

Ad and Brand Evaluations in a Competitive Processing Context—The Effects of Number of Attributes and Repetition Strategies

Chingching Chang, National Chengchi University – Taipei

ABSTRACT

This study proposes that the effectiveness of claim strategies and repetition strategies of the target ads will vary as a function of the presence of a competing ad. Findings demonstrated that, when the competitor's ad was not present in the context, participants generated more favorable responses to ad messages that featured a lower number of attribute claims than a higher number of attribute claims and to ad messages that repeated with one mode of variation than with two modes of variation. In clear contrast, when the competitor's ad was present in the context, participants, in general, generated more favorable responses to ad messages that featured a higher number of attribute claims than a lower number of attribute claims and to ad messages that repeated with two modes of variation than one mode of variation. The effects of one mode and two modes of repetition strategies have also been shown to be moderated by the number of attribute claims.

A product can be evaluated differently when competitors' ads are present in the ad-viewing context. For example, Chang (2002) demonstrated that an ad was evaluated less favorably when its attribute claims were shared with a competitor, as opposed to when the attribute claims were unique. Malaviya, Kisielius and Sternthal (1996) showed that, when a target ad was inserted into a context that was composed of competing ads, an attribute-focused message strategy was more effective than an image-focused message strategy. These findings suggest that, product judgments are relative, contingent upon contextual variations.

When exploring the effects of a cluttered ad context on ad perceivers' ad processing and product evaluations, it is important to take the limitation of ad perceivers' cognitive capacity into account. The central assumption of this study is that individuals are cognitive misers (Miller, 1956). Implicit in this assumption is the idea that consumers are more motivated to justify their evaluations only when there are competitors' ads in the context, as opposed to when there are no competitors' ads in the context. Due to the difference, when competitors' ads are not present in the context, individuals will favor simple ads to complex ads. In clear contrast, when competitors' ads are present in the context, individuals are more likely to seek justified bases on which to formulate their evaluations.

PROCESSING STRATEGIES IN A COMPETITIVE CONTEXT

A cluttered competitive ad-viewing context can constrain an ad perceiver's processing capacity. As past research has indicated, an individual's learning or recall of a target ad is impaired by his/her exposure to information about other ad stimuli (Percy & Rossiter, 1980). The limited processing capacity of ad perceivers may also explain Keller's (1991) findings that, as the number of ads present in the ad processing environment increases, recall of brand information declines. Similarly, past research indicated that the presence of competing ads caused problems in recalling information about the target brand whether the competing ads featured brands in the same product category (Burke & Srull, 1988) or in different product categories (Kumar, 2000). All these findings suggest that processing ads in a cluttered ad context is a capacity-demanding job. However, when there are competitors' ads present, consumers

need justified bases to formulate their evaluation of the target brand. Given the fact that a cluttered ad context demands more cognitive capacity than a non-cluttered ad context, this paper argues that a cluttered ad context will encourage ad perceivers to rely on salient heuristic cues to formulate judgments. Specifically, this study proposes that the number of attribute claims and the number of alteration strategy modes will work differently when the context varies.

PROCESSING STRATEGIES IN A NON-COMPETITIVE CONTEXT

In clear contrast, based on the assumption that individuals are cognitive misers and are reluctant to process complex information unless it is necessary, this study argues that, in the absence of a competitor's ad, consumers would prefer ad messages that demand less cognitive capacity. Indeed, a low-involving processing state can describe most of the ad viewing or ad reading situations in natural settings. Under such circumstances, an ad featuring simple product information should be sufficient for ad perceivers to form their judgments regarding the ad and the advertised brand. Indeed, when exploring the moderating influence of message complexity on ad repetition effects, Anand and Sternthal (1990) showed that, when ad perceivers had little opportunity to process ad messages, difficult messages led to more negative evaluations than do simple messages. Anand and Sternthal reasoned that, at initial exposure, uncertainty and conflict evoked by complex ad messages should be higher than that elicited by simple ad messages, resulting in more negative evaluations of complex ads than of simple ads. Therefore, processing simple ads will lead to the ads being evaluated more favorably than complex ads in a non-competitive context.

