey et al. 2000; Shaver et al. 1987).

The preceding discussion is important because it emphasizes that consumers think about emotions and may use this as information when considering a product. This is distinct from more traditional accounts of affect and feelings in persuasion (Gorn, Goldberg, and Basu 1993; Pham 1998). For example, the "feelings-as-information" perspective examines how momentarily experienced affect is interpreted as evidence of liking, satisfaction, or attitude toward a target

stimulus. How emotional knowledge acquired from a prior experience can be harnessed and used to better understand a product experience has not been explored. Given that experiential analogies involve a base experience that is potentially emotional and that resolving an analogy generates positive feelings (Gregan-Paxton et al. 2002), feelings and emotions may be elicited during the processing of an experiential analogy. However, we also perceive an important role for the transfer of emotional knowledge, a more cognitive process that is characteristic of analogical thinking.

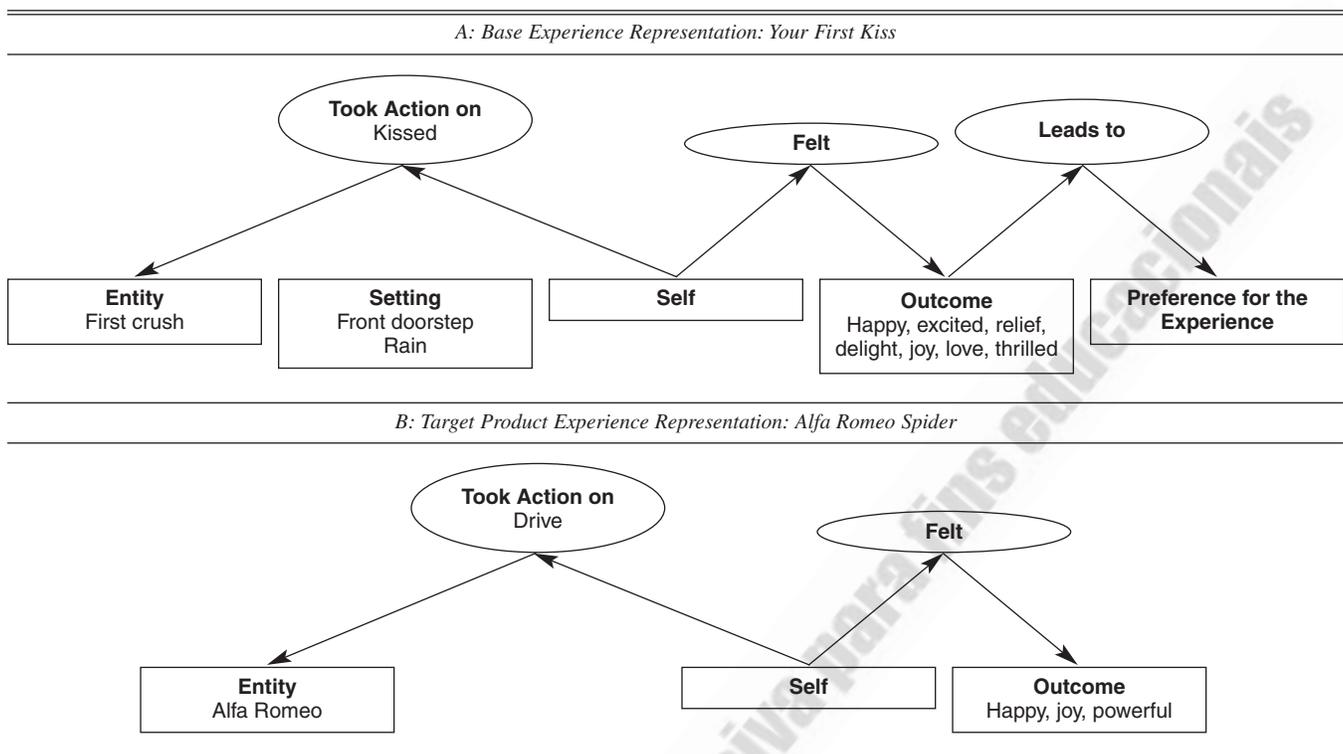
#### *Emotional Inferences and Emotional Knowledge Transfer*

Both intuition and previous research suggest that an experiential analogy will prompt consumers to identify underlying structural similarities between a base experience and a target product, such that emotions cognitively associated with the base are then transferred, creating expectations that they will also be experienced with the target. We make this claim for several reasons. First, the base experience that marketers often select in analogy advertisements tend to be those that are emotionally charged. Second, empirical investigations of the TEAV model show that when consumers are prompted to think about previous product experiences, they recall information related to emotions, events, preferences, and product attributes (Lofman 1991). Consistent with this, when a person's memory of a specific experience is cued, details such as the events, feelings, location, and people present become salient (Anderson and Conway 1993; Comblain, D'Argembeau, and Van der Linden 2005). Finally, when asked to consider a previous product experience, it is agreed that consumers devote significant attention to the emotional aspects of the experience (Havlena and Holbrook 1986; Holbrook and Hirschman 1982). Taken together, this evidence suggests that the processing of an experiential analogy will involve mapping the structural similarities between the base and the target experiences, enabling the transfer of emotional knowledge. Recall the Alfa Romeo Spider advertisement: Consumers might think about what happened and the emotions they experienced during their first kiss (see Figure 1, Panel A). Any structural similarities between what takes place during a first kiss and what they think the Alfa Romeo driving experience might entail would be cognitively identified (see Figure 1, Panel B). On the basis of these identified similarities, they would generate emotional inferences. Emotional inferences are predictions about the emotions that would be experienced during target product use. As analogy research supports, inferences signal the transfer of knowledge from the base to the target (Gentner and Markman 1997). With an experiential analogy, we anticipate that people will infer that the emotions associated with the base experience are likely to occur during the target product experience.

#### *The Moderating Role of Base Preference*

Previous accounts speculating about the role of prior preferences in analogical thinking have been relatively vague, and little empirical work has centered on this area (Perrott, Gentner, and Bodenhausen 2005; Thagard and Shelley 2001). This is not surprising because prior research has focused on analogies that by their very nature induce a less evaluative reaction (Gregan-Paxton and Moreau 2003; Hoefler 2003; Moreau, Markman, and Lehmann 2001).

