

Consumer Psychology and Memory Recall Effect: An Analytical Study on Comparative Advertising

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Abstract

Advertising is all about competing with brands and proving its superiority over other brands. Competition through comparison is a creative form of advertising profession and offers leading edge for a brand, adds to its value, and positions it as a unique brand in the product category. It is advertising and especially the comparative advertising that makes a detergent whiter, a soft drink stronger and a toothpaste healthier than just the rival brands. Comparative advertising has its genesis in a way that it compares two brands and highlights only the most powerful features of one brand over the other. The entire communication process remains favourable for the advertised brand and leaves rival brand in poor light without stating its worth. The purpose of this study is to test its hypothesis whether consumers recall comparative advertisements better than regular forms of advertisements. It also explores the factors responsible for the memory effects of comparative advertisements. The study is based on a survey indicating the growing acceptance among the consumers to be more receptive towards comparative advertisements and why brands are claiming to be better, safer and cheaper than their competitors. Results evince that the design of comparative advertising that includes the content and manner of presentation greatly charms the consumers and affects their buying behaviour. The study also shows that advertisements which have a greater number of cues are easier to recall than those with lesser cues.

Keywords: Comparative advertising, memory effects, brand rivalry, consumer behaviour

Today, advertising represents a prevalent and penetrating form of communication. Every type of mass media conveys advertising messages to consumers. Apart from the obvious purpose of delivering information about products and services, advertising messages also raise awareness about socially significant matters. Compelling images, vibrant music, and powerful words can stimulate feelings in viewers to encourage societal welfare. Advertisements have become a part of our life today. After debating in the late 1800's, advertisements have evolved greatly over the last century. While conventional research

still debates the efficacy of advertisements through research, one has to believe that advertisements have been good for the industry and commerce in general, otherwise, why would a single spot for 30 seconds in the Superbowl (America's premier domestic Football, not soccer, event) sell for 4 million dollars? This is not taking into account the cost of making the advertisement itself.

Commercial advertisements often seek to generate increased consumption of their products or services through "branding", which involves associating a product name or image with certain qualities in the minds of consumers. Non-commercial advertisers who spend money on advertising items other than a consumer product or service include political parties, interest groups, religious organizations and governmental agencies (Hanssens, 2011)^[11]. Comparative advertisements also have been termed contrast advertisements, negative advertisements, attack advertisements, or knocking copy (Moore, 1999)^[21]. Comparative claims [A claim is a comparison which is not substantiated by facts or test results] may vary in nature. They may either emphasize the similarities or the differences between the products. They may also state that the advertised product is 'better than' or 'as good as' the competitors.

Evolution of Comparative Advertising

The term 'comparative advertising' refers to any form of advertising in which a trademark owner attempts to enjoy pecuniary benefits from a comparison between his product, service, or brand and that of a competitor (Gokhale and Dutta, 2011)^[17]. In 1979, the United States, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) defined comparative advertising as "advertisement that compares alternative brands on objectively measurable attributes or price, and identifies the alternative brand by name, illustration or other distinctive information." Similarly, the Law Council of Australia, in 1995, suggested that comparative advertising refers to "advertising which includes reference to a competitor's trademark in a way which does not impute proprietorship in the mark to the advertiser." Comparative advertising can involve the direct or indirect comparison of a sponsored brand in an advertisement or commercial. Specifically, a direct comparison advertisement explicitly names the competing brand and compares on two or more attributes, benefits, or market positions. An indirect comparison advertisement is comprised of an overall subtle comparison such as the "leading brand" or "Brand X" approach that does not name the competing brand. (Barry, 1993; Beard & Nye, 2011)^{[3][5]}

Comparative advertising generally possesses two components, puffery, and denigration. Puffery is where the advertiser seeks to draw the consumer's attention by making superlative claims about his product that are assertions of opinion, rather than verifiable statements of fact. Denigration occurs when puffery seeks to portray the competing product in a negative light. The brands that use comparative advertising most generally are the newer or smaller manufacturers, who want to increase their market share. Dayton (2014)^[10] states that these brands have much to gain by featuring a market leader in their advertisements. They create a brand association that diminishes the special one-of-a-kind image that market leaders so carefully cultivate. Thus comparative advertising gives the new or small brand an efficient way to tap into the market segment that the market leader has already carved out. On the other hand, market leaders instead try to distinguish their brands in the consumers' minds. Coke is not advertised as the best cola; Coke is "The Real Thing", or just plain "It". By implication, other colas

are “unreal” or maybe “not it”, and are challenging Coke with the “Pepsi Challenge”. Similarly, the producers of Bayer do not merely claim that their brand is better than another aspirin. They state that “only Bayer is 100% pure aspirin”, thus implying that all other aspirins are of some inferior grade not worthy of mention. McDougall (1978)^[9] suggests that brands may be compared directly, indirectly and generically in the advertisements.