Number of Attribute Claims in a Competitive Context

The effects of the number of message arguments as heuristics cues has been well explored in the persuasion literature (e.g., Chen & Kao, 1998; Eagly & Warren, 1976; Petty & Cacioppo, 1984). Within the Elaboration Likelihood Model, the number of message arguments serves as an important cue when message processors are not motivated to engage in message elaboration or do not have the cognitive capacity to process information in detail (Petty & Cacioppo, 1983; 1984). That is, the decision rule, "the more arguments, the better," will influence message processors' evaluations of the persuasive messages under such conditions. For example, Petty and Cacioppo (1984) showed that when the issue was of low personal relevance, 6-argument messages generated more agreement than do 3-argument messages. Yet, under high relevance conditions, 6-argument messages did not enhance persuasion over 3-argument messages.

Product attribute claims in product advertising are similar to arguments in persuasion messages (Petty, Cacioppo & Schumann, 1983). Therefore, the number of product attributes in advertising may function as a heuristic cue when ad perceivers are reading ads in a cluttered context in which their ability to engage in effortful processing is constrained. In addition, Brown and Carpenter (2000) reasoned that consumers prefer to make judgments "on the basis of easily justified, cognitively available reasons" (p. 373). It is proposed in this paper that, in a competitive ad context, ad perceivers may be

eager to search for readily justified bases on which to formulate their ad and brand evaluations. When ads present higher numbers of product attributes than those of the competing brand, the sheer number of product attributes may serve as a salient basis for judgment.

On the other hand, in the absence of a competitor's ad, an ad including a long list of attribute claims may provide ad perceivers more information than they would like to process. These extra and unnecessary product attribute claims will increase ad perceivers' processing load and introduce uncertainty due to their complexity, leading to less favorable ad and brand evaluations. Therefore, under such conditions, ads promoting two product attributes will generate more favorable responses than will ads promoting four product attributes.

Hypothesis 1: When there are no competitors' ads present, ads featuring two product attributes will generate more favorable ad liking (H1a), ad believability ratings (H1b) and brand evaluations (H1c) than will ads featuring four product attributes. Yet, when competitors' ads are present, ads featuring four attributes will generate more favorable responses.

Repetition Variation Strategies in a Competitive Context

In a competitive ad context, ad repetition is an effective way to reduce clutter interference (Chang, 2003). Yet, repetition will introduce boredom and may lead to negative evaluations. A common practice is to repeat ads with different content or executions. It has been proposed that ad repetition with varying executions is an effective way to enhance recall of product information (Unnava & Burnkrant, 1991) and may counteract the negative effect of repetition on ad evaluations (Chang, 2003). MacKenzie (1986) has proposed that attribute repetition can be delivered through presenting different advertisements that feature the same attributes. That is, essential product information remains constant but the insubstantial features of the ad, such as color, graphics, fonts or layouts, are varied. This is termed cosmetic variation by Schumann, Petty and Clemons (1990). Schumann, Petty and Clemons (1990) have further distinguished substantive variation from cosmetic variation. Substantive variation refers to changing the message component (i.e., arguments, attributes) over repeated ad presentations while keeping the cosmetic components constant. Chang (2003) has identified the substantive/cosmetic variation strategy, which refers to ads featuring different product attributes with changing cosmetic characteristics.

For ads adopting the substantive/cosmetic variation strategy, both the visual and verbal components of the ads change with repetitions. For ads adopting the substantive variation strategy, only the verbal part of the ads changes with repetitions. Finally, for ads adopting the cosmetic variation, only the visual components of the ads alter with repetitions. In other words, substantive/cosmetic variation strategies involve variations concerning two modes, both visual and verbal, whereas cosmetic variation strategies and substantive variation strategies involve variation concerning only one mode, either visual or verbal.