Figure 1  
BASE AND TARGET KNOWLEDGE STRUCTURE REPRESENTATIONS FOR AN EXPERIENTIAL ANALOGY



The analogies previously examined have spotlighted function and performance, which enable the mapping and transfer of more objective, functional knowledge rather than evaluative reactions that are a large part of a consumer's subjective experience. Given that evaluations are likely to come to mind when a consumer reflects on an experience, we propose that consumer preferences play a critical role in defining the effectiveness of an experiential analogy.<sup>4</sup>

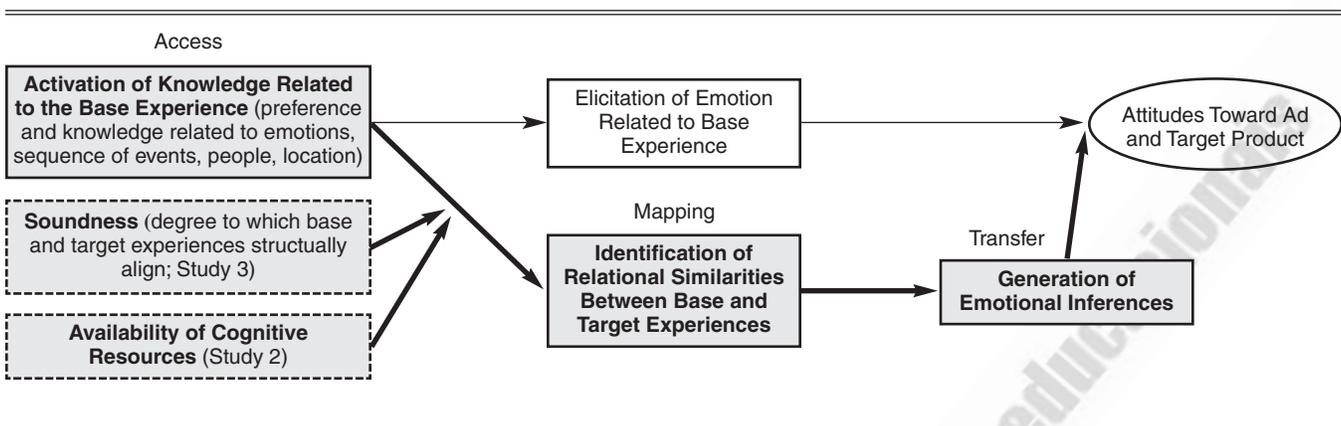
Base preferences are likely to vary from consumer to consumer, and this may be reflected in the effect of emotional inferences on the persuasiveness of an analogy. For an experiential analogy to have an effect on target attitudes, it is proposed that a high number of emotional inferences must be generated. This signals that the mapping stage of analogical processing was successful. Generating fewer emotional inferences about the target product may reflect a breakdown in the mapping stage of analogical processing (Gentner and Markman 1997; Markman and Gentner 1993). When a link (i.e., relational mapping) cannot be made between a base and a target experience, the generation of emotional inferences is unlikely to occur. We predict that whether the generation of emotional inferences has a positive or negative effect on target attitudes depends on the favorability of the base preference (i.e., how much the base experience is liked). This moderating hypothesis implies that target attitudes will be more positive when preference for the base experience is favorable and a high number of emotional

inferences are generated. When preference for the base experience is less favorable and a high number of emotional inferences are generated, we expect that target attitudes will be more negative. The current investigation, however, focuses on the more common use of experiential analogies to positively influence consumer attitudes.

Three studies were designed to test our theorizing (see Figure 2). This was done using three different analogies across several base and target categories, thus contributing to the generalizability of our effects. Study 1 involves direct measures of base preferences and emotional inferences to test the main moderating prediction. By directly manipulating participants' ability to generate emotional inferences in Study 2, we provide additional evidence to support our prediction and the cognitive nature of the emotional knowledge transfer process. We also include measures of experienced emotion in Studies 2 and 3 to demonstrate that emotional knowledge transfer is cognitive and influences target attitudes independent of experienced emotion. Finally, the soundness construct (which captures the extent to which the base and target share deeper underlying similarities) was introduced in Study 3 to further demonstrate that base preference moderates the effect of emotional knowledge transfer on target attitudes. In all three studies, we compare the persuasiveness of an experiential analogy with more general, emotion-oriented appeals, which provides additional insights into the contributors to analogical persuasiveness and enables us to make substantive recommendations about the consumers for whom experiential analogies may be more persuasive.

<sup>4</sup>When an experiential analogy is used to positively influence attitudes, the target product should be compared to a base experience that consumers already perceive favorably. Alternatively, if the goal is to negatively influence target attitudes, as is often the case in political advertising, the base should be viewed negatively by the majority of the target audience.

Figure 2  
PROCESS BY WHICH EXPERIENTIAL ANALOGY INFLUENCES ATTITUDES TOWARD AD AND TARGET PRODUCT



### STUDY 1

In addition to testing the key moderating prediction, we use Study 1 to compare the persuasiveness of an experiential analogy with other emotion-oriented appeals. Therefore, an emotional appeal advertisement and a more neutral advertisement served as the control conditions. Although an experiential analogy may not always confer a persuasive advantage over other types of emotional appeals, when consumers generate many emotional inferences and express a favorable preference for the base experience, an experiential analogy may be superior because the comparison (1) increases knowledge of the emotions associated with a new or unfamiliar target product, (2) fosters a novel or unique perspective of a target product, and (3) promotes a deeper consideration of the emotions associated with a familiar target product.

#### Method

**Design and procedure.** The study used a two-way, between-subjects design with two measured factors, base preference and emotional inferences. This design was conducted using an experiential analogy advertisement. The control conditions consisted of emotional appeal and neutral advertisements. Participants ( $n = 126$ ) were recruited for pay (\$10) from a large West Coast university and were randomly assigned to the analogy or control conditions. Participants were told that they were completing a study for a company interested in feedback on an ad concept. After the participants viewed a print advertisement for 10 seconds, the advertisement was removed, and participants had 30 seconds to consider it before responding to the survey. The survey measured ad attitudes (key dependent variable), base preference, and emotional inferences.

**Ad stimuli and measured factors.** "Brand X Massage Chair" was the advertised target product in the analogy and control advertisements. Only the analogy advertisement contained copy referring to the base experience, being in a hot tub after skiing, and none of the advertisements mentioned emotions. The copy stated, "Like hot tubbing after an intense day on the ski slopes. Now experience this any time of day. Brand X Massage Chair." We selected the base and target because these experiences have relational structures that align well. A day of skiing is physically and mentally demanding, and soaking in a hot tub after skiing may enable a person to relax. Similarly, consumers should be able to

imagine doing something demanding that would require the relaxation from a massage chair.

A pretest identified relaxation as the emotion most closely associated with the base experience, according to 64% of respondents ( $n = 17$ ). Therefore, the copy in the emotional appeal advertisement stated, "Relaxation... Now experience this any time of day. Brand X Massage Chair." The emotional reference provided participants with a key emotional inference that we would expect them to generate in response to the analogy. The neutral advertisement contained the following ad copy: "Now experience this any time of day. Brand X Massage Chair." This advertisement provided a broad cue for participants to think about the massage chair experience without offering any specific emotional anchor. A picture of the target product was included in all three advertisements.