In India, it has been seen that such form of advertising where a market leader/new entrant compares his product on the basis of product/services attribute, price, market standing, the image is more common in industries where there are very few major competitors (mostly a duopoly). Given that most of the comparative advertising in India happens in duopolistic industries, there is a tendency for firms come up with counterclaims when they are targeted by a rival through a comparative ad campaign. This attitude has given rise to some of the most riveting advertising wars between companies in India. Some of the most famous and controversial ones include - Coca-Cola vs. Pepsi, Pepsodent vs. Colgate, The Hindu vs. Times of India, Sprite vs. 7UP among many others. Gokhale and Dutta (2011)^[17] show how Ad-men have evolved their thought processes to take into account changing consumer behaviour, government laws and regulations and the disruption caused by new mediums of media.

The earliest case concerning comparative advertising dates back to 1910 in the United States – *Saxlehner v Wagner*. Prior to the 1970s, comparative advertising was deemed unfeasible due to related risks. For instance, comparative advertising could invite misidentification of products, potential legal issues, and may even win public sympathy for their competitors as victims. Throughout the twentieth century, many U.S. advertisers fought comparative advertising wars which grew increasingly hostile over time, created problems for the media delivering the advertisements, and raised concerns about potentially misleading advertising. Eventually, disparagement and the validity of comparative claims seem to have driven media advertising self-regulation policies. In the 1960s, comparative advertisements started to identify competitors by name and comparisons to “Brand X” almost disappeared. Prior to the 1970s, comparative advertisements identified competitive brands as “brand X” or the “leading brand”.

In 1972, the FTC began to encourage advertisers to make a comparison with named, competitors, with the broad, public welfare objective of creating more informative advertising (Burke and Srull, 1987). The FTC argued that this form of advertising could also stimulate comparison shopping, encourage product improvement and innovation, and foster a positive competitive environment. The FTC felt that direct comparisons would enhance the quality and quantity of information presented in messages for consumers, advertisers, competitors, and the advertising industry. In particular, comparative advertising would provide useful price and performance information to consumers, would help businesses carve better market positions, would help consumers evaluate competitive alternatives, and would be an incentive to producing better products and services. The FTC’s (1979) position is clear “Comparative advertising, when truthful and non-deceptive, is a source of important information to consumers and assists them in making rational purchase decisions”. By the 1990s, even though networks reduced their clearance staff, comparative advertisements grew substantially, especially in telecommunications, beverages, and automobiles.

Comparative advertising has been widely investigated and research has been carried out on the costumer's persuasion by both association and differentiation (between advertised brand and comparison brand). Much research has focused on the question if a comparative advertisement is more effective than a non-comparative one, and on the evidence on greater effectiveness is often equivocal. The results seem to vary not only upon the specific kind of comparative advertisements used and the brands involved, but also on the measure of effectiveness used (attention/recall, perceived similarity, or persuasion) and even the specific questionnaire scales used to measure effectiveness.

Although the international research so far conducted in comparative advertising effectiveness for consumers has given contradictory results, comparative advertising is believed by the majority to be an important source of information for consumers because, if conducted properly, it tends to increase the transparency of the market. Comparative advertising has firstly been generally viewed as a method for providing the consumer with better product information and the advertiser with a more effective message. The increased information in comparative advertisements should be useful to consumers and should increase the chances for better decision making.

Objectives

- To explore the factors responsible for memory effects of comparative advertisements.
- To study how these factors influence the buying behavior of consumers.
- To examine the extent of effectiveness of comparative advertising over the non-comparative advertising

Need of the Study

Traditional advertising companies and researchers can observe the inherent limitations in the non-comparative form of advertising and acknowledge the role of realistic inquiry by providing an essential window on everyday advertising response presented as above. Comparative advertising theory must extend its horizons beyond over simplistic cause-and-effect models of advertising response and begin to take into account the subtle influences created by the social contexts that are present between reception and purchase. The present study has contributed to a more comprehensive understanding of the key points of comparative understanding and can provide a useful benchmark for future advertising decisions in large multinational companies. Speaking of a more industrial perspective, it is also possible to see how the study of advertising's function in the social contexts of everyday can contribute relevant insights into product consumption. Accepting that advertising may well be understood and used independently of the consumer good it features does not permanently divorce the ad from the product. Taken together the theoretical framework and the new constructs developed for this comparative study can serve as a foundation for further research in interstate and nationwide comparisons.

Literature Review

In order to provide a comprehensive picture, literature has been organized in themes as follows:

Memory Effects

Burke and Srull (1988)^[6] explored the effect of advertising clutter on the message conveyed by advertisements and its adverse impact on the memory of consumers. Through their experimental procedures, they were able to show the dependence of recall on cues present in the ads and how the consumers commit ads to their memory by forming associative linkages through these cues.

Perhaps the most important work in this field was carried out by Keller (1991) in his paper. He extended the research carried out by Burke and Srull (1988)^[6] and by Keller (1987)^[18] himself in understanding the effect of competitive advertising by consumers on their memory through the perspective information processing. In their previous study, Keller (1987)^[18], Burke and Srull (1988)^[6] had shown experimentally that increases in the amount of competitive advertising produced interference effects and significantly reduced recall of brand claims, given the brand name and product category cues. In his follow-up paper, Keller proved the detrimental effect that competitive advertising can have on brand evaluations and also studied the impact of advertisements with varied likability and effectiveness on the consumer's memory.

