

Facing Clutter

On Message Competition in Marketing Communications

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EFI THE ECONOMIC RESEARCH INSTITUTE



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Preface

This report is a result of a research project carried out at the Center for Consumer Marketing at the Economic Research Institute at the Stockholm School of Economics.

This volume is submitted as a doctor's thesis at the Stockholm School of Economics. As usual at the Economic Research Institute, the author has been entirely free to conduct and present her research in her own ways as an expression of her own ideas.

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Stockholm September 18, 2008

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To Alma and Olof

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Stockholm, September 2008

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Prologue

Imagine the following. You are sitting in a sofa watching your favorite TV series. A few minutes into the program, just as the plot starts to thicken, an advertising break comes on. The series is replaced by ads for shampoos, cars, beverages, cornflakes, detergents, shoes, and retailers. Somewhat annoyed with the interruption you lower the volume, turn to the person next to you in the sofa and start a conversation. After about five minutes the series comes back on. You turn up the volume and put your conversation on hold.

Recognize this situation? Does it say anything about how you behave when exposed to advertising in different media? Do you tend to avoid ads by changing channels, skipping over pages, or directing your attention elsewhere? Many people do. In fact, it is difficult to get consumers to pay attention to ads. Marketers are struggling to get their messages across. Consequently, several voices have been raised questioning the effectiveness of advertising and marketers are increasingly turning towards alternative means of communication such as, for instance, PR.

Consider another situation. A woman in her early twenties is going to a party. She has been requested to pick up a few beers. On her way to the party she stops by a shop and checks out the different brands of beer on display. Upon deciding what brand to choose, she recalls an ad that she has previously seen. In the ad, actor Brad Pitt sneaks out of his apartment to pick up some beer at the local store. This sets an army of paparazzi on the move. “Well”, the woman thinks, “Brad Pitt is kind of nice...”, and “...talking about the ad might be a great icebreaker when entering the party”. Consequently, she reaches out and grabs a pack of Carlsbergs.

What do you make of this? The young woman obviously had paid attention to the ad as she remembered it so vividly. But, perhaps the notion of choosing beer based on a celebrity in an ad strikes you as odd? Or, that she had not decided on a brand to buy before entering the store? Actually, for mature and low risk product categories, such as beer, this type of decision is not uncommon. As the actual differences between brands are small, advertising becomes one way for consumers to discriminate between brands. What is strange, however, is that the ad used to make the decision was promoting Heineken and the young woman ended up with a pack of Carlsberg.

A final example: On his way to work, a man in his late forties peers out of the train window. His attention is caught by a billboard displaying a beautiful scenery: A small island in what seems to be the Mediterranean Sea. Brick houses. Sailboats. A sensational sunset. He looks at the bottom right corner where it says “Visit Croatia”. “Hm...”, he thinks to himself, “it does look rather nice. Maybe I should go there?”. But then he reminds himself that ads are not to be trusted. They tend to give a rosy view of the things they promote. “I guess once there it is not at all like in the picture”, he concludes, “but rather crowded and dirty”. Instead of adding Croatia to his mental list of destinations to visit he decides to forget about the ad.

What about this situation? Again, our man did notice the ad. He also liked the scenery in it. Still, guided by past experiences of numerous ads promising advantages that the products do not deliver, he decides to dismiss it. Even though he could not have been expected to go directly from seeing the ad to buying a trip, most marketers would have hoped that the ad would make him more likely to consider their brand. Ads are meant to affect how consumers think about brands and, hopefully, to have an effect on their evaluations and intentions towards them. In this case, however, the positive impression of the ad was overruled by the man’s general skepticism towards advertising.

Even if you did not recognize yourself in the examples above, the three situations are not unusual. In fact, they illustrate different ways in which consumers respond to the many marketing messages present in our society. They also illustrate some of the challenges faced by marketers wanting to influence consumers to buy their brands. Successful marketing communications affects consumers’ perceptions of a brand in a way that increases its chances to be bought. To have this effect, however, consumers must not only attend to marketing communications messages, but also, consciously or unconsciously, accept and remember these claims at a later time when they are to make a purchase. Given the number of marketing messages reaching consumers each day, this is hard for marketers to achieve.

The abundance of marketing messages reaching consumers every day is often referred to as clutter. Whereas clutter might not be too problematic for consumers (of course, you might be annoyed by advertising breaks, our woman might suffer some embarrassing moments when trying to tell others that Brad Pitt promotes Carlsberg, and our man might lose out on a delightful vacation) it does, in fact, pose a major challenge to marketers. In the

examples, expensive TV spots and billboards were ineffective and investments made by Heineken turned out to stimulate a purchase of one of their leading competitors. Avoiding these outcomes should be a top priority for marketers.