Base preference and emotional inferences were the key measured factors used to test our moderating hypothesis in the analogy condition. To measure participants' preference for going to a hot tub after a day of skiing (base), we used three seven-point Likert scale items ("not appealing/very appealing," "do not like/like very much," and "do not enjoy/enjoy very much";  $\alpha = .94$ ). We used an open-ended question to measure emotional inferences, adapted from Gregan-Paxton and Moreau (2003). Participants were asked, "What does the advertisement convey to you about the Massage Chair? Please write down ALL of your thoughts no matter how simple, complex, relevant or irrelevant they may seem." Two coders, blind to the ad condition, coded these responses for their emotional inferences (i.e., emotions associated with the target product experience;  $r = .90$ ). Disagreements were resolved through discussion. For example, one participant responded, "The fantastic feeling you get from the hot tub after a day of skiing can now be experienced at the comfort of your home; relaxation and relief." This response indicates two emotional inferences: relaxation and relief. Only emotional references that adhered to the emotion sets defined by Richins (1997) and Shaver and colleagues (1987) were coded as emotional inferences. In the control conditions, emotional inferences would be a result of consumers accessing their prior knowledge about massage chairs or making a prediction about the target experience because these advertisements contained no base experience from which to transfer emotional knowledge.

*Dependent variable.* The measure of ad attitude, our key dependent variable, comprised four seven-point Likert scale items, anchored by “not at all” (1) and “very much” (7) (ad like, ad good, ad effective, ad convincing;  $\alpha = .89$ ). We counterbalanced the open-ended question, the base preference, and ad attitude measures to control for order effects. We used similar counterbalancing in Studies 2 and 3 and found no order effects. Participants responded to a suspicion probe and general demographic questions about their age, gender, years of education, and major. None of the demographic measures had a significant effect on the key dependent variables, nor were participants aware of the hypotheses in this or the subsequent studies.

### Results

To test our key prediction that preference for the base experience moderates the effect of emotional inferences on target attitudes for those who process an experiential analogy, we performed a regression analysis in the analogy condition ( $n = 51$ ) (see the Web Appendix at <http://www.marketingpower.com/jmrapril10>). A comparison of the experiential analogy advertisement with the control advertisements follows.

*Experiential analogy condition.* We centered the base preference and emotional inference measures and entered them as independent variables into a regression. To test our moderating prediction, we also multiplied the centered measures and entered them into the regression model as an interaction term. We find a significant interaction between emotional inferences and base preference for ad attitude ( $\beta = .18$ ,  $t = 2.03$ ,  $p < .05$ ). No other effects are significant.

We conducted simple slope tests to interpret the interaction in the analogy condition (Cohen et al. 2003; Preacher, Curran, and Bauer 2006; West, Aiken, and Krull 1996). Specifically, we examined the effect of emotional inferences on ad attitude for those with a more favorable base preference (one standard deviation above the mean of base preference) and those with a less favorable base preference (one standard deviation below the mean). As Figure 3

shows, the positive effect of emotional inferences on ad attitude is significant when base preference is favorable ( $\beta = .39$ ,  $t = 2.65$ ,  $p < .05$ ). However, when base preference is less favorable, the effect of emotional inferences on ad attitude is not significant ( $\beta = -.13$ ,  $t = -.64$ ,  $p > .20$ ). The more emotional inferences generated and the more favorable the preference for using a hot tub after skiing, the more positive is ad attitude. The effect of emotional inferences on ad attitude declines when base preference is less favorable.

*Experiential analogy versus control advertisements.* We computed the median splits for base preference and emotional inferences in the analogy condition to facilitate comparisons among the ad conditions. Respondents who generated more emotional inferences and had a favorable base preference liked the analogy advertisement ( $M = 5.13$ ,  $SD = 1.27$ ,  $n = 14$ ) significantly more than the emotional appeal ( $M = 3.90$ ,  $SD = 1.40$ ,  $n = 33$ ;  $t(111) = 2.90$ ,  $p < .01$ ) or neutral advertisements ( $M = 3.54$ ,  $SD = 1.37$ ,  $n = 33$ ;  $t(111) = 3.76$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Ad attitude does not significantly differ among the control advertisements ( $t(111) = 1.11$ ,  $p > .20$ ).<sup>5</sup>

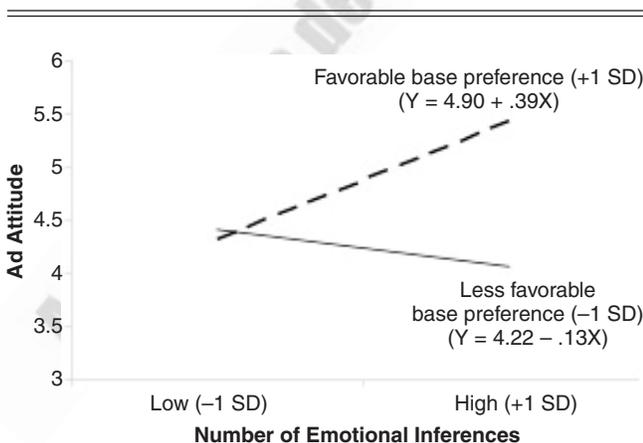
### Discussion

The findings are consistent with our theorizing: Preference for using a hot tub moderates the effect of emotional knowledge transfer on ad attitude. This suggests that base preference and emotional knowledge are made salient when prompted by an experiential analogy. In the analogy condition, ad attitude is more positive among those who transfer more emotions and express more favorable preferences for using hot tubs. Simply having a favorable preference for the base experience (a main effect) or generating more emotional inferences (another main effect) is not sufficient to enhance ad attitudes. Furthermore, the number of emotional inferences is not a function of base preference, which implies that the persuasiveness of the analogy cannot be discounted as personal relevance, such that the more a person likes the base, the more emotional inferences he or she generates. The results suggest that even people with a less favorable base preference may generate many emotional inferences. However, the positive effect of the analogy on ad attitude emerges only when the base preference is positive and emotional inferences are high.

The experiential analogy advertisement is significantly more persuasive than the emotional appeal advertisement, in line with the significantly more emotional inferences generated in response to the analogy advertisement ( $M = 2.06$ ) than the emotional appeal advertisement ( $M = 1.42$ ;  $t(114) = 2.19$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Our key analysis in the analogy condition implies that this effect may be due to the interaction of emotional inferences and base preferences. People with a favorable base preference and who generate more emotional inferences in the analogy condition report more positive ad

Figure 3

EFFECT OF EMOTIONAL INFERENCE AND BASE PREFERENCES ON AD ATTITUDES IN RESPONSE TO ANALOGY ADVERTISEMENT (STUDY 1)



Notes: The slope coefficient for the favorable base preference is significant at  $p < .05$ ; for the less favorable base preference, the slope coefficient is not significant.

<sup>5</sup>Overall, participants liked the analogy advertisement ( $M = 4.60$ ,  $SD = 1.24$ ,  $n = 51$ ) significantly more than the emotional appeal advertisement ( $t(114) = 2.36$ ,  $p < .05$ ). When we performed median splits on the base preference and emotional inference measures in the emotional appeal condition, we also find that the respondents with a favorable base preference who generate many emotional inferences in the analogy condition still like the advertisement ( $M = 5.13$ ,  $SD = 1.27$ ,  $n = 14$ ) significantly more than those with a favorable base preference who generate many emotional inferences in the emotional appeal condition ( $M = 3.50$ ,  $SD = 1.28$ ,  $n = 13$ ;  $t(105) = 17.00$ ,  $p < .001$ ). We find no significant interaction between base preference and emotional inferences in the emotional appeal condition.

attitudes than those who saw the emotional appeal advertisement. These results imply that the persuasive superiority of the analogy advertisement may have been a result of the comparison afforded by the analogy and the number of emotional inferences generated. Moreover, the emotional appeal advertisement explicitly mentions relaxation in the copy, and we suspect that this explicit mention narrows the respondents' attention to the specific emotion, at the expense of other emotions. The analogy advertisement instead encourages elaboration and the transfer of more emotional information from the base to the target, and the neutral advertisement provides participants with a general cue for considering the product experience. However, in comparison with the analogy advertisement, this potentially less restrictive cue does not prompt emotional inferences equivalent to the level in the analogy condition.