Pechmann and Ratneshwar (1991)^[23] explained that direct comparisons are more likely to differentiate the advertised brand from comparison brand, lowering the perceptions of the comparison brand when the featured attribute is typical of the category and the advertised brand is familiar. When the direct comparative ads explicitly declare that the comparison brand is relatively inferior on a specific attribute, it is more effective in lowering the perceptions of the comparison brand.

Donthu (1992)^[12] has been able to reconcile the different results by introducing a new variable, the intensity of comparison. Five levels of intensity of comparative advertising were considered. To identify that levels four factors were taken into account whether the brand competitor is appointed or not, if the comparison is based on elements specific or generic, if it only describes the characteristics for which the advertised brand is better or also the others, and finally if the comparison occupies more or less than 50% of the space available. To exclude the distorting effects of the experience of the consumer and the attitude of the same as the brand being advertised products were not actually on the market. So the consumer response has been more positive when the comparing the intensity was moderate and less positive in the absence of any comparison or with a strong comparison. The relationship between consumer attitudes and intensity of comparative advertising follows a pattern similar to an S reversed. Donthu found the gain in the recall was highest if the comparisons being made were more "intense" (naming explicit competitors, making comparisons on specific attributes, and only making a one-sided claim).

Chow and Luk (2006)^[8] have further enriched the model considering another variable the cognitive elaboration. According to the experiment conducted by the authors, the S curve is more pronounced in the case of intense cognitive processing and flatter in the event of low cognitive processing. Barone and Miniard (1993)^[26] tested for persuasion effects in terms of relative post-communication impressions and identified strong differences between the comparative and noncomparative ads. The results indicated that the differentiative comparative ads used in the study were successful in creating favourable beliefs and attitudes toward the advertised brand relative to the comparison brand.

Misleading Effects

Most alleged deceptive claims today are implicitly manipulative instead of outrightly false (Mazis, 2005). The studies carried out with this respect have amassed solid evidence of deception by implication. For example, in a study about attribute claims of ibuprofen based brands, Burke (1988)^[6] examine four types of claims no attribute information, truth, expansion implications, and inconspicuous qualification implications. They found that expansion and inconspicuous qualification implications increase the respondents' false attribute beliefs about headache pain relief, side effects, and speed of relief. Pechmann (1996)^[9] found that a company claimed that it charges the lowest rate for a particular service but did not mention that it charges more than competitors for other required services. Due to erroneous inferences, respondents tend to believe that this company had the lowest overall price.

Barone and Miniard (1999)^[2] expressed how factual ad claims may mislead consumers. This is reviewed with respect to advertisements that provide a mixture of noncomparative and comparative information. In particular, the authors explored how and when processing of the latter type of ad information can cause deceptive beliefs about the former type of ad information, an outcome referred to as "copy x copy" interactions. The authors also examined alternative processes that may underlie copy x copy interactions, as well as when these interactions are most likely to occur.

Economic Effects

While all the above studies focus on the ethical issues of competitive advertising and their effect on the recall of ads in the consumer, a lot of research has also focused on the economic aspects of competitive advertising, analysing economically the impact of comparative advertisements. Anderson, Ciliberto, Liaukonyte and Renault (2010)^[11] explored the same in the US OTC drugs market. This study showed how comparative advertising not only works like a conventional advertisement in propping up demand for the brand advertising itself but also pulls down the rival ad (mentioned explicitly or otherwise) and thus analysed the economic sense and incentives for a brand ahead to get ahead of its rivals by hurting them through comparative advertisements. Similar research work by Chakrabarti and Haller (2007)^[14] also economically analyzed advertising wars.

Contemporary Studies

Yagci, Biswas and Dutta (2008)^[30] distinguishes between ads that compare two different brands (Across-Brand Comparison or ABC ads) and those that compare different versions of the same brand (Within-Brand Comparison or WBC ads) was undertaken. Results from an experiment indicate that when comparative ads use attributes that are relevant to product performance, ad type and brand image interact such that an ABC ad leads to less favourable consumer perceptions than a WBC ad when the image of the sponsor brand is low but not when it is high. However, when the ads use attributes that are irrelevant to product performance an ABC ad leads to less favourable consumer outcomes than a WBC ad, regardless of the image of the sponsor brand. Research into comparative advertising was initiated by Wilkie and Farris (1975)^[16], who gave the first definition to the word comparative advertising,

looked at the different types of comparative advertising practiced by the advertisers to market their product. The primary objective of the paper was to investigate theoretically the issues surrounding comparative advertisements, their effectiveness, and also to suggest further avenues for research. Wilkie and Farris showed that comparative advertising is more successful in product positioning than the non-comparative advertisements. The effectiveness of advertising was operationalized by the attitude toward the advertisement, attitude toward the brand, and purchase intention. The literature on these constructs is also extensive.

Beard (2010)^[13] found that advertisers who engaged in comparative advertising “wars” often regretted it, mainly because hostilities tended to escalate, causing damage to both sides and, in some cases, to entire product markets and industries. Empirical research also confirms the longstanding and widely held professional belief that negative comparative advertising by market leaders regularly produces a backlash.