This thesis sets out to investigate challenges to marketing communications posed by a highly competitive communication environment. It is my hope that it will add to our understanding of this challenge and, in doing so, what marketers can do to overcome it.

Message Competition in Marketing Communications

Marketers are finding it hard to get through to consumers. Messages stemming from advertising, promotions, PR, direct marketing, and salesmen are everywhere. Consumers encounter these messages on their way to work, in newspapers and magazines, stores and restaurants, when watching their favorite sports, looking out of their airplane window¹, or even while socializing with their friends². In this clutter, it is far from easy for marketers to stand out and make their messages heard.

It is difficult to say how many marketing messages an average consumer is exposed to each day. A typical magazine may comprise of close to 70 ads (Malaviya, Meyers-Levy, and Sternthal 1999). Within one single commercial break on TV, as many as 18 ads could be included; three hours in front of the TV could mean being exposed to over 100 advertising messages – not counting those placed within actual programs (Dunér and Jönsson 2007). If consumers were to pay careful attention to all these messages, they would, indeed, have little time to do anything else. Estimates of total advertising exposure range between 254 and 5 000 messages a day (Creamer and Klaassen 2007). Even if the lower estimate is used, consumers could be expected to encounter more than ten ads every hour. Adjusting for eight hours of sleep, the number rises to 16.

Generally, consumers only pay little attention to ads (e.g., Dahlén and Edenius 2007, Pham and Johar 1997). During ad breaks on TV, consumers talk to their friends, go to the bathroom, or pick up a book or a magazine (Brodin 2007). When surfing the internet, they avoid banners by scrolling down Web pages and install software to block pop-ups (Cho and Cheon 2004). According to Kumar (2000), consumers will remember less than 25% of the ads they are exposed to each day. Using the estimates above, this would mean that consumers remember over 63 marketing messages each day. Most likely, the actual number is lower.

What is more, brands generally are advertised alongside competing brands. In a typical magazine the number of brands within one specific category can be up to six (Malaviya et al 1999). Over a decade ago, Kent (1993) found that

¹ As in a campaign for Swedish railway company SJ.

² As in buzz marketing

32% of all brands advertised on American prime-time TV had at least one competing brand advertised within that hour. 10 years later, Law (2002) estimated it to be 41%. This competition makes marketing communications even more challenging. Not only does clutter decrease the chances of gaining attention; when consisting of ads for direct competitors it breeds confusion between brands. For instance, in the beer category it has been reported that as much as 20% of the advertising for well-known beer brands is thought to promote competing brands (Pham and Johar 1997). In the same study, the slogan for the leading beer brand was confused with other brands in 40% of the cases.

The clutter of marketing messages has also been found to cause irritation amongst consumers (e.g., Dunér and Jönsson 2007; Ha 1996). As a consequence, many consumers are negatively disposed towards advertising in general (e.g., Grusell 2008). Irritation is generally higher when media consumption is interrupted by advertising. For instance, Swedes are more positive towards advertising in newspapers than on TV (Grusell 2006; 2008) and few consider advertising-intensive publications such as the Yellow Pages as cluttered (Elliott and Speck 1998).

Consumers' negative opinions of advertising pose two main challenges for marketers. First, consumers who are negatively disposed to advertising actively make choices against it. Sixteen percent of all Swedes have a "No Advertising Please" sign on their mailboxes and an additional 16% are thinking about putting one up. In larger cities (where total advertising exposure is higher), 28% have such a sign and 18% are considering one (Grusell 2006). On the internet, "banner blindness" is used to describe how consumers actively avoid fixing their eyes on anything that looks like an ad (Cho and Cheon 2004). Second, negative opinions are used to discount claims made by marketers (Friestad and Wright 1994, Obermiller, Spangenberg, and MacLachlan 2005), thus reducing the chances of claims being accepted and opinions changed.

Given this description, it should not be surprising that the challenges posed by a cluttered environment are among the most publicized issues in advertising trade literature (Danaher, Bonfrer, and Dhar 2008). The aim of any marketing communications effort is to shape consumers' brand knowledge, either by making the brand more salient or by affecting brand perceptions and evaluations. These mental changes are meant to increase the

likelihood of consumers buying the advertised brand (Rossiter and Percy 1997; Percy and Elliott 2005). To succeed, marketers must ensure that consumers pay attention to their messages and that they remember the brand and what it has to offer at a later time. As evident by the discussion above, clutter makes this difficult.