Although the findings are consistent with our theorizing, we acknowledge the limitations of this study. First, given that the advertisements may be viewed as differing in information length and/or vividness, there may be a concern that level of ad processing may underlie the reported difference in ad attitude among the conditions. Importantly, analysis of total thoughts as a measure of ad processing revealed no significant differences among the ad conditions. To further alleviate this concern, the ad copy for the analogy and emotional appeal advertisements was equated for information length and vividness in Study 2. A second limitation is with respect to our ability to account for the influence of momentarily experienced emotions on target attitudes. There are at least three reasons to expect that actual emotions may be evoked during the processing of an experiential analogy. First, an experiential analogy involves a comparison to an emotional base experience. Second, the results from Study 1 show that consumers cognitively identify and transfer emotional knowledge. Thinking about emotions may elicit actual emotion. Finally, resolving an analogy has been shown to generate positive feelings. With this in mind, we designed Study 2 to examine both emotional knowledge transfer and the effect of experienced emotion on target attitudes.

### STUDY 2

We designed Study 2 to provide further support for the moderating effect of base preferences on emotional knowledge transfer and target attitudes. We also wanted to provide additional evidence regarding the cognitive nature of the emotional knowledge transferred during processing of an experiential analogy. To do this, we used cognitive load to manipulate participants' ability to generate emotional inferences, consistent with previous characterizations of analogical processing as effortful and purposeful (Kubose, Holyoak, and Hummel 2002; Roehm and Sternthal 2001). The manipulation of the availability of cognitive resources through low and high levels of cognitive load should affect the mapping of the base and target experiences as well as the generation of emotional inferences. Participants under high load should be able to generate and transfer significantly fewer emotional inferences for the target product than those under low load. Study 2 also enabled us to examine the effect of momentarily experienced emotions on an experiential analogy's persuasiveness. While experienced emotion may also predict target attitudes, its effect is believed to occur with little conscious control. As such, it

should be unaffected by the cognitive load manipulation, and the influence of experienced emotion on attitudes should be independent of that from the analogical transfer of emotional knowledge. Similar to Study 1, we included emotional appeal conditions for comparison to the analogy condition.

### Method

*Design and procedure.* We used a two-way, between-subjects experimental design with one manipulated factor, cognitive load (low/high), and one measured factor, base preference. This design was conducted using an experiential analogy advertisement. The two control conditions consisted of an emotional appeal ad condition with low and high cognitive load levels. Participants ( $n = 118$ ) from a large West Coast university participated for course credit. Participants were told that they were completing the study for a company interested in examining the effect of media multitasking on consumer memory, and therefore they would complete several tasks simultaneously throughout the study. First, participants were introduced to the cognitive load manipulation, which required them to memorize either a 2-digit or a 13-digit number during the 25-second memory task (Shiv and Fedorikhin 2002). Therefore, with respect to the knowledge transfer process, this seems suitable for manipulating emotional inferences. Second, after the load manipulation, the procedure followed Study 1, with one exception. While viewing the advertisement, participants were reminded to also keep their focus on the number. Before completing the base preference measure and key dependent variables, participants were asked to recall the memorized number and were told that they no longer needed to focus on the number.

*Ad stimuli and independent variables.* In the experiential analogy and emotional appeal advertisements, the target product was "ActionZone Eco-Tours," an adventure tour package offered at a local mountain. Finishing a video game was the base experience in the analogy advertisement. The analogy ad copy stated, "For hours you gripped the video game controller, as you escaped fiery peril and solved the unsolvable. Finally, you raised the last flag high on its post. Now take this experience outside with ActionZone Eco-Tours." Similar to Study 1, the base experience and target product were selected because they possess relational structures that seem reasonably well aligned. Both experiences may involve physical and mental challenges that must be overcome and, in doing so, may evoke similar emotions. As in Study 1, we conducted a pretest ( $n = 19$ ) to determine the emotion to include in the ad copy of the emotional appeal advertisement. The results show that excitement was the emotion most likely to be generated by the base experience, and therefore we included it in the ad copy. The emotional appeal advertisement described the target product experience and stated, "Higher and higher ... step by step ... sweat drop by sweat drop.... You finally climbed Mount Baker in Washington State Park. Now experience excitement and victory outside with ActionZone Eco-Tours." Participants were randomly assigned to receive low or high cognitive load. We measured preference for the base experience, playing video games, the same as in Study 1 ( $\alpha = .96$ ).

*Dependent variables.* The ad attitude measure was the same as that from Study 1 ( $\alpha = .89$ ). To measure target prod-

uct attitudes, participants were asked, “Based on the ad you saw, what is your impression of ActionZone Eco-Tours?” Participants rated three items, ranging from  $-4$  to  $4$  and anchored by “dislike very much/like very much,” “very negative/very positive,” and “very unfavorable/very favorable” ( $\alpha = .93$ ). The experienced emotion measure used a five-item index that consisted of emotional descriptors associated with the base experience, which we identified in a pretest (excited, energetic, aroused, positive, and satisfied;  $\alpha = .79$ ), and followed the instructions and format from the positive and negative affect scale (PANAS; Watson, Clark, and Tellegen 1988).

**Manipulation check.** The cognitive load manipulation was assessed through an open-ended question and a single-item index that asked participants how much attention they paid to the advertisement, where  $1$  represented “very little” and  $7$  represented “very much.” The open-ended question in Study 1 served to measure emotional inferences and assess how much participants focused on the memory task (Shiv and Fedorikhin 2002). Two coders coded the open-ended question for the mention of emotions associated with the target product ( $r = .92$ ).

### Results

**Manipulation check.** The results were consistent with a successful cognitive load manipulation. Participants pay significantly more attention to the advertisement when they are under low load ( $M = 4.35$ ) than when they are under high load ( $M = 3.13$ ;  $\beta = -1.24$ ,  $t = -4.23$ ,  $p < .01$ ). They also generate significantly more emotional inferences in the low load ( $M = .30$ ) than high load ( $M = .06$ ) condition ( $\beta = .25$ ,  $t = 2.04$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Finally, participants mentioned that they focused more on the number in the high load condition ( $M = .15$ ) than in the low load condition ( $M = 0$ ;  $\beta = .15$ ,  $t = 2.64$ ,  $p < .01$ ).