Paivio (1971; 1986) proposes that processing verbal information and processing nonverbal information are independent actions. According to Paivio's (1971; 1986) dual coding model, two subsystems exist for information processing. One specializes in processing information concerning words or languages, which is referred to as the verbal system, and the other specializes in processing nonverbal objects, which is referred to as the imagery

system. Given the assumption that the two systems are independent, repetition strategies that vary in both verbal and nonverbal content will compete for cognitive resources.

In addition, a large body of literature has indicated that the brain's left and right hemispheres are responsible for processing verbal and visual inputs, respectively (Anderson, Garrison & Andersen, 1979). Specifically, the left hemisphere specializes in analytical and logical processing, whereas the right hemisphere focuses on holistic, gestalt-like processing. Das, Kirby and Jarman (1975; 1979) have also proposed that processing verbal and visual inputs involves different strategies. Processing verbal information relies on sequential organization and successive processing of linguistic materials, whereas processing visual information relies on synchronous organization and holistic processing.

Substantive/cosmetic variation strategies involve new inputs for the two independent systems and the two hemispheres, whereas substantively varied ad messages or cosmetically varied ad messages involve only new inputs for one of the systems. Therefore, it is proposed that processing substantively/cosmetically varied ad messages will be more complex and demand more cognitive capacity than processing either substantively varied ad messages or cosmetically varied ad messages. In line with the reasoning for developing hypothesis 1, it is argued that, in the presence of competitors' ads in the ad processing context, ad perceivers' cognitive capacity is constrained, and at the same time they are more motivated to justify their evaluations. As a result, they will rely on salient cues, such as the number of modes of alteration, as bases for developing their ad and brand judgments. Thus, repetition variation strategies that involve two modes of alteration will generate more favorable responses than will repetition variation strategies that involve only one mode of alteration. In contrast, when competing ads are not present, processing ad messages that demand higher cognitive effort does not seem desirable. Therefore, ad repetition variation strategies that involve only one mode of alteration will generate more favorable responses than will ad repetitions that involve two modes of alteration.

Hypothesis 2: When there are no competitors present, ads featuring one mode of alteration will generate more favorable ad liking (H2a), ad believability ratings (H2b) and brand evaluations (H2c) than will ads featuring two modes of alteration. Yet, when competitors are present, ads featuring two modes of alteration will generate more favorable responses.

The Interaction between Mode of Repetition and Number of Attributes

As argued earlier, uncertainty caused by message complexity will lead to negative attitudes. Thus, it is reasonable to propose that evaluations of ads that adopt repetition variation strategies involving two modes of alteration should be less favorable when the ads promote higher numbers of attribute claims rather than lower numbers of attribute claims. In the former situation, high uncertainty or confusion due to message complexity can introduce negative attitudes. In the latter situation, lower levels of uncertainty or confusion will result in more favorable attitudes.

In clear contrast, when participants are exposed to ads that vary with one mode, which requires less cognitive capacity to process, some people will believe that the more simple the ad, the more effective it is, whereas other people will think that the more attributes an ad emphasizes, the more effective it is. As a result, the effects cancel out each other. Therefore, the number of product

TABLE 1
Design of the experiment

Presence of Competitor	Featured attributes for competitor	Number of product attributes for the target ad	Featured attributes for the target ad	Type of repetition	Cell No.
With competitor	Set A	Four attributes	Set A & B.	Substantive	1
			Set A & B	Substantive/cosmetic repetition	2
			Set A & B	Cosmetic repetition	3
		Two attributes	Set A	Substantive	4
			Set B		5
			Set A	Substantive/cosmetic repetition	6
			Set B		7
			Set A	Cosmetic repetition	8
			Set B		9
	Set B	Four attributes	Set A & B.	Substantive	10
			Set A & B	Substantive/cosmetic repetition	11
			Set A & B	Cosmetic repetition	12
		Two attributes	Set A	Substantive	13
			Set B		14
			Set A	Substantive/cosmetic repetition	15
			Set B		16
			Set A	Cosmetic repetition	17
			Set B		18
No competitor	N. A.	Four attributes	Set A & B.	Substantive	19
			Set A & B	Substantive/cosmetic repetition	20
			Set A & B	Cosmetic repetition	21
		Two attributes	Set A	Substantive	22
			Set B		23
			Set A	Substantive/cosmetic repetition	24
			Set B		25
			Set A	Cosmetic repetition	26
			Set B		27