Methodology

The study aims at exploring the effects of comparative advertisements on the basis of the themes undertaken for the aforementioned literature review. The results of the survey are presented to examine whether a comparative advertisement is easier to recall relatively or not. The study is based on the hypothesis that consumers recall comparative ads better than other forms of advertisements

We assume that a brand whose product features, ad copy and claims are recalled better by consumers has had a greater impact on their buying decision, and would be the one that consumer buys once he goes out to shop and sees an array of products lined up in front of him. We further tested the recall of comparative advertisements as compared to non-comparative advertisements and found to establish a higher rate of remembrance amongst the consumers for comparative ads.

A survey was conducted on the students in one of the most reputed institutes (aged between 18 and 24) in the sciences and technology. In order to design an effective survey, we needed to make sure that all the variables are controlled for and that the responder’s preferences/tastes are known to us. The following approach, used by both Burke and Keller in their research, breaks the survey into three parts as it helps control two significant variables: Part A and Part B controls for the clutter found in the media. Part C controls for the product features specified in the advertisement

Defining the groups

Part A. Varied Product Context

The target ads (comparative in nature) were placed within advertisements promoting only different brands in different product classes

Part B. Same Product Context

The target ads (comparative in nature) were placed within non-comparative ads promoting only different brands in the same product classes.

Part C. Direct Comparison between Comparative/Non-Comparative Contexts

The target comparative ads were placed within non-comparative advertisements of the same product by the same brand.

The survey questionnaire also tracks the interest level of the participant in each advertisement and hence controls for the second measure of recall stated earlier. Images of ads were displayed with a question below asking the respondent to rate his interest level in the advertisement. Before the survey was conducted the respondent were also asked to detail any past experience they might have with a specific brand in the set in order to control for bias in the participant's mind. These measures helped control for past experiences, buying preferences and interest level of responders.

Procedure of Study

The survey was conducted in groups of 3-4 members each in order to ensure that each participant's response was recorded properly.

Sample and Population

A total of 43 participants took the survey. The survey included questions which helped to ensure that the consistency of answers of each participant could be verified. After removing the outliers and inconsistent participant data, 36 survey responses were analysed for the purpose of the study. Sufficient care was taken to ensure that there was as much representation from different groups of society as possible; hence stratified sampling technique was used. The participants of the survey included people taking into account various factors such as varying age, gender, and social background. Of the 43 participants in the survey, 34 of them were boys aged between 18 and 24 and 9 were girls aged between 18 and 24. 10 participants were from a rich family while the rest of them were all from middle-class families. Most of the affluent participants were from big cities of the country and most of the middle-class participants were from smaller cities.

Findings and Discussion

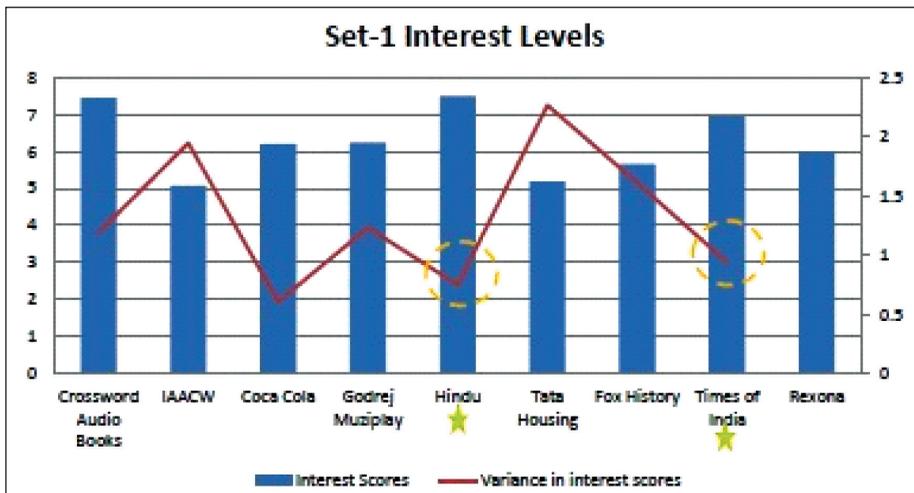
From the description of how advertisements are stored in the memory, we have established that Advertisements which have a greater number of cues are easier to recall than those with lesser cues. It becomes difficult to recall advertisements when the information channel becomes cluttered with advertisements which make use of similar ad cues. Ad cues may be any of the following the product class that the brand belongs to, the specifications/features of the brand or in some cases (when the brand is an established household name) the brand itself. Comparative advertisements, as explained earlier are aimed at showing how a brand is superior to another in the same product class by taking direct/indirect digs at them. This means that any single comparative advertisement must contain more recall cues than most other advertisements as it will always have to contain the identity of two brands (one named directly and the other directly/indirectly, but it is made sure that the consumer is able to identify the rival brand lest the purpose of the advertisement will be defeated), product feature cues and product class cues. Going by the associative memory model explained an earlier greater number of recall cues should enhance the ability of a person to recall a specific advertisement.