What might, however, be more surprising is that academic research on clutter – and the challenges posed by it – is quite rare (Nan and Faber 2004, Tellis 2005). Although marketing practitioners and researchers have long acknowledged clutter as a key challenge (e.g., Ray and Webb 1986, Webb and Ray 1979), little research actually takes it into account (Nan and Faber 2004, Vakratsas and Ambler 1999). In their review of advertising-related articles published in six leading journals³, Nan and Faber (2004) found that more than 90% of the articles empirically testing advertising effects did not include competing advertising. Similar results are presented by McQuarrie (1998), who concludes that advertising experiments typically exclude key features of the environments in which most advertising takes place. However, when the context of a message, such as editorial content and competing advertising, is considered, communication effects seem to change (e.g., Chang 2004, Malaviya 2007). To be better equipped to handle the challenge of clutter, more research in a cluttered setting is needed (Nan and Faber 2004). The current thesis is a step in that direction.

Practical Relevance of the Thesis

The practical relevance of studying marketing communications in a cluttered environment is quite straightforward. Each year, firms invest substantially in communicating their brands. In 2007, Swedish companies invested more than 63 billion SEK in marketing communications (www.irm-media.se). If such investments are not beneficial it is, indeed, problematic. Although academic research offers many guidelines on how to improve communication effectiveness, most research focuses on ads in isolation (Tellis 2005; Vakratsas and Ambler 1999). These guidelines thus give little advice to the marketer when it comes to understanding the highly competitive media environment in which his/her brand is communicated.

³ The review included articles from Journal of Advertising, Journal of Advertising Research, Journal of Current Issues and Research in Advertising, Journal of Consumer Research, Journal of Marketing, and Journal of Marketing Research, 1993-2002

Another reason to put clutter into focus is that the lack of research does not equal a lack of opinions on the issue. The challenges of clutter are widely discussed (Danaher et al 2008). For instance, Kaledin (2006) refers to clutter as the conundrum of modern day marketing, Neff (2007) likens clutter with pollution and global warming, and Upshaw (2008) argues that it is high time for marketers to boot this elephant (in the room). Synthesizing existing research on clutter and adding new insights should provide a welcome step in this direction.

A final reason for studying clutter is that it is often used as an excuse to write off advertising in favor of new and alternative communications such as PR (e.g., Ries and Ries 2002), permission marketing (e.g., Godin 1999), or buzz marketing (e.g., Salzman, Matathia, and O'Reilly 2003). These alternative means of marketing communications are often said to be unaffected by clutter. Nevertheless, without systematic research, many of these claims remain but speculations and common wisdoms (cf. Rosengren and Dahlén 2006).

Academic Relevance of the Thesis

Although the practical relevance of studying clutter might be enough to motivate academic research on the topic, there are some additional reasons for studying marketing communications effects in a cluttered environment that I wish to address.

First, the lack of contextual richness of many advertising studies can be explained by the experimental settings used. Advertising research tends to use various ad appeals or formats of execution as independent variables and assess their effects in terms of mental processes. To ensure control over these processes, novel stimuli and controlled exposures are used. The experimental approach offers a rigorous analysis of causality, but might lack relevance to real-market situations (Tellis 2005). It is therefore important to complement such approaches with more ecologically valid investigations (McQuarrie 1998, Tellis 2005). Instead of creating artificial responses through manipulations, several researchers have argued the need for using the natural variance that respondents bring into the ad exposure (e.g., Bergkvist and Rossiter 2006, Muehling, Laczniak, and Stoltman 1991). An enquiry into marketing communications clutter offers an opportunity to combine real world complexities with the control of a laboratory setting.

Second, academic research on marketing communications has predominantly been concerned with advertising (Keller 2001). In their efforts to fight clutter, marketers are, however, increasingly turning towards alternative means of communication. By considering the challenge of clutter, this move is highlighted and the question of whether or not clutter is relevant to marketing communications other than advertising is raised. For instance, PR is often suggested to be a solution to the problems discussed above. By being part of the editorial content, publicity is suggested to ensure attention to and raise credibility of marketing messages (e.g., The Economist 2006; Kitchen 1993). Still, consumers' media habits are complex and incomplete (Pilotta and Schultz 2005) suggesting that not all editorial content will be attended to. For instance, approximately 50% of American newspaper readers attend to half or less of a newspaper's content on an average day (McCauley and Nesbit 2005). Being present in the editorial content, then, does not necessarily mean that your message will get noticed and have an effect.

Third, the conceptualization of clutter as advertising also seems out of step with recent changes in the media landscape. Current discussions of clutter rest on the notion that marketing messages are surrounded by editorial content. However, a sharp distinction between editorial and advertising content no longer seems valid. The internet has led to advertising messages being included in e-mails and chat rooms (Edwards, Li, and Lee 2002). Furthermore, with a growing use of PR among marketers, the share of publicity-based editorial content is likely to grow (Balasubramanian, Karrh, and Patwardhan 2006, Sheehan and Guo 2005). Creating a common understanding of clutter and ensuring that it is in line with current developments should facilitate further research into the challenges posed by competing messages.