Note. Competitor ad always features two product attributes, either set A, featuring comfortable fit and lightweight, or set B, featuring lightweight and breathability. When the target ad promotes four attributes, the four attributes include comfortable fit, lightweight, durability and breathability. When the target ad promotes two attributes, they can either be set A or set B.

attributes may not affect their evaluations of either the ad or the product.

Hypothesis 3: When ads feature two-mode repetition strategies, ads featuring two product attributes will generate more favorable ad liking (H3a), ad believability ratings (H3b) and brand evaluations (H3c) than will ads featuring four product attributes. Yet, when ads feature one-mode repetition strategies, ads featuring two attributes will not generate different responses.

METHODOLOGY

Design

This was a three-factor experimental design (see Table 1). The three factors were: number of attribute claims featured in the target ad (two levels: two attribute claims versus four attribute claims), the presence of the competitor's ad (two levels: present versus absent),

and number of variation modes (two levels: repetition with verbal and visual variation, repetition with verbal or visual variation).

Selection of Products and Brands

Sneakers were selected as the product category in this experiment. Sperry, a brand that was not marketed in the area where the experiment was conducted, was selected to be the target brand. The competing brand was Nike, which was ranked top in market share in the area where the experiment was conducted.

Participants

This study recruited 345 participants from undergraduate classes at a university in a metropolitan area. Only students who did not major in advertising, marketing or psychology were allowed to participate. Forty-nine percent of the participants were male.

Stimuli

Stimuli ads were created by professionals working at Ogilvy & Mather Ad Agency. To reduce confounding effects from using visuals that may generate different favorability ratings under differ-

ent conditions, visuals were pretested before ad copy was inserted. ANOVA results indicated that the three visuals used in the experiment were rated equally in terms of liking, $F(1, 19)=2.03, p=.15$, good, $F(1, 19)=1.05, p=.36$, interesting, $F(1, 19)=.04, p=.96$, attention drawing, $F(1, 19)=.98, p=.38$, attractive, $F(1, 19)=.44, p=.65$, and suitable for advertising sneakers, $F(1, 19)=1.19, p=.32$. To improve external validity, the stimuli ads were inserted between two genuine filler ads.

Procedures

Participants first read brief instructions about the procedures. Then, depending on which condition they were assigned to, they were either asked to read a packet of five ads (one stimuli ad for Nike, two stimuli ads for Sperry and two filler ads) or a packet of four ads (no ads for Nike, two stimuli ads for Sperry and two filler ads) that were bound together as they would appear in magazines. For these two conditions, one filler ad was inserted in the first position and the other filler ad was inserted in the last position in the packet. After reading the ads, the moderators collected the stimuli packets and distributed questionnaires for participants to complete.

Independent Variables

Presence of the Competitor's Ad

As described in the procedure, when participants were assigned to the condition in which no competitor's ad was involved, they only read four ads, two Sperry ads and two filler ads. When they were assigned to the condition in which the competitor's ad was shown, they read five ads, including one for Nike.

Number of Attribute Claims

A pretest ($N=20$) asked participants, in an open-ended question, the attributes they would take into consideration when they purchased a pair of sneakers. Their responses were coded and ranked. The four attributes ranked at the top were selected to be featured in the target ads. They were: comfortable fit, durability, lightweight and breathability. The condition that featured two product attributes only contained comfortable fit and lightweight or durability and breathability. The two sets of attributes did not generate different effects on any of the dependent measures (all $ps>.32$). Therefore, they were collapsed in the later analyses. The condition that featured four product attributes included all four.

