

The Effects of Message Claim Type on Comparative Advertising

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Abstract

 In the marketing literature, very little is known about the effect of direct versus indirect comparative advertising and how advertising messages will influence the effectiveness. Since direct and indirect comparisons have been increasingly used in the advertisements, the relative effectiveness of direct and indirect comparative advertising has become a crucial topic in advertising (Miniard et al. 2006; Zhang et al. 2011). While both direct and indirect comparative advertising encourage the creation of comparative evaluations in viewers' minds, the effectiveness of these two types of comparative advertising should differ based upon viewers' reference points (Miniard et al. 2006). Researchers have found evidence for better advertising effectiveness for both direct and indirect comparative advertising (Pechmann and Esteban 1993). The mixed results from previous studies would certainly lead us intuitively to believe in the possibility of the existence of moderating or mediating variables. To find these answers, in this research, one moderator, *message claim type*, and one mediator, *perceived attribute importance*, were investigated.

The results of the experimental study showed that the interaction between advertising directness and message claim type was significant for attitude toward the brand. When the comparative advertisement contained narrative claims, indirect comparative advertising significantly generated more positive attitude toward the brand than direct comparative advertising. On the other hand, when the comparative advertisement contained factual claims, direct comparative advertising significantly generated more positive attitude toward the brand than indirect comparative advertising.

To test the mediation effects of perceived attribute importance on the attitude toward the advertised brand, we closely followed the approach recently suggested by Zhao, Lynch, and Chen (2010) instead of the more commonly used methodology by Baron and Kenny (1986). These authors recommend replacing the Baron–Kenny “three tests + Sobel” approach with a single bootstrap test of the indirect (mediated) effect (which is the multiplicative product of the path from the independent variable to the mediator and the one from the mediator to the dependent variable; Preacher & Hayes, 2008; see Zhao et al., 2010, for a detailed discussion). The results indicated that perceived attribute importance is an indirect-only mediator for the relationship between advertising directness and attitude toward the advertised brand. According

to Zhao et al. (2010), the results also showed evidence that the mediator (perceived attribute importance) is consistent with the hypothesized theoretical framework and it is unlikely there is any omitted mediator. This indirect-only mediating effect provides another explanation for the inconclusive findings of the relationship between advertising directness and consumer responses. To our best knowledge, this is the first research that specifically focused on the mediating effect of perceived attribute importance on the effectiveness of comparative advertising. We hope this research can not only advance our knowledge in the literature but also initiate a new research stream that can take us further in comparative advertising research.

References

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Relevance to Marketing Educators, Researchers and Practitioners: The findings indicated that providing facts and objective information in the comparative advertisement is extremely important if the company wants to use head-to-head comparisons to one particular competitor. On the other hand, if the company wants to compare itself with the rest of the industry, it should instead utilize subjective information in their comparative advertisement.

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