



Comparing direct and indirect branding in advertising

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ABSTRACT

Advertising research has largely neglected to evaluate the relative effectiveness of the different forms of branding devices available to advertisers. Branding can be direct, through explicit use of brand names, or indirect, through use of (non-brand name) brand elements, such as logos, spokes-characters and slogans that are connected to the brand in consumers' memory. Advertisers often downplay brand names in favour of brand elements because the latter are seen as less intrusive and more creative. This experiment in three categories demonstrates that direct branding often produces higher brand recall than indirect branding without compromising advertising likeability. There is, however, a clear picture-superiority effect, whereby picture elements (logos, spokes-characters) consistently elicit higher brand recall than text elements (slogans). The findings highlight that advertisers need not be reluctant to call out the brand name for fear of losing attention due to an unappealing ad, because consumers do not appear to penalise advertising with direct branding, nor do they reward advertising with subtler indirect branding.

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CHINESE ABSTRACT

广告研究很少涉及评估广告商可用的不同形式的广告策略的相对有效性。品牌可以通过显露品牌名称进行直接推广，也可以通过品牌名称以外的品牌元素，如品牌标志、角色代言人和消费者耳熟能详的品牌口号进行间接推广。广告商通常更爱凸显品牌元素，尽量淡化品牌名称，因为他们认为前者没有后者那么单刀直入，而且更赋创意。本实验共有三类，证明直接品牌推广比间接品牌推广更能够让观众记住，而且无损广告的魅力。然而，图片效果具有明显的优势，图片元素（品牌标志、角色代言人）一向比文本元素（品牌口号）更能给读者留下印象。这些发现显示广告商无需担心直接引用品牌名称而造成广告缺乏吸引力，从而丧失观众的关注，因为顾客并不会因直接品牌推广而贬低广告，也不会因更含蓄的间接品牌推广而推崇广告。

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1. Introduction

Branding in an advertising context is the audiovisual presence and prominence of the brand throughout advertising content (Teixeira et al., 2010). Good branding is a tenet of effective advertising, as most advertising theories agree that consumers must register the advertised brand (on some level) to influence their buying propensities and be successful (Romaniuk, 2009). Even so, large-scale studies report that about half of advertising fails to make this all-important link to the brand in consumers' memories (du Plessis, 1994a; Franzen, 1994). Such findings suggest there is scope to learn more about how to better execute branding in advertising so that the brand is processed during exposure and remembered post exposure.

Two forms of branding have been suggested but not fully explored in terms of their relative efficacy by the advertising literature. Before discussing the advertising literature, however, we must

first address the relevant branding literature, specifically the conceptualisation of brand identity. Brand identity is the means by which consumers identify different brands through distinctive (predominantly visual) features, and it is an important component of brand equity (Kohli et al., 2002; Wheeler, 2013; Zaichkowsky, 2010). A strong brand identity can be achieved through developing well-known sensory cues, which are termed brand elements (Keller, 2003, 2005) or identity elements (Zaichkowsky, 2010), also trademarks (Hoek and Gendall, 2010). Brand elements include the brand name, logo, symbols, packaging, shapes, colours, fonts, spokes-characters, slogans, jingles, sounds, and/or even styles of advertising (Keller, 2005; Major et al., 2014; Zaichkowsky, 2010). A strong brand identity, or a strong brand element, makes it easy for consumers to quickly recognise brands they use among the competitive set (Hoek and Gendall, 2010).

These brand elements can be separated at a most basic level into direct and indirect branding classifications. Direct branding involves showing or saying the brand name; for example, the name McDonald's can stand-alone or feature on packaging (or retailscapes). Indirect branding, on the other hand, involves showing brand elements that do not state the brand name but are linked with the brand in consumer

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memory through past brand experiences or exposure to advertising that features brand elements. Continuing the McDonald's example, brand elements might include the golden arches logo, 'I'm loving it' slogan, the colour red, the Ronald McDonald spokes-character, and so on.