Information is effective as a retrieval cue to the extent that it is stored in the memory trace with the to-be-remembered information (Craik 1979)^[7]. The encoding specificity principle (Tulving 1974, 1979)^[27] holds that memory accessibility is a function of the compatibility between trace and cue information (see also Morris, Bransford, and Franks (1977)^[22]. Along these lines, Keller (1987)^[18] argues that in many settings, ad execution information may be more unique and strongly related in memory to brand claims in the ad than to the brand name or identification of the advertised product. The brand name may have relatively weak associations with elements of the ad memory trace as a result of a variety of factors (Keller 1991)^[15], such as the nature of the ad itself (either in its structure or content), the nature of the surrounding ad environment, and the characteristics of the person processing the ad. As noted, the clutter of advertising can increase the likelihood that an ad memory trace is confused or overlooked. Keller (1991)^[15] goes on to say that because the brand name is a less effective retrieval cue, execution information from the ad (e.g., the photo, headline, or some other key graphic from a print ad) may be more strongly linked to the experience of and knowledge acquired from ad exposure. Hence the recall of an advertisement would be directly linked to how interesting the ad was perceived to be by the consumer. Thus, the more interesting an advertisement is or if the consumer’s experience of watching the ad was better than average and the knowledge in the advertisement is packaged in a more attractive way, recall of the advertisement will be high.

Interest Level

Part A of the survey contained print advertisements of the following brands

Crossword Audio Books, Tata Housing, IAACW, Fox History, Coca-Cola, Times of India, Godrej Multiplay, Rexona, Hindu. Hindu and Times of India were indirectly comparative in nature where both the brands took a dig at each other without explicitly naming the rival brand. The survey checked for the interest level of the participant in each of the advertisement, represented below by a column chart -



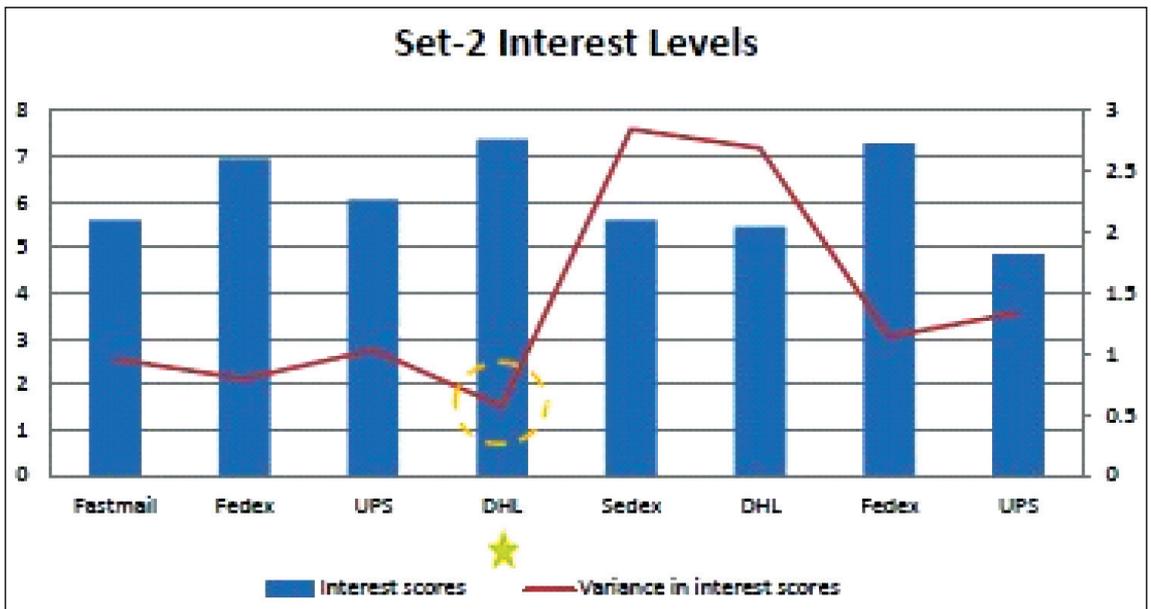
X-axis Companies; Y-axis Interest levels

The three most interesting advertisements as per the participants’ ratings were Hindu, Crossword Audiobooks and Times of India (in that order).

In Part B, we showed the participants print ads of several brands in the same product class (Courier services). The brands that were included in Part B were

Fastmail, DHL, Fedex, Cedex, UPS.

The set contained 1 advertisement of Fastmail and Sedex, and 2 each of Fedex, UPS, and DHL. The targeted advertisement was a comparative ad of DHL explicitly naming 2 of its rival brands in UPS and Fedex. The second DHL advertisement was a non-comparative ad, talking about one of its product’s features. The interest level of the participants in the advertisements (total of 8) is shown below, through the column chart :