The Presence of the Competitor's Ad (two levels: present versus absent)

The ad for Nike, which was the leading brand, featured two attribute claims, either comfortable fit and lightweight or lightweight and breathability. The effects of the two sets of attributes were not significant on any of the dependent measures for evaluating Nike or Sperry (all $ps>.32$) and the responses to the two sets were collapsed in the later analyses.

Number of Repetition Modes

As discussed in the literature review section, there are three types of repetition strategies: repetition with substantive/cosmetic variation, repetition with cosmetic variation and repetition with substantive variation. For each repetition strategy condition, the Sperry ad either featured two product attributes or four product attributes.

For the repetition with substantive/cosmetic variation condition, the two Sperry ads featured different visuals and different product attributes. Specifically, for the two-attribute condition, the first ad highlighted the first attribute and the second ad emphasized the second attribute. The cosmetic characteristics of the two ads also varied. For the four-attribute condition, each ad featured two of the four attributes. The first ad highlighted the first two attributes and the second ad emphasized the last two attributes. Similarly, the

same two visuals used for the Sperry ads in the two-attribute condition were employed in the four-attribute condition to reduce the confounding influence of visual differences across the two conditions.

For the repetition with cosmetic variation condition, the two Sperry ads featured the same product attributes, yet different visuals. Specifically, for the two-attribute condition, both ads featured the same two attributes. On the other hand, for the four-attribute condition, both ads addressed all four attributes. Two different visual formats were used for each of the two ads.

For the repetition with substantive variation condition, the two Sperry ads featured the same visuals but different product attributes. Specifically, for the two-attribute condition, the first ad highlighted the first attribute and the second ad featured the second attribute. For the four-attribute condition, each ad featured two of the four attributes. The first ad highlighted the first two attributes and the second ad emphasized the last two attributes.

Most importantly, the three variation strategies can be categorized into two groups based on the number of modes that the variation strategies involve. Specifically, the substantive/cosmetic variation condition falls into the category of two-mode variation, whereas the other two variation conditions fall into the category of one-mode variation.

Dependent Measures

Ad Liking

Participants rated their liking of each ad on a five-item seven-point Likert scale. The five items were adopted from Madden, Allen, & Twible (1988) and Mitchell and Olson (1981). The items were: "interesting," "good," "likable," "favorable" and "pleasant." Cronbach's reliability alpha of ad liking was deemed satisfactory at .92 and .94, respectively, when evaluating the two Sperry ads.

Ad Believability

Participants rated the believability of the ad on a four-item seven-point scale. The four items were adopted from Beltramini's (1982) advertising believability scale: "believable," "convincing," "reasonable," and "authentic." Cronbach's reliability alphas were deemed satisfactory, each at .91 when evaluating the two Sperry ads.

Brand Attitudes

Brand attitudes were measured with a five-item seven-point Likert scale. The items were adopted from Chang (2002). They were: "good," "like," "pleasant," "positive" and "good quality." Cronbach's reliability alpha for this scale was deemed satisfactory at .94.

RESULTS AND ANALYSES

The correlations among ad liking, ad believability, and brand attitudes were significant (Pearson's r ranged from .62 to .83, all $ps<.01$). Therefore, MANOVA was first conducted to test each set of hypotheses. As expected, MANOVA indicated that the two-way interaction between presence of competitor and number of product attributes was significant, $F(1, 344)=2.68, p=.05$.

ANOVA showed that the interaction between presence of competitor and number of product attributes on ad liking was not significant, $F(1, 345)=1.25, p=.26$. Therefore, H1a was not supported.