Aim of the Thesis

The aim of this thesis is to further our understanding of marketing communications in a cluttered environment. Through empirical investigations of marketing communications effects and a conceptual discussion of clutter, I want to contribute to the literature on marketing communications effectiveness.

In the thesis, I seek new insights on marketing communications in the presence of competing messages by using ecologically valid settings in my

empirical investigations. More specifically, I study communication effects in cluttered environments of three instances of marketing communications, namely: slogans, media choice and publicity.

Outline of the Thesis

This thesis consists of two parts. It starts with a conceptual discussion of clutter and what is currently known about its effects. The discussion is followed by empirical studies presented in five articles. The conceptual discussion, which follows in the sections below, provides a deeper understanding of clutter and functions as a framework for my empirical investigations. It also summarizes the empirical work and gives a brief overview of the articles. Although it precedes the articles, it has to a large extent been written as a result of the empirical studies. The discussion could thus be regarded as part of the overall contribution rather than as a review of previous research.

The second part of the thesis comprises five articles in which issues of clutter are empirically investigated. Specifically, conventional wisdoms regarding slogans, media choice, and PR are put to test in more ecologically valid settings than what has been used in previous research. By including these settings, our understanding of marketing communications in the presence of competing messages is improved. The articles also point out different ways for marketers to face the challenges of clutter.

Understanding Clutter

As this thesis aims to increase our understanding of marketing communications by explicitly considering its cluttered environment, it is necessary to clarify what is meant by clutter. This is especially important as there is no established way to define or conceptualize clutter in a marketing context. In the following sections, I will therefore try to delineate the meaning of clutter. I will also briefly summarize effects of clutter found in previous studies. The following discussion aims to provide a deeper understanding of clutter and serves as a point of reference for the five articles.

What is Clutter?

In plain English, clutter means a confused state or a disordered collection. It is often used to refer to disorganized parts of people's homes such as attics and desks. In a marketing context, clutter is used by practitioners, academics, and journalists to denote what is broadly described as an excessive amount of advertising (e.g., Danaher et al 2008; Rumbo 2002). Excess means that the quantity, amount, or degree is more than what is justifiable, tolerable, or desirable.

What constitutes excessive advertising will, however, depend on who you ask. Whereas the common understanding of marketing communications clutter seems to lay at a general level – as a descriptor of the state of affairs in the highly commercialized society of today (cf. Rumbo 2002) – marketers tend to have a more narrow focus. Furthermore, marketers' perceptions of excessive advertising often differ from that of consumers (Rotfeld 2006). In the following, I will briefly discuss different views of clutter used in previous research. I will then introduce the conceptualization of clutter used in the current thesis.

Dimensions of Clutter

Although my description of clutter this far has emphasized the quantity of advertising messages reaching consumers each day, Ha (1996) suggests that advertising excessiveness (or, as she calls it, advertising density) within a media vehicle could be conceptualized in terms of three dimensions: quantity, competitiveness, and intrusiveness. She also proposes that each of these dimensions of clutter affects advertising effectiveness differently. Below follows a brief introduction to her framework.

Quantity refers to both the number of advertisements and the proportion of ad space in a media vehicle. Quantity is thus synonymous with the degree of commercialization of a media vehicle. The more ads, the less attention an average ad will get, and the less effective it will be. Negative effects of clutter quantity have to do with information overload. Too many ads overload consumers with a large quantity of information, which they are unable to process.

Competitiveness is defined as the degree of similarity of the advertised products and the proximity between the advertisements of competitive brands in the same product category in a media vehicle. When products are similar, consumers easily confuse one product with another. Such confusion increases with the proximity of competitive advertisements. Clutter competitiveness thus reduces advertising effectiveness by causing interference, rendering consumers unable to remember what brand was advertised.

Intrusiveness denotes the degree to which advertisements in a media vehicle interrupt the flow of an editorial unit. Including ads in the editorial domain could make it harder for consumers to enjoy their media experience. Such intrusions might therefore lead to negative reactions. The proposed effects of intrusiveness are based on reactance theory. When consumers' freedom of choice is constrained they try to regain it by skipping ads and resisting persuasion.

In her empirical investigations of the three dimensions, Ha (1996) finds individual differences in perceived clutter, especially when it comes to intrusiveness. Some consumers enjoy advertising and find it to be a welcome addition to their media experience. Others are more negative and consider all ads, no matter how few or how discretely placed, to be intrusive. Furthermore, consumers' perceptions of quantity seem closely aligned with the actual number of ads, whereas they do not seem to notice differences in competitiveness.

Perspectives on Clutter

What clutter is will also depend on who you ask. In previous research three main perspectives on clutter have been used: the media owner, the consumer, and the marketer. What constitutes clutter, and what challenges it poses, differs somewhat between these perspectives.