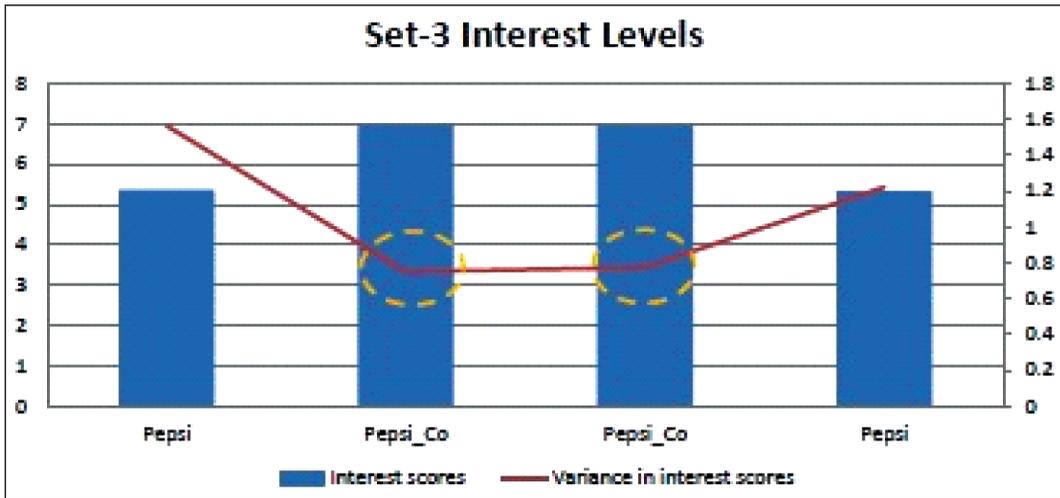


X-axis Brands in same product class Y-axis Interest levels

The three most interesting advertisements as per the participant’s ratings were DHL (comparative ad), and the two ads of Fedex (non-comparative) again showing that the participants were fascinated by the comparative advertisement as compared to the non-comparative ones. The average interest level in the advertisements of Part B, were lower than those of Part A, probably because all the ads belonged to the same product class.

Part C of the survey contained 4 different advertisements of the same brand showcasing the same product. All 4 advertisements were by Pepsi Co. showcasing its premier brand Pepsi in different ways. Two of these advertisements were comparative in nature (codenamed 19. PepsiCo and 20. PepsiCo for

differentiating the results) and the other two were non-comparative in nature (18.Pepsi and 21.Pepsi). The interest levels in these ads are shown in the following column chart –



X-axis 4 different advertisements of Pepsi Y-axis Interest levels

The interest levels in the two comparative advertisements were again significantly higher than the non-comparative advertisements.

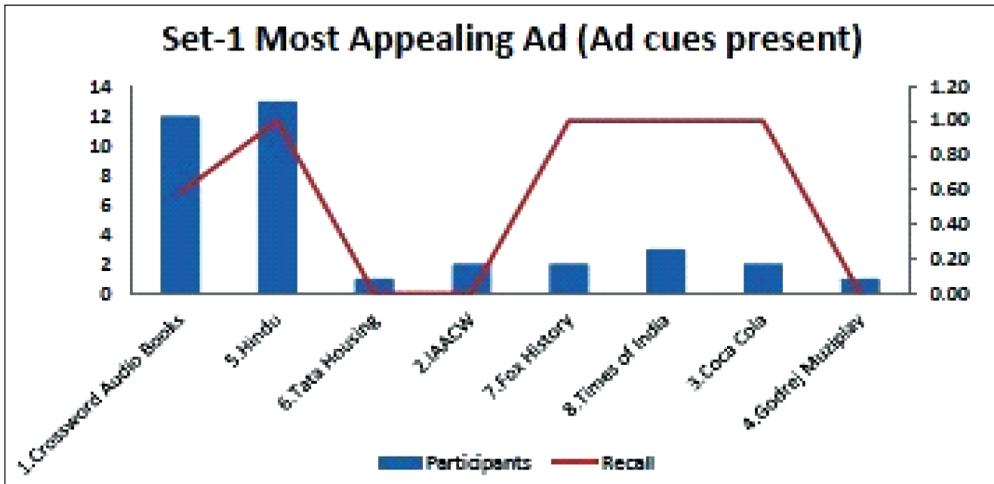
Specific Ad Recall

After the end of each part of the survey, the participants were asked to state the most interesting ad they saw in the segment. They were asked to describe the ad that they found most interesting and were also asked why this particular ad was particularly appealing to them. This exercise tested the behaviour of the customer and also the recall of the most appealing advertisements.

In order to evaluate recall objectively, we used a measure which will be described as the “**remembrance**” of the advertisement. Mathematically defined as

Remembrance of any advertisement = No. of exact recalls/ Total number of by the participant participants who found the ad to be most appealing

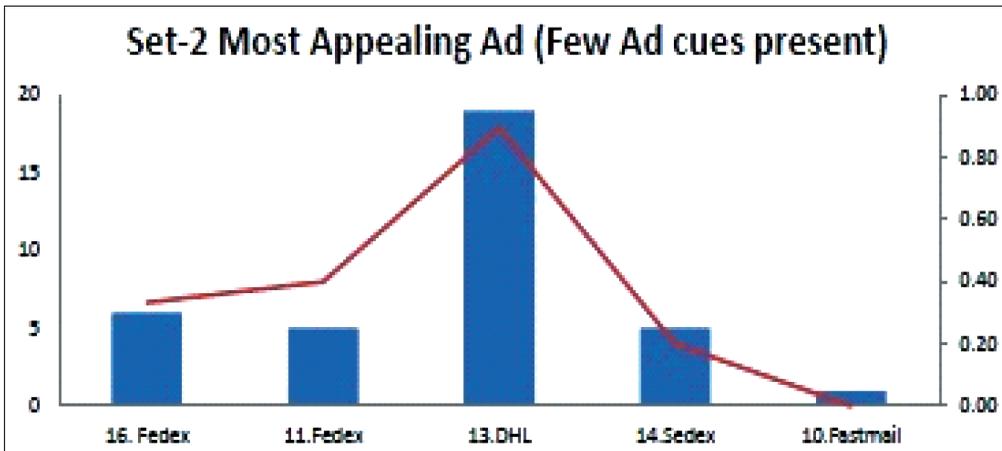
An exact recall will be marked against an advertisement, when and only when the participant can fully remember the ad that he found most interesting. If there is any help sought by the participant from the survey to correctly identify the ad that he found most interesting/ any wrong detail specified by him during the detailing of the ad in the questionnaire, the advertisement will be marked as a non-exact recall. In **Part A**, the frequency of the ads that were found to be most appealing as well as the remembrance of the advertisements was found to be as shown in the chart :