When ad believability was analyzed, ANOVA showed a significant interaction, $F(1, 345)=5.19, p=.02$, which was as expected. When there was no competitor's ad in the context, ads featuring two product attributes generated higher ratings than did ads featuring four product attributes, $M_{\text{two attributes}}=4.31, M_{\text{four attributes}}=3.72$, whereas, when there was a competitor's ad in the

context, ads featuring two product attributes generated lower ratings than did ads featuring four product attributes, $M_{\text{two attributes}}=3.84$, $M_{\text{four attributes}}=3.97$. The findings supported H1b.

When brand evaluations were analyzed, ANOVA showed that the interaction was not significant, $F(1, 345)=.07$, $p=.78$. Therefore, H1c was not supported.

Consistent with expectations, MANOVA indicated that the two-way interaction between presence of competitor and mode of repetition was significant, $F(1, 344)=3.02$, $p=.03$.

As expected, ANOVA revealed that the interaction on ad liking was significant, $F(1, 345)=4.80$, $p=.03$. When there was no competitor's ad in the context, ads varying on one mode generated higher ratings on than did ads varying on two modes, $M_{\text{one mode}}=4.20$, $M_{\text{two mode}}=3.81$, whereas when there was a competitor's ad in the context, ads varying on one mode generated lower ratings than did ads varying on two modes, $M_{\text{one mode}}=3.76$, $M_{\text{two mode}}=4.07$, supporting H2a.

ANOVA did not generate a significant interaction on ad believability, $F(1, 345)=.44$, $p=.51$. Yet, the means were in the expected directions. When there was no competitor's ad in the context, ads varying on one mode seemed to generate relatively higher ratings than did ads varying on two modes, $M_{\text{one mode}}=4.04$, $M_{\text{two mode}}=3.99$, whereas when there was a competitor's ad in the context, ads varying on one mode seemed to generate relatively lower ratings than did ads varying on two modes, $M_{\text{one mode}}=3.82$, $M_{\text{two mode}}=3.98$.

When brand evaluations were analyzed, ANOVA showed that the interaction was not significant, $F(1, 345)=1.46$, $p=.23$. However, the means were in the expected directions. When there was no competitor's ad in the context, ads featuring two product attributes generated higher ratings than did ads featuring four product attributes, $M_{\text{two attributes}}=4.14$, $M_{\text{four attributes}}=3.89$, whereas when there was a competitor's ad in the context, ads featuring two product attributes generated lower ratings than did ads featuring four product attributes, $M_{\text{two attributes}}=4.05$, $M_{\text{four attributes}}=4.16$.

MANOVA indicated that the interaction between number of attributes and number of repetition modes approached the significant level, $F(1, 345)=2.12$, $p=.10$.

However, as expected, the interaction on ad liking was significant, $F(1, 345)=6.05$, $p=.01$. As expected, when ads featured two-mode repetition strategies, simple effect analyses showed that promoting two product attributes generated higher ratings than did promoting four attributes, $F(1, 125)=5.23$, $p=.02$, $M_{\text{two attributes}}=4.24$, $M_{\text{four attributes}}=3.64$. Yet when ads featured one-mode repetition strategies, simple effect analyses indicated that promoting either two attributes or four attributes did not generate different ratings on ad liking, $F(1, 218)=.70$, $p=.41$, $M_{\text{two attributes}}=3.89$, $M_{\text{four attributes}}=4.07$. The findings confirmed the predictions of hypothesis 3a.

ANOVA indicated that the interaction on ad believability was significant, $F(1, 345)=5.33$, $p=.02$. As expected, when ads featured two-mode repetition strategies, simple effect analyses indicated that promoting two product attributes generated more favorable ratings than did promoting four attributes, $F(1, 125)=5.36$, $p=.02$, $M_{\text{two attributes}}=4.28$, $M_{\text{four attributes}}=3.68$. In clear contrast, when ads featured one-mode repetition strategies, simple contrast analyses demonstrated that promoting either two attributes or four attributes did not generate different ratings, $F(1, 218)=.40$, $p=.53$, $M_{\text{one mode}}=3.87$, $M_{\text{two mode}}=4.01$, supporting hypothesis 3b.