For *media owners*, clutter is about the content of their products. The key issue is how to balance the editorial and non-editorial content in order to maximize the value of a media product (e.g., Ha and Litman 1997; James 2008). This is what Ha (1996) refers to as the quantity of clutter. A high level of clutter has been operationalized as one that exceeds the average proportion of ads in that medium (cf. Ha and Litman 1997). Clutter has thus been treated as a relative phenomenon. In the context of magazines, the appropriate

balance between advertising and editorial content has been found to be approximately 50 / 50 (Ha and Litman 1997).

For *consumers*, clutter is mainly about irrelevant and interruptive advertising (e.g., Elliott and Speck 1998; Grusell 2008). When consumers seek out advertising to inform themselves about brands, ads do not constitute clutter, but when ads are forced upon consumers, for instance, through a commercial pod in a film screened on TV, they most likely do. Ha (1996) refers to this as the intrusiveness of clutter. Taking the perspective of consumers, Elliott and Speck (1998) define clutter in terms of the perceived excess of advertising messages within a medium. What consumers perceive as excess differ between media (Elliot and Speck 1998; Speck and Elliott 1997b) and media vehicles within the same medium (Ha and Litman 1997). From a consumer perspective, high clutter is at hand in situations when an individual finds advertising to be too much and/or too intrusive.

For *marketers*, clutter is about competing messages surrounding the own communication effort and how they influence communication effectiveness (e.g., Burke and Srull 1988; Keller 1991). Typically, clutter is discussed as a property of a specific medium such as TV (e.g, Kent 1993) or a media vehicle such as a specific magazine (e.g, Ha 1996). Definitions of clutter vary in whether they include all non-editorial content (e.g., Brown and Rothschild 1993; Webb and Ray 1979), or advertising content only (e.g., Ha 1996; Kent 1993). Focus has mainly been on clutter quantity, and sometimes a distinction is made between overall and competitive clutter (cf. Ha 1996). The effects of competitive clutter are generally stronger than those of clutter quantity (Nan and Faber 2004). There is, however, no established way to assess if clutter is high or low. To some extent, clutter seems to be considered high in situations when competing messages are detrimental to advertising effectiveness.

Conceptualizing Clutter

As this thesis is about marketing communications effectiveness, it takes a marketer's perspective on clutter. The American Marketing Association's dictionary of marketing terminology (www.marketingpower.com) offers two definitions of clutter:

<i>Clutter</i>	<i>The condition that exists when many ads or commercials are placed too closely together in space or time</i>
<i>Clutter, advertising</i>	<i>The extent to which multiple messages compete for the consumers' (limited) attention. It often is used to indicate multiple competing messages in one medium (such as television) or place</i>

These definitions indicate that clutter is generally perceived as a problem for advertising. Clutter denotes too much advertising in the same time and place, but also the message competition caused by this condition. To me, this conceptualization is too narrow. Advertising is but one of several marketing communications options available to marketers. And, given the high levels of everyday exposure to marketing communications, looking at only one medium or media vehicle would mean a myopic view of overall message competition. As suggested by Elliott and Speck (1998), there are long-term threshold effects of clutter. These effects occur over time as consumers develop strategies to deal with repeated exposures to high levels of advertising, through many different channels.

In the current thesis, I will extend the notion of clutter to denote *all marketing messages* surrounding a *marketing communications effort* and the competition they cause. Whereas previous research has mainly used clutter to refer to the “non-editorial content” in specific media vehicles (Nan and Faber 2004), my conceptualization is broader and includes marketing messages in shapes other than advertising. Also, it does not restrict clutter to a certain space or time, thus taking the cumulative nature of clutter into account. My general idea is that marketing communication efforts do not exist in isolation. Competing messages pose major challenges for marketers wanting to affect what consumers think of their brands. I use clutter to point out this competition and references to the cluttered environment of brands to connote the challenges it causes.

My conceptualization of clutter thus broadens the current notion of clutter in several ways. First, by focusing on a marketing communications effort rather than advertising, clutter is made relevant to all marketing communications. Moreover, suggesting that all marketing messages surrounding such efforts constitute clutter means seeing marketing messages stemming from communication efforts other than advertising as contributing to clutter. For

instance, the growing use of marketing PR has led to a high level of editorial content being influenced by marketers (The Economist 2006; Rosengren and Dahlén 2006). Although these messages are not part of the advertising content, they are marketing messages and they are competing for consumers' (limited) attention. To some extent, editorial content could thus also be clutter. Any article covering a brand must compete with other content, both editorial and advertising, for the eyes of consumers (e.g., McCauley and Nesbit 2005; Ha 1996). This means that editorial content also is part of the challenge of message competition. Finally, my conceptualization avoids a myopic view of clutter. By extending clutter in this way, my notion is more in line with current marketing communications practice.