X-axis Most appealing advertisements Y-axis Interest levels

As can be seen from the chart above, the two ads that were found to be most appealing were the Crossword audio books (non-comparative) ad and the Hindu ad (comparative). What sets the Hindu ad apart from the crossword ad was the high remembrance factor which was exactly 1. So everyone who found the ad to be the most appealing recalled the advertisement exactly.

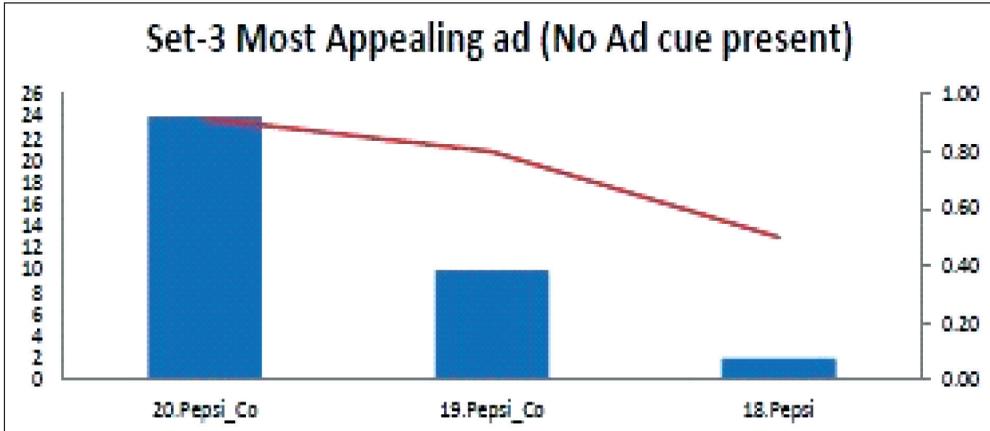
In **Part B**, the frequency of the ads that were found to be most appealing as well as the remembrance of the advertisements was found to be as shown in the chart :



X-axis Most appealing advertisements Y-axis Interest levels

In the second section, only 5 of the 8 ads were mentioned by at least one participant to be the most appealing. Of all the advertisements in this section, only the DHL (comparative) advertisement was

said to be the most appealing to a significant number of participants. It is also seen that the comparative advertisement was also the best-remembered ad with almost 90% of all participants recalling it exactly. In the third section, (chart) :

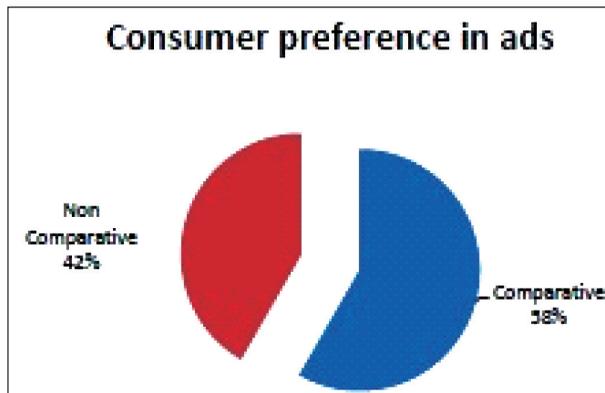


X-axis Pepsi Ad Y-axis Interest levels

We see that both the comparative advertisements led the pack of 4 ads in terms of being voted as the most appealing advertisements. Again, just as the last two sections, both the comparative advertisements were also recalled exactly by the highest proportion of participants.

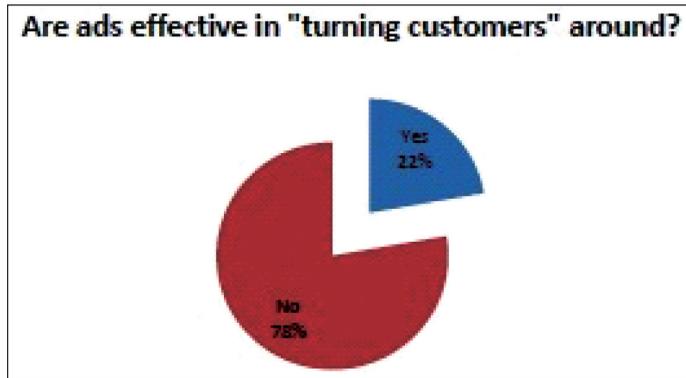
Consumer Preferences

The consumers were also asked a bunch of questions at the end of the survey, to directly gauge their preference for comparative/non-comparative ads, the responses of which are given in the following chart –



A significant proportion of consumers stated that they preferred comparative advertisements over non-comparative advertisements, thus re-affirming the results of the earlier parts of the survey as well as

further strengthening the conclusions drawn initially by Wilkie and Farris (1975)^[16] and later by William and Lutz (1987)^[29] and Mitchell (1991)^[20].