Finally, ANOVA showed that the interaction on brand evaluations was significant, $F(1, 345)=4.15$, $p=.04$. When ads featured two-mode repetition strategies, simple effect analyses showed that promoting two product attributes generated more

favorable brand evaluations than did promoting four attributes, $F(1, 125)=5.90$, $p=.02$, $M_{\text{two attributes}}=4.32$, $M_{\text{four attributes}}=3.74$, yet when ads featured one-mode repetition strategies, simple effect analyses indicated that promoting either two attributes or four attributes did not generate different ratings, $F(1, 125)=.04$, $p=.83$, $M_{\text{two attributes}}=4.08$, $M_{\text{four attributes}}=4.12$. Therefore, hypothesis 3c was supported.

It is also important to note that ratings of the Nike ad on liking, believability or brand evaluations did not vary when the content for Sperry ads changed (all $ps>.87$).

DISCUSSION

This study explores an ad context that is similar to what ad perceivers are exposed to on a daily basis. Within this cluttered viewing context, all messages compete for attention, and yet, ad perceivers' cognitive capacity is limited. As a result, ad perceivers cope with the glut of information by adopting different processing strategies. Therefore, understanding how ad perceivers make sense of cluttered message contexts, and at the same time manage message processing within the limits of their cognitive capacity, is important to researchers.

Findings indicate that ad perceivers seemed to adopt different processing strategies due to the presence of competitor's ad messages. In general, when competitors' ads are absent, participants rated the target ad featuring simple ad content more favorably than the target ad featuring complex ad content. Yet, when competitors' ads are present, participants in general generated more favorable responses to ad messages that featured higher number of attribute claims or ads varied with two modes of alterations. It is likely that, when processing ad messages for two competing brands, participants were motivated to find readily justified cues to develop their judgments, allowing number of attribute claims or number of variation modes to play an influencing role in the evaluation process. However, it is important to note that findings were not very consistent when the competitor's ad was present. One of the possible explanations is that individual difference such as product involvement has not taken into account. Individuals with high and low involvement may respond differently to two sneakers ads in a competitive context. The moderating influence of individuals' product involvement can be further explored in the future.

It is also important to note that the impact of context effects on ad perceivers' evaluations of the target ad and brand are mainly limited to new brands. The known brand, Nike, is not subject to the influence of context variations. These findings are consistent with past research. For example, Chang (2002) has demonstrated that evaluations of a familiar brand are less likely to be affected by ad strategies employed by competing ads in the context. Kent & Allen (1994) also showed that memory interference is less serious for familiar brands.

Findings of this study should be considered within its limitations. First, this study explores a cluttered ad context for print media. Visuals in print media are static, whereas visuals in television are dynamic (Bryce & Yalch, 1993). Therefore, findings of this study may not be directly generalized to understand the influence of a cluttered ad context in television. Second, the interactive relationship between the verbal and visual components of the message has not been controlled. Houston, Childers and Heckler (1987) demonstrated that when pictures corresponded well with the verbal component of the ad, messages were better recalled (see also Lutz & Lutz, 1977). Therefore, future investigations can explore the moderating influence of the interactivity between the verbal and visual components. Finally, Unnava and Burnkrant (1991) argued that verbal information varied in terms of its imagery-evoking

power. This study did not specifically control the imagery-evoking power of the verbal component and was not able to detect possible interference that might have been caused by the vividness of imagery that the verbal component evoked. Yet, given that the verbal components mainly concern attribute claims, ads claiming different product attributes should not differ much in the vividness of the evoked imagery.

Regardless of the limitations, this study sheds some light on our understanding of how ad perceivers balance between making sense out of competing ad messages and managing their cognitive work load within reasonable limits. Findings of this study have direct implications for media planners and creative professionals when they develop message strategies or media planning for a new or less-known brand. Specifically, when a cluttered media context is selected for ad placement, ad messages can promote a long list of attributes and repetition strategies can involve variations along both the visual and verbal mode.

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