To illustrate this point consider event marketing, which is frequently being used by marketers as a way to gain attention and improve perceptions of their brands (e.g., Drengner, Gaus, and Jahn 2008). Instead of using an ad to communicate a message, an event is created. For instance, energy drink Red Bull often complements traditional advertising with spectacular events. To communicate its key message of "Red Bull gives you wings" events such as the Red Bull Flugtag are created. Looking at the AMA definitions, clutter should not be an issue for this event. The event is "owned" by Red Bull, and no other brands will be present at the same place during the time of the event. Furthermore, the number of events taking place each day should be small compared to the number of ads. Using my notion of clutter, however, clutter is indeed, relevant to the Flugtag too. Although the event might be without competing messages, consumers are likely to have been exposed to advertising when getting there (be it through radio ads in their cars or public transport posters). What is more, to get consumers to attend the event, it needs to be communicated to consumers in ads or, through the use of PR, as editorial content. And finally, consumers are likely to see the event as "advertising" for Red Bull (cf. Dahlén and Edenius 2007) thus being another advertising exposure to add to their 254 or so daily exposures.

Thinking that advertising is the only marketing communications option faced with clutter seems like a gross simplification. As unconventional marketing communications options gain in popularity they should all be affected by and contribute to clutter (cf. Rosengren and Dahlén 2006). Whether or not a message is communicated through a sponsorship or a traditional ad, it still competes with other messages for the eyes and ears of consumers. By

extending the notion of clutter to denote all marketing messages surrounding a marketing communications effort this competition is acknowledged.

Conclusion: What is Clutter?

Although clutter generally refers to some kind of advertising excess there is no established definition of clutter. It has been suggested that perceptions of clutter depend on the overall quantity, competitiveness, and intrusiveness of advertising. Each of these dimensions of clutter poses a different challenge to communication effectiveness. Clutter has also been investigated from three different perspectives: the media owner, the consumer, and the marketer. To some extent, it could be said that media owners' main concern with clutter is quantity, consumers' intrusiveness, and marketers' competitiveness.

In this thesis I will use the marketer's perspective. Clutter will be used to denote all marketing messages surrounding a marketing communications effort and the competition they cause. This means that I consider clutter to comprise of, and be relevant to, all marketing communications – not only advertising. This notion of clutter is broader than the ones used in previous research.

Effects of Clutter

Research on communication effectiveness and clutter has mainly taken one of two routes. The first route focuses on general effects, mainly in terms of different coping strategies such as advertising avoidance or advertising skepticism (e.g., Elliott and Speck 1998, Grusell 2008). The second route investigates how clutter affects specific brands (e.g., Burke and Srull 1988, Danaher et al 2008). In the latter route, communication effects such as brand awareness and brand attitudes have been studied. The first line of research can thus be said to investigate how clutter sets the overall conditions for marketing communications, whereas the second looks at its effects on specific brands.

In the following, a brief summary of previous research on clutter is given. Effects of clutter are the center of attention, but approaches used to account for clutter are also introduced. The overview is complemented by a brief introduction into media context research. This line of research rarely sets out to address the clutter challenges, but as it takes the context of ads into account it should be useful for our understanding of the effects of clutter.

When reading the following sections, it should be remembered that clutter research to date has focused on advertising. The research efforts presented has thus conceptualized and investigated clutter in ways that differ from my proposed conceptualization. Still, the effects found should help our understanding of clutter.

General Effects

Clutter has been found to influence how consumers relate to advertising in general. More specifically, research shows that perceived clutter leads to lower attitudes towards advertising in a medium (Ha 1996; Elliott and Speck 1998). A negative predisposition tends to breed ad skepticism and make it difficult for brands wanting to change consumers' perceptions through advertising (Obermiller et al 2005; MacKenzie and Lutz 1989). For instance, consumers who have negative attitudes towards advertising in general will pay less attention to ads, and be less influenced by them, than those with more positive attitudes (Mehta 2000).

Another consequence of negative attitudes towards advertising in a medium is ad avoidance (Speck and Elliott 1997b). Ad avoidance takes different forms in different media (Cho and Cheon 2004; Speck and Elliott 1997b). For TV advertising, it could be tuning out ads or switching channels during ad breaks. For newspapers it could be discarding advertising inserts and pages that contain only ads. And, for the internet, it could be intentionally avoiding looking at banners and installing software to block out unwanted pop-ups. Ads that are completely avoided will obviously have little effect on what consumers think about a brand (Rossiter and Percy 1997).