Surprisingly, very few participants believe that advertisements are effective in influencing their choices. This was also re-imposed by a different question in part C where customers were asked to state their buying preference between Coca-Cola and Pepsi before the survey and were then shown 4 Pepsi ads. Subsequently, when asked if they had changed their preference after seeing the 4 Pepsi ads, none of the participants responded positively.

Discussion

A total of 21 advertisements was shown to the customer of whom in the top 8 most interesting ads (through voting by participants) 5 were comparative in nature. This fact proves to us that comparative ads are more appealing and alluring than any other form of the advertisement presented on print media. This overlaps with the objective of our study portraying the effectiveness of comparative advertisements.

The variance in interest level of comparative advertisements was also the lowest in each product class showing that not only were they more appealing than the rest but also that the positive response was consistent throughout the highest proportion of consumers. In Part B and Part C, when all the advertisements were of the same product class and even the same brand perhaps (Part C) the comparative advertisements were found to be most appealing by a significant margin and also most recalled accurately (again by a comprehensive margin) confirming our hypothesis of comparative advertisements improving brand recall. Consumers themselves preferred comparative advertisements over non-comparative ones when asked a direct question to state their choice of viewership between the two. These results concur with research carried out by Gresham and Shimp (1985)^[16] and Wilkie and Farris (1975)^[16].

The above factors highlight the growing trend in the consumer to be more receptive towards comparative advertising through the perspective of three main features of appealing advertisements stated above. The Greater number of advertisement retrieval cues present in the advertisement. This corresponds to the Hovland's Message Learning Theory, which states the increase in recall with the repetition of a

message and increased retrieval cues present in the advertisement and reaffirms the research undertaken by Burke and Srull (1988)^[6] and Pechmann and Stewart (1990)^[24].

There is an increased interest level of the consumer in the advertisement. This feature resonates with the Elaboration Likelihood Model. This model highlights the central premise of the self-persuasion theory^[25] that persuasion depends on the involvement and interest that receivers attach to the message or an advertisement.

Product features specified in the ad and how the information is packaged and presented. Hovland's **Message Learning Theory** and **Attribution Theory** both states a striking similarity to the above feature. It states that a consumer will evaluate an advertisement using two independent characteristics. The first being the degree to which the speaker is perceived to be an expert on the topic and secondly, the degree to which the speaker is perceived to be trustworthy. It also states that if an advertiser is portraying a message that is self-serving, their credibility declines and persuasion become increasingly difficult.

In the light of the above discussion our hypothesis:

Consumers recall comparative ads better than other forms of advertisements stands to be true and the null hypothesis is rejected. This is also supported by the conclusions drawn by Wilkie and Farris (1975)^[16] and Gresham and Shimp (1985)^[16].

Psychological Implications

The psychological distance between the sponsored brand and the brand to which it is compared in a challenge/leader contrast, two different psychological courses may result depending on the degree of information presented by the market leader. If the brand leader is processed as an individual brand not linked with a type (category), the decrease of psychological distance may be with respect to the challenger brand and the particular brand leader. If the brand leader is processed as a category example, the decrease in psychological distance is expected between the challenger brand and a product category.

If the psychological distance is decreased between the challenger brand and the leader as processed on an individual brand, the characteristics, and qualities associated with that particular brand will be generalized to the challenger. If the psychological distance is reduced between the challenger and a product category, the beliefs associated with the product category will be related to the new brand. The above concur with the research by Batra, Rajeev and Ray (1986)^[4]. For example, a new automobile may be compared to a Mercedes Benz. If Mercedes-Benz is shown as an individual brand and not as a representative of a "luxury car" product set, the new car may be viewed as an import with excellent quality, handling, and durability. If the Mercedes Benz is processed as an example of the product class luxury automobiles, however, the new car may be viewed as big, comfortable, smooth ride. The beliefs associated with the new car would depend on how the comparison brand is processed. The set of beliefs that the advertiser wants to develop for the new brand would decide the most appropriate prototype for example selected for comparison.

Conclusion

The present study clearly states that the recall of comparative advertisements is simply easier and higher than non-comparative advertisements and competitive appeals used in advertisements, generate better memory cues amongst the consumers when they are exposed to choose a brand of their choice. Within all three sets of ratings between comparative and non-comparative advertisements, the participants associate themselves closely with comparative advertising, let it be the ratings over different brands from different categories, different brands with one category or same brands within the same category. The study also supports that comparative ads capture the eyeballs as participants chose 8 advertisements as the most interesting ads and 5 out of them were the comparative ads. Thus the comparative ads emerge as a noticeable form of communication over non-comparative ads within the proposed study. Authors corroborate the present trends that comparative advertising is becoming a regular and acceptable form of communication with the brands. Companies employ this advertising as a powerful strategy to gain attention and sell products and services. Whether *Pepsodent* is superior to *Colgate* or *Horlicks* is stronger to *Boost*, the comparative advertising states the virtues of one brand over its competitors and would have the leverage to improve the recall value among the consumers.

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