**Experiential analogy condition.** We used regression to test for the predicted interaction between base preference and cognitive load in the analogy condition ( $n = 76$ ). We multiplied the base preference measure (centered) by the cognitive load measure (dummy coded) to create an interaction term, which we then entered, along with the cognitive load and base preference measures, into the regression to predict ad and target product attitudes. The interaction between base preference and cognitive load significantly predicts ad ( $\beta = -.42$ ,  $t = -2.70$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and target product ( $\beta = -.33$ ,  $t = -2.09$ ,  $p < .05$ ) attitudes in the analogy condition. Base preference also significantly predicts ad ( $\beta = .35$ ,  $t = 3.18$ ,  $p < .01$ ) and target product ( $\beta = .38$ ,  $t = 3.30$ ,  $p < .01$ ) attitudes. Simple slope tests, as in Study 1, show that when participants indicate a greater preference for playing video games, their ad and target product attitudes are more positive when they also experience a low load ( $\beta = .41$ ,  $t = -2.81$ ,  $p < .01$ ) rather than a high load ( $\beta = .41$ ,  $t = -2.81$ ,  $p < .01$ ) (see Figure 4). However, when base preference is less favorable, ad ( $\beta = .39$ ,  $t = .98$ ,  $p > .20$ ) and target product ( $\beta = .40$ ,  $t = .12$ ,  $p > .20$ ) attitudes do not differ, regardless of the load.

When included in the regression, experienced emotion significantly predicts ad and target product attitudes ( $\beta = .36$ ,  $t = 2.96$ ,  $p < .01$ ;  $\beta = .29$ ,  $t = 2.27$ ,  $p < .05$ , respectively). However, the interaction between cognitive load and base preference remains significant (ad attitude:  $\beta = .36$ ,  $t = 2.96$ ,

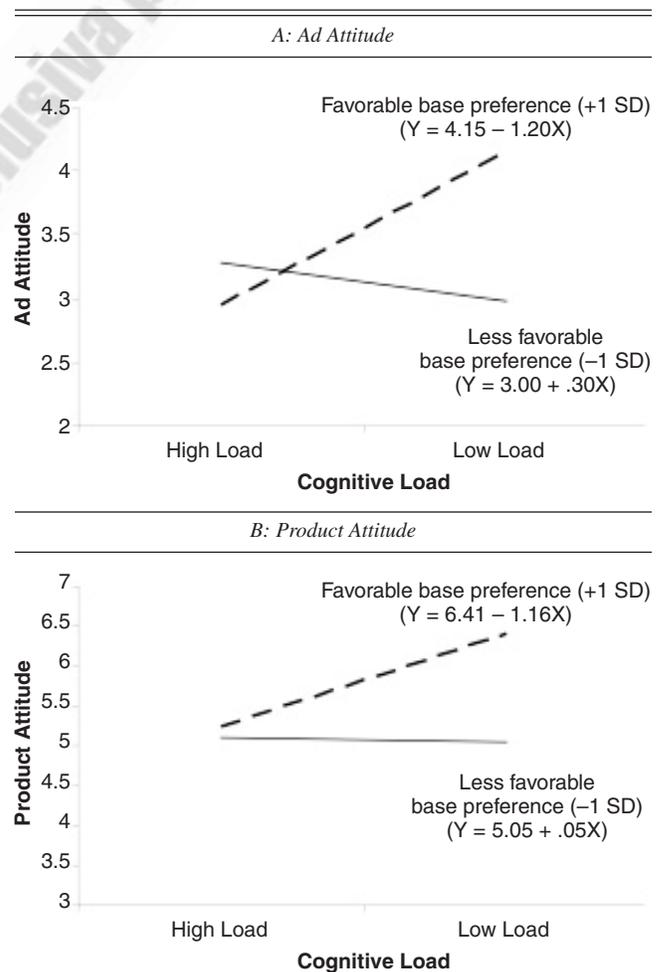
$p < .05$ ; product attitude:  $\beta = -.28$ ,  $t = -1.76$ ,  $p = .08$ ), as does the main effect of base preference on ad and target product attitudes (ad attitude:  $\beta = .28$ ,  $t = 2.60$ ,  $p < .05$ ; product attitude:  $\beta = .32$ ,  $t = 2.27$ ,  $p < .05$ ).<sup>6</sup>

**Experiential analogy advertisement versus emotional appeal advertisement.** A median split on base preference in the analogy condition facilitates our comparisons across advertisements. Ad attitudes are highest among participants with a favorable base preference under low load in the analogy condition ( $M = 4.02$ ,  $SD = 1.29$ ,  $n = 20$ ), compared with the emotional appeal advertisement with a low load ( $M = 3.30$ ,  $SD = 1.09$ ,  $n = 25$ ;  $t(112) = 1.99$ ,  $p = .05$ ) or high load ( $M = 3.18$ ,  $SD = 1.17$ ,  $n = 17$ ;  $t(112) = 2.13$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Target product attitudes are highest among respondents with a favorable base preference under low load in the analogy

<sup>6</sup>Higher-order interactions involving experienced emotion as a predictor do not have a significant effect on ad and target product attitudes in Study 2 or Study 3.

Figure 4

EFFECT OF COGNITIVE LOAD AND BASE PREFERENCE ON AD AND PRODUCT ATTITUDES IN RESPONSE TO ANALOGY ADVERTISEMENT (STUDY 2)



Notes: The slope coefficients for the favorable base preference in Panels A and B are significant at  $p < .05$ ; for the less favorable base preference, the slope coefficients are not significant.

condition ( $M = 6.43$ ,  $SD = 1.13$ ), compared with those who viewed an emotional appeal advertisement in low load ( $M = 5.65$ ,  $SD = .97$ ;  $t(112) = 2.02$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and high load ( $M = 4.88$ ,  $SD = 1.78$ ;  $t(112) = 3.66$ ,  $p < .01$ ) conditions.

We also consider whether experienced emotion, as a dependent variable, differs between the analogy and emotional appeal conditions. Experienced emotion does not differ significantly for those with a favorable base preference and low load in the analogy condition versus those who saw the emotional appeal control advertisement with either a low or a high load ( $t(112) = .53$ ,  $p > .20$ ;  $t(112) = 1.13$ ,  $p > .20$ , respectively). An overall comparison of the analogy advertisement under low and high loads with the emotional appeal advertisement under low and high loads reveals no significant differences in experienced emotion.

### Discussion

In this study, we replicate the moderating effect of a base preference on emotional knowledge transfer and target attitudes. By manipulating participants' ability to generate emotional inferences (through cognitive load), we provide further evidence that an experiential analogy is an effective way to convey information about the emotionality of a target product experience. The moderating effect of the base preference on emotional knowledge transfer and target attitudes remains significant, even when experienced emotion significantly predicts target attitudes. These results suggest that target attitudes may be influenced by both thinking about and experiencing emotions. The effect of experienced emotion alone (high load conditions) is not sufficient to increase target attitudes in comparison with a situation that generates many emotional inferences and a favorable base preference. The results from Study 2 suggest that the significant effect of experienced emotion on target attitudes can be viewed as a complementary rather than a competing process to emotional knowledge transfer.