Negative attitudes towards advertising are connected with finding ads to be interfering, bothersome, and invasive (Edwards et al 2002; Ha 1996). As an illustration, consumers perceive TV and direct mail to be highly cluttered, whereas catalogues and classifieds are judged to have little clutter (Elliott and Speck 1998; Shavitt, Vargas, and Lowrey 2004). Similarly, advertising on TV and the internet is less appreciated than newspaper and cinema advertising (Grusell 2006; 2008). The general effects of clutter are thus driven by consumers' perceptions of excessive advertising rather than the actual number of ads per se (e.g., Ha 1996; Shavitt et al 2004).

Research on general effects has mainly been descriptive. Samples of the general population have been selected to participate in survey-like

investigations with self-reports of attitudes and behaviors (e.g., Dutta-Bergman 2006; Grusell 2008; Speck and Elliott 1997b). A few studies have, however, assessed the effects of clutter in a more direct way. In such studies, respondents have been asked to answer questions after reading actual magazines with real (Mehta 2000) or manipulated content (Ha 1996; Speck and Elliott 1997a, study 2).

Brand Specific Effects

Summarizing existing research on the direct effects of clutter, it can be concluded that clutter is most powerful in situations where consumers are not highly involved. For instance, negative effects are mostly found in situations where consumers do not have a clear purchase intention (Burke and Srull 1988), use ad-related rather than brand-related processing strategies (Keller 1991), or have low involvement in the product category (Breneman, Geuens, and De Pelsmacker 2001). Generally, familiar brands are also less sensitive to clutter than are unfamiliar brands (e.g., Kent and Allen 1994; Kent and Kellaris 2001). Furthermore, clutter competitiveness has a stronger impact on advertising effectiveness than does clutter quantity (Nan and Faber 2004). The discussion of brand specific effects will therefore be divided in two. The first part focuses on clutter quantity and the second part on clutter competitiveness.

Clutter Quantity

Clutter quantity has mainly been investigated in connection to general effects as described in the section above. The general effects influence consumers' perceptions of brand specific communications by restricting attention and reducing chances of acceptance. In terms of communication effects for brands (cf. Percy and Elliott 2005; Rossiter and Percy 1997), ad avoidance reduces the chances to get attention and thus makes it difficult to achieve brand awareness whereas ad skepticism makes it harder to achieve positive brand attitudes.

However, there is also more specific research on how clutter quantity in a media vehicle affects communication effectiveness for specific brands. Clutter quantity mainly influences marketing communications at exposure. This is usually explained in terms of information overload (Ha 1996; Nan and Faber 2004). Due to limited mental capacity, as the number of message increases, the likelihood that any given message will be processed or remembered is reduced (Pieters, Warlop, and Wedel 2002; Riebe and Dawes

2006). The number of ads has also been found to reduce ad persuasion and likeability (Kent 1993). The impact is, however, less clear cut when it comes to communication effects such as brand attitudes and purchase intentions (Nan and Faber 2004).

Whereas the general effects are driven by consumers' perceptions of clutter, quantity effects are more objective. The effects of clutter quantity seem to be present mainly at lower levels of competing messages. For instance, when the number of ads increased from four to eight within 25 minutes of programming, Webb and Ray (1979) found that overall attention, processing, and memory of specific ads decreased. When increasing the number of ads from 10 to 15 to 20 within 30 minutes of programming, Brown and Rothschild (1993) found no such effects. A possible interpretation of these findings would be that as the number of ads approaches 10, consumers no longer have the ability (or motivation) to attend to all ads (Speck and Elliott 1997a). This would suggest that in the highly cluttered communication environment of today, information overload is a given.

Much attention has also been given to the effect of placement within TV ad pods on memory of ads (e.g., Mord and Gilson 1985; Zhao 1997). The results from these studies are quite complex, but as the number of ads in a pod increases, memory for ads generally decreases. Prior advertising has also been found to influence evaluations of brands by priming different mindsets amongst consumers (Labroo and Lee 2006; Poncin, Pieters, and Ambaye 2006, Yi 1990).

Most research on clutter quantity has investigated ads embedded in editorial content. Operationalizations range from relative measures, such as the ratio of ad content to overall content for magazines (e.g., Ha 1996; Ha and Litman 1997) or ad time per hour for TV and radio (e.g., Mord and Gilson 1985; Riebe and Dawes 2006) to the absolute number of ads within a specific segment, such as an ad pod (e.g., Zhao 1997) or an hour of programming (e.g., Kent 1995; Kent 1993). In these studies, the ad-to-editorial levels are either manipulated (e.g., Ha 1996; Brown and Rothschild 1993) or based on real media vehicles (Ha and Litman 1997; Pieters et al 2002).

From a marketer's perspective, research on clutter quantity thus suggests that looking at the number of ads in different exposure contexts could help assess the influence of clutter on advertising effectiveness, mostly in terms of its

impact on attention. As consumers have limited mental resources, too many ads in close proximity to the own ad are likely to reduce the effectiveness of each ad.