Advertising research that has looked at the effects of branding on attention and memory has often neglected to consider the separate contributions of these two forms of branding (e.g. Pieters and Wedel, 2004; Romaniuk, 2009; Rosbergen et al., 1997; Walker and von Gonten, 1989). Branding in these studies is either limited to direct branding or the two forms are grouped together. It is theoretically and practically possible to examine the influence of direct and indirect branding separately, yet, their differential impact on advertising effectiveness remains largely untested. Theory would suggest that the greater sensory nature of brand elements would make them better at attracting attention and encouraging mental processing than the brand name (Keller et al., 2008; Kohli et al., 2013). But with both forms of branding present in many ads, controlled testing becomes necessary to examine the relative effectiveness of each type of cue. This study looks to contrast how the inclusion of direct and indirect branding, as well as different types of brand elements, impacts advertising effectiveness using measures of brand recall and ad likeability.

2. Background

2.1. Branding in advertising

Advertising has the significant challenge of trying to gain some level of mental processing from mostly distracted, disinterested audiences (Krugman et al., 1995). Creating memory structures to facilitate brand recall is particularly important because there are usually time delays between receiving advertising and being able to act upon it (Kennedy et al., 2013). Branding, as part of advertising content must compete with other creative devices to be noticed and stored in memory. Copywriters believe their primary task is to break through clutter and disinterest to deliver their message (Kover, 1995). It is not contested that cut-through is incredibly important, but all too often the creative tactics that are used to draw and maintain attention (e.g. surprise, drama, humour, celebrities) dominate the foreground of advertising content, directing attention away from branding (Keller, 2007).

Marketers and advertising agencies often struggle to balance branding and creativity to achieve their objectives. Some creatives suspect that intense branding through large or frequent exposures is counter-productive because it alerts consumers to the presence of advertising, which they will actively try to filter out. Some take a most extreme view, for example; "Why advertise the fact that an ad is an ad? The less an

ad looks like an ad, the more likely it is to be noticed" (Aitchison, 1999, p. 72). There is some supporting evidence for this sentiment, demonstrating that central sustained branding can promote advertising avoidance, however, avoidance behaviours can be reduced by pulsing the branding throughout the creative without reducing total branding activity (Teixeira et al., 2010).

Studies such as this, however, have restricted their investigations to only direct branding (brand name) and do not report on the – possibly unintended – inclusion of indirect branding (brand elements) that could have impacted effectiveness. We propose these different forms of branding will have differential effects on consumers' capacity to process the brand as an important part of ads. We now consider how brand elements are used in practice; either added to brand name exposures (supplement) or instead of brand name exposures (supplant). We then discuss the possible memory effects of these different advertising strategies.

2.2. Brand elements in advertising

Many believe that including brand elements in advertising should increase brand recall (e.g. du Plessis, 1994a; Franzen, 1994; Keller, 2003; Romaniuk et al., 2007; Rossiter et al., 1991). This is intuitively sound, as brand elements are assumed to supplement the brand name, increasing the brand's total footprint in advertising by providing additional opportunities to see some form of branding. These are hereon referred to as dual branded ads.

Others go further to suggest that the best ads are recognisable via indirect branding alone, for example; "You ought to be able to write a letter [analogy for advertising], not sign it, and everybody ought to know who it comes from because it's written in your tone of voice, your handwriting, and about things in which you're interested" (Aitchison, 1999, p. 71). Here, brand elements supplant the brand name, removing direct branding altogether. Under these circumstances, consumers must rely on their already existing knowledge of brand elements related to specific brands. These represent two very different advertising strategies.

There are many examples of advertisers supplanting brand names for brand elements. In Fig. 1, for example, only brand elements (a slogan and a logo) are used to signal the advertiser (Nike). These practices suggest that advertisers view brand elements as equivalent or even superior to brand names as the means for signalling brands. Poiesz and Verhallen (1989) tested brand recognition for ads without brand names (across nappies, washing powders and cosmetics categories) and found large variation in brand recognition scores, ranging from 2% to 89%. However, the authors provided little information about the brand elements that were used or how the brand elements were executed, which



Fig. 1. Indirect branding only advertising ('Saint Rooney', 2006).

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