### STUDY 3

Studies 1 and 2 used analogies that were designed to be structurally sound. A sound analogy is one in which the base and target share deeper underlying relational similarities rather than superficially based similarities (Gentner, Rattermann, and Forbus 1993). The stronger the relational structure shared between a base and a target, the more sound an analogy is rated, and the more useful an analogy is for prediction and explanation. For an analogical comparison involving a base experience, a "sound" experiential analogy would imply that the base and target share a system of relational similarities that makes the experiences emotional (as we outline in Figure 1). This also implies that simply linking any positive experience to a target product may not produce a sound match, and therefore the comparison may not be as persuasive of a message as when the base and target experiences share deeper relational similarities. Although many interesting base experiences can be used to prompt consumers to consider the emotionality of a potential product experience, soundness implies that the base and target must possess a system of relational similarities to be persuasive. Even if a base and target share common emotions or if the emotionality of a base experience is strong, when a base and target do not align well at a deeper level, the persuasiveness of an experiential analogy may be compromised. To

date, the effect of soundness on an analogy's persuasiveness has not been empirically examined, nor has this moderator been investigated in the context of an experiential analogy.

The results from Studies 1 and 2 suggest that base preference alone is not sufficient to enhance target attitudes; a positive base preference coupled with emotional inferences is needed. By contrasting a sound experiential analogy with a less sound experiential analogy, we are able to further distinguish the mechanisms underlying attitudes toward the target experience. Specifically, this comparison enables us to understand whether base preference alone can enhance target attitudes even in the absence of emotional knowledge transfer. As in Study 2, we include experienced emotion measures to examine their effect on target attitudes. Evoked experienced emotion may have a positive effect on target attitudes when an experiential analogy is less sound, but the lack of underlying relational similarities between the base and target experiences should mitigate the generation of emotional inferences, thereby reducing any potential positive effect ascribed to the more cognitive transfer of emotional knowledge.

Furthermore, by accounting for the soundness of an experiential analogy, we can (1) demonstrate that this construct is an important moderator of analogical persuasiveness; (2) show that the moderating effect of base preference alone is not sufficient to enhance target attitudes, as is the case when an analogy is less sound; and (3) provide additional evidence of the effectiveness of emotional knowledge transfer, beyond the effect of experienced emotion.

### Method

*Design and procedure.* The three-way, between-subjects experimental design employed one manipulated factor, soundness (sound analogy/less sound analogy), and two measured factors, base preference and emotional inferences, as well as an additional emotional appeal control condition. Participants ( $n = 180$ ) from a large West Coast university received course credit for participating in the study. The instructions and procedure were the same as in Study 1.

*Ad stimuli and independent variables.* The target product in the sound analogy, less sound analogy, and emotional appeal advertisements was the Bugatti Sportster, a European sports car. The sound analogy advertisement compared the target to a first kiss (base), with copy that stated, "Like your first kiss.... An experience worth repeating. The Bugatti Sportster." In the less sound analogy condition, the comparison was to a weekend at the cottage (base), with copy stating, "Like a weekend at the cottage.... An experience worth repeating. The Bugatti Sportster." A pretest ( $n = 40$ ) confirmed that these base and target comparisons appeared more and less sound, respectively. Also in the pretest, respondents rated the extent to which they thought the base and target experiences shared feelings and emotions, on a 1–7 Likert scale, and answered an open-ended question in which they listed the feelings and emotions, if any, they thought the base and target experiences shared. Respondents indicated that the experiences in the sound condition ( $M = 2.60$ ) had significantly more feelings and emotions in common than the experiences in the less sound condition ( $M = 1.45$ ;  $t(38) = 3.98$ ,  $p < .05$ ). They also listed significantly more emotions as shared between the base and the target in the sound analogy condition ( $M = 2.30$ ) than in the

less sound condition ( $M = 1.25$ ;  $t(38) = 2.48$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Excitement and thrilling were the emotions most frequently associated with a first kiss and driving a sports car, so the copy of the emotional appeal advertisement read, “The thrill and the excitement.... An experience worth repeating. The Bugatti Sportster.” The advertisements contained a picture of the sports car. The measure of preference for the base experience in the sound and less sound conditions was similar to that in Studies 1 and 2 ( $\alpha = .89$ ,  $\alpha = .97$ , respectively), and the same open-ended question from Study 1 provided the measure of emotional inferences ( $r = .90$ ).

**Dependent variables.** The same measures from Study 2 assessed ad and target product attitudes ( $\alpha = .84$ ,  $\alpha = .92$ , respectively). The measure of experienced emotion, expanded from Study 2, included a mix of descriptors related to the base experiences. A principal component analysis of the emotions revealed two factors with eigenvalues greater than 1, explaining 56% of the variance. Interpretation suggests two factors: happy (happy, positive, content, relaxed, calm, and satisfied;  $\alpha = .78$ ) and excitement (excited, proud, energetic, and aroused;  $\alpha = .67$ ). We averaged the item scores to form happy and excitement indexes.

### Results

**Sound versus less sound analogy.** To test the predicted three-way interaction among soundness, base preference, and emotional inferences, we standardized the latter two measures and entered them into the regression as predictors, along with a dummy variable for soundness (i.e., sound versus less sound) and their respective interaction terms. A three-way interaction among emotional soundness, base preference, and emotional inferences significantly predicts ad ( $\beta = -.56$ ,  $t = -2.08$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and target product ( $\beta = -.55$ ,  $t = -1.92$ ,  $p = .05$ ) attitudes.

As we expected, the interaction between base preference and emotional inferences has a significant effect on ad ( $\beta = .41$ ,  $t = 2.28$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and target product ( $\beta = .50$ ,  $t = 2.28$ ,  $p < .05$ ) attitudes in the sound analogy condition ( $n = 76$ ) but not in the less sound condition ( $n = 68$ ) ( $\beta = -.15$ ,  $t = -.86$ ,  $p > .20$ ;  $\beta = -.05$ ,  $t = -.31$ ,  $p > .20$ , respectively). Base preference also predicts ad attitude ( $\beta = .33$ ,  $t = 2.39$ ,  $p < .05$ ). No other effects are significant.

Simple slope tests of the effect of emotional inferences on ad and product attitudes for those with more and less favorable base preferences in the sound analogy condition reveal that the effect of emotional inferences on ad ( $\beta = .36$ ,  $t = 2.22$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and target product ( $\beta = .40$ ,  $t = 2.62$ ,  $p < .05$ ) attitudes is significant when base preference is favorable (see Figure 5). When base preference is less favorable, the effect of emotional inferences is not significant (ad:  $\beta = .33$ ,  $t = -1.46$ ,  $p > .05$ ; target product:  $\beta = .36$ ,  $t = -1.40$ ,  $p > .05$ ). The more emotional inferences generated and the more favorable the base preference, the more positive are target attitudes when the analogy is sound.

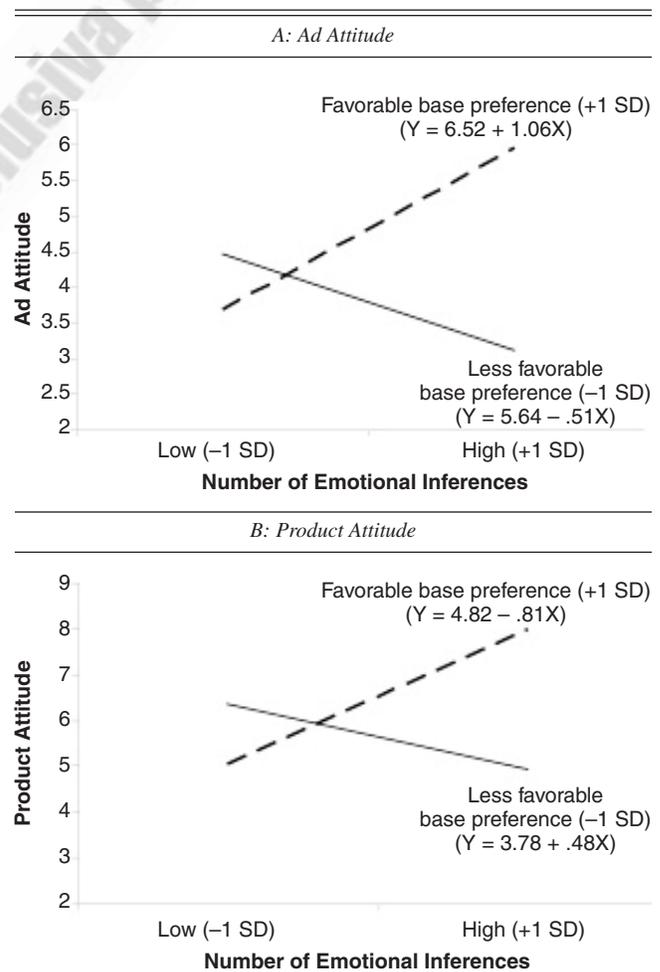
To examine how accounting for the effect of experienced emotion on target attitudes may affect the significant three-way and two-way interactions among soundness, base preference, and emotional inferences, we standardized the happy and excitement factors and entered them individually as predictors into the regression. The happy factor significantly predicts ad ( $\beta = .24$ ,  $t = 2.33$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and target product ( $\beta = .27$ ,  $t = 2.45$ ,  $p < .05$ ) attitudes. However, the

three-way interaction remains significant even when we include happiness as a predictor (ad:  $\beta = -.52$ ,  $t = -1.95$ ,  $p = .05$ ; target product:  $\beta = -.51$ ,  $t = -1.79$ ,  $p = .07$ ). The interaction between base preferences and emotional inferences also remains significant (ad:  $\beta = .38$ ,  $t = 2.16$ ,  $p < .05$ ; target product:  $\beta = .46$ ,  $t = 2.48$ ,  $p < .05$ ).<sup>7</sup>

**Sound analogy advertisement versus less sound analogy and emotional appeal advertisements.** We computed median splits on base preference and emotional inferences in the sound analogy condition. This enabled a comparison between target attitudes for participants who had a favorable base preference and generated a high number of emotional inferences in the sound analogy condition versus the emo-

<sup>7</sup>When included in the model, the excitement factor is not a significant predictor of ad ( $\beta = .19$ ,  $t = 1.77$ ,  $p > .05$ ) or target product ( $\beta = .15$ ,  $t = 1.34$ ,  $p > .05$ ) attitudes, and the key three-way and two-way interactions among soundness, base preferences, and emotional inferences remain significant.

**Figure 5**  
EFFECT OF EMOTIONAL INFERENCE AND BASE PREFERENCES ON AD AND PRODUCT ATTITUDES IN RESPONSE TO SOUND ANALOGY ADVERTISEMENT (STUDY 3)



Notes: The slope coefficients for the favorable base preference in Panels A and B are significant at  $p < .05$ ; for the less favorable base preference, the slope coefficients are not significant.

tional appeal condition and a comparison of overall target attitudes for those in the less sound analogy condition. Ad attitudes are highest among participants with a favorable base preference and who generated many emotional inferences in the sound analogy condition ( $M = 4.82$ ,  $SD = 1.41$ ,  $n = 29$ ) than among those in the less sound analogy condition ( $M = 3.94$ ,  $SD = 1.07$ ,  $n = 68$ ;  $t(174) = 3.25$ ,  $p < .01$ ) or the emotional appeal condition ( $M = 3.69$ ,  $SD = 1.24$ ,  $n = 36$ ;  $t(174) = 3.71$ ,  $p < .01$ ). Similarly, target product attitudes are highest for those with a favorable base preference and generated a high number of emotional inferences in the sound analogy condition ( $M = 6.70$ ,  $SD = 1.52$ ) than for those in the less sound analogy condition ( $M = 5.99$ ,  $SD = 1.05$ ;  $t(174) = 2.60$ ,  $p < .05$ ) and the emotional appeal condition ( $M = 5.93$ ,  $SD = .98$ ;  $t(174) = 2.50$ ,  $p < .05$ ). Ad and target product attitudes do not differ significantly between the less sound analogy and emotional appeal conditions ( $t(174) = .99$ ,  $p > .20$ ;  $t(174) = .23$ ,  $p > .20$ ).

By contrasting the respondents in the favorable base preference, less sound condition with those in the favorable base preference, high emotional inferences sound condition, we further assess whether base preference alone is sufficient to enhance target attitudes. Specifically, we performed a median split on base preference in the less sound condition. As we expected, ad attitudes are not as positive for those with a favorable base preference in the less sound condition ( $M = 4.32$ ,  $SD = 1.03$ ,  $n = 37$ ) compared with those with a favorable base preference who generated many emotional inferences in the sound condition ( $M = 4.82$ ;  $t(173) = 1.66$ ,  $p = .05$ , one-tailed). Directionally consistent with the ad results, target product attitudes were less positive for those with a favorable base preference in the less sound condition ( $M = 6.23$ ) than for those with a favorable base preference, who generated a high number of emotional inferences in the sound condition ( $M = 6.70$ ;  $t(173) = 1.45$ ,  $p = .07$ , one-tailed). Because emotional inferences do not predict target attitudes or interact with base preferences in the less sound condition, we gain further evidence that a positive base preference alone may not be enough to enhance target attitudes.

### Discussion

We find empirical evidence that soundness moderates an analogy's persuasiveness when the comparison involves experiences. In Study 3, we show that the persuasive effect of base preference and emotional knowledge transfer may not emerge when an analogy is less sound. Although base preferences predict target attitudes in the less sound condition, these target attitudes are not as positive as those that result from a favorable base preference and a high number of emotional inferences in the sound condition. Therefore, the careful selection of a base experience must ensure that the structural alignment between the base and the target involves strong relational similarities related to the emotionality of the experience. When a base experience is positive but does not share a strong system of relational similarities with the target (i.e., sports car and a weekend at a cottage), consumers may not be able to establish the relational mapping necessary to transfer their emotional knowledge.

Similar to Study 2, experienced emotions were found to influence target attitudes in both the sound and the less sound conditions. This effect was limited to feelings of happiness and not excitement. Importantly, base preference

continued to moderate the effect of emotional inferences on target attitudes when happiness was included as a predictor. This again suggests that experienced emotion and emotional knowledge transfer, a more cognitive process, can be viewed as having complementary effects on the persuasiveness of an experiential analogy.

### GENERAL DISCUSSION

Previous research has focused almost exclusively on analogies designed to transfer objective knowledge in the context of strategic and functional-oriented comparisons. In doing so, the consumer's ability to transfer unique, personally experienced emotional information has been ignored. Such an oversight, in both psychology and marketing, is surprising given the persuasive influence of emotional knowledge (particularly that which is recalled from first-hand experiences) during the consideration of a product. By using an emotional experience as a basis of comparison to a target, base preference has been established as an important moderator of an analogy's persuasiveness. Across three studies, we find consistent evidence that how much a person likes or dislikes a base experience matters.

The use of experiential analogies to study the effect of base preferences on target attitudes is strategic. Comparing a target product to an emotional experience invites consumers to view the target in terms of the subjective experience it offers. In addition, preferences are an important part of subjective experiences, and experiential analogies offer an ideal context to examine how they affect the processing and persuasiveness of an analogy. By focusing on experiential analogies, we also gain a better understanding of how information related to the emotionality of a product experience can be conveyed. Consumers prefer products that provide meaningful experiences, and part of what makes an experience meaningful is the emotion ascribed to product use. Our findings indicate that an experiential analogy is an effective way to communicate the emotions associated with a product experience, and this occurs through the transfer of emotional knowledge, a cognitive process characteristic of analogical thinking. Studies 2 and 3 reveal the role of experienced emotion in the process. Although the effect of emotional knowledge transfer and experienced emotion on an analogy's persuasiveness may be viewed as complementary rather than competing processes, we found that reducing a participant's ability to generate emotional inferences significantly decreases an analogy's persuasiveness.

Unlike previous research and theorizing about the role of emotion in analogical thinking (Gregan-Paxton et al. 2002; Thagard and Shelley 2001), we attempted to isolate and examine the effects of prior preferences, emotional knowledge, and experienced emotion on consumer attitudes. The findings suggest that neither base preference nor emotional inferences alone can maximize the persuasiveness of an experiential analogy. The more a consumer likes a base experience and the more emotional inferences he or she generates, the more positive are his or her target attitudes. When an experience is perceived less favorably or if too few emotional inferences are generated, the persuasiveness of an experiential analogy may be compromised. Generating fewer emotional inferences may signal a breakdown in the mapping and transfer of emotional knowledge from the base experience to the target product. The use of cognitive load

to manipulate the generation of emotional inferences in Study 2 is evidence that insufficient cognitive resources may reduce emotional knowledge transfer. Our investigation of soundness in Study 3 also demonstrates that when a base and target do not align well, the lack of relational similarities can impede emotional knowledge transfer.

From a broader perspective, the necessity of generating a high number of emotional inferences is akin to what previous research would identify as “resolving an analogy” (McQuarrie and Mick 1996, 1999). In the context of experiential analogies, this means figuring out how the base and target experiences are similar. The findings from our research specify what resolving an analogy means and why it leads to increased persuasiveness. Specifically, we find that resolving an experiential analogy involves the activation of base preferences and the identification of underlying similarities that make the base and target experiences emotional.

### *Substantive Implications*

Experiential analogies in recent advertisements suggest that we need a better understanding of how consumers process these comparisons. Predominant views on emotions and feelings as information (e.g., Pham 1998) indicate that experiential analogies are persuasive because they involve the generation of feelings (associated with the base experience) that are interpreted as judgments about a target product. Although it is not clear if this assumption prompts marketers to use experiential analogies, our research demonstrates that emotional knowledge plays a key role in influencing the persuasiveness of analogies. When consumers process an experiential analogy, they make predictions about the emotions they will experience with a new product, according to the similarities they establish with the base experience. This cognitive process is characteristic of analogical thinking, and in our research, it influences attitudes independently of experienced emotion. Our findings also suggest that marketers should be mindful of the experiences they choose as a basis of comparison. If consumers do not perceive the base experience favorably, their generation of emotional inferences will have a less positive effect on target product attitudes. Because processing an experiential analogy is cognitively demanding and not limited to the potentially positive effects of experienced emotion, simply associating any positive experience with the target product may not have the desired effect on consumer attitudes. A target product needs to be perceived as capable of evoking the kind of emotional experience associated with the base experience. The difference in the number of emotional inferences generated in response to the analogy advertisements across our three studies highlights the importance of choosing fruitful, rich experiences as a basis of comparison.

More broadly, our research provides evidence that an analogy is an effective way to communicate about a product experience. In a marketplace fraught with consumers seeking products that provide meaningful experiences, analogy can be used to tap into the evaluative, emotional, and multisensory information they associate with a product experience.

### *Limitations and Future Directions*

Not all experiential analogies have the capacity to be more persuasive than other types of emotional appeals. However, our findings highlight that a cleverly designed

analogy may prompt consumers to leverage emotional knowledge associated with an experience. Because this knowledge often stems from first-hand experience or thoughtful expectations, experiential analogies have the potential to be more persuasive than a generic reference to a feeling in an advertisement. However, the access and transfer of emotional knowledge may not occur if persuasion knowledge is invoked. Additional investigation may be useful in determining the circumstances under which a consumer’s persuasion knowledge may become salient and the specific mechanisms through which this would, perhaps, negatively influence the persuasiveness of an experiential analogy.

We do not distinguish between emotional inferences generated from direct versus indirect experience with the base; rather, we selected base experiences with which most people should be familiar. Additional research should seek to delineate the effect of direct versus indirect base experience on the generation of emotional inferences and experienced emotions. Similarly, our analogies involve target products with which most people probably are familiar; it seems worthwhile to investigate whether experiential analogies are equally effective for really novel target experiences.

We created our experiential analogies to obtain variance in the base preferences to test our key moderating hypothesis. However, the base experiences are generally positive (or neutral) for most participants. Thus, it remains an open question whether our findings generalize to experiential analogies that use negative experiences. Further empirical investigations might attempt to determine whether base preference would influence the transfer of functional information when the analogy is designed to communicate how a product works. In addition to base preference, we investigated soundness as a moderator of an experiential analogy’s persuasiveness; varying the target product while holding the base experience constant would offer another means to examine the moderating effect of soundness.

It may be questioned whether the valence of the emotional inferences coincided with the favorability of the base preference. Were target attitudes enhanced because a base preference was favorable and the valence of emotional inferences generated was positive? We conducted statistical analyses to determine whether evidence could be provided for the valence of emotional inferences interacting with base preference to affect target attitudes. The results were inconclusive. When preference for the base was less favorable, this did not always coincide with negative emotional inferences. As we discussed, the analogies in our studies did not necessarily involve experiences in which participants would have been polarized on their preferences. To further specify whether the valence or even the strength of the emotional inferences would affect the persuasiveness of an analogy, additional research is needed.

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