Clutter Competitiveness

Competitive clutter has a more pronounced effect on advertising effectiveness than clutter quantity. This is true for ads promoting brands within the same category (e.g., Burke and Srull 1988; Kent and Allen 1994), especially when ads use similar claims (Kent 1993), ad evaluations are similar (Keller 1991), or ads share the same modality (Unnava, Rajagopal, and Raju 2003, study 2).

The negative effects caused by competitive clutter have mainly to do with consumers being unable to remember what was said by whom. Competitive clutter encountered both before and after exposure to an ad can influence how and how well it is remembered (Burke and Srull 1988). The effect is due to overlaps between information in consumers' minds and new information. This is often referred to as competitive interference (e.g., Dahmén and Nordfält 2004; Danaher et al 2008). Previously learned information might interfere with information currently being learned (proactive interference) and newly learned information with information learned previously (retroactive interference, cf. Reber and Reber 2001). This is also called response competition (cf. Burke and Srull 1988; Kent and Allen 1994; Kumar and Krishnan 2004): different associations formed with the same (or similar) target stimulus compete at recall, making it more difficult to remember. The actual effect thus occurs at retrieval (Jewell and Unnava 2003; Kumar and Krishnan 2004).

The effects of competitive clutter have received more attention than those of clutter quantity. Ads for competing brands have been found to decrease memory for ad claims (e.g., Burke and Srull 1988; Keller 1991), increase ad-brand confusion (e.g., Law 2002; Pham and Johar 1997), and lower brand identification (e.g., Kent and Kellaris 2001; Unnava et al 2003). To some extent these negative effects have also been found to affect brand attitudes (Keller 1991). In a recent study, Danaher et al (2008) also show that the negative effects are transferred into lower sales. They also find that the effects are due to the total number of brands being advertised rather than overall category spending.

Research on clutter competitiveness has predominantly been conducted in an artificial environment. Usually researchers have used the absolute number of ads within the same category to operationalize competitive clutter. Typically, two or three ads for competing brands are included in booklets consisting of 12-16 ads in total (e.g., Burke and Srull 1988; Keller 1991). Few studies use any editorial or programming content (for exceptions, see Ha 1996; Leong, Ang, and Heng 1999). An exception is Danaher et al (2008) who use panel data and real sales in their investigation.

From a marketer's perspective, research on competitive clutter highlights the importance of considering what brands will be communicated in a certain context. When several brands from the same category are communicated in close proximity to each other, consumers are likely to confuse the messages and have a difficult time to identify the sponsoring brands.

Media Context Effects

The basic reason for studying clutter is that the context in which a message is exposed will influence its effectiveness. Although clutter research focuses on the context in terms of other marketing messages, there is a growing stream of research concerned with other aspects of this context and how they affect advertising effectiveness. This research does not set out to address clutter per se, but should still be useful for understanding the challenges posed by a cluttered environment.

Basically, advertising context could be divided into receiver context and medium context (De Pelsmacker, Geuens, and Van den Bergh 2007). Receiver context denotes the situational circumstances in which a person is exposed to an ad, such as in their homes, at work, alone or in the company of others (e.g., Brodin 2007; Puntoni 2005). The medium context refers to characteristics of the content in which the ad is inserted, for instance, TV ads being placed before, in, or after TV programs or billboards being placed on the wall of a building or in a bus shelter (De Pelsmacker et al 2007).

Media context research predominantly considers the editorial content of a media vehicle (e.g., De Pelsmacker et al 2007; De Pelsmacker et al 2002). Studies have shown how the immediate editorial environment influences affective responses, which, in turn, affect ad processing and communication

effects (Dahlén 2005).⁴ Although the interest in the setting is shared with clutter research, the studies focus on the relation rather than competition between messages. Still, Jun and colleagues (2003), find that the editorial context can contribute to competitive interference in much the same way as advertising.

Looking at the study designs, it becomes evident that both editorial and advertising content have been included in most studies. The media context literature has mainly dealt with TV (e.g., De Pelsmacker et al 2002, Lord, Burnkrant, and Unnava 2001), but attention has also been given to print media (e.g., Moorman, Neijens, Smit 2002; Yi 1993). Focus has been on the immediate context, that is, the editorial context in direct connection to an ad. In extreme cases this means placing one article as a prime before an ad in a booklet (e.g., Yi 1990, 1993). Recently, however, more ecologically valid approaches with real magazines have been used (Jun et al 2003; Moorman et al 2002).

Conceptualizing Effects on Different Levels

Reviewing the current literature on clutter and media context effects, it becomes clear that clutter can be investigated on different levels of aggregation. Whereas the common understanding of clutter seems to lie at a general level – as a descriptor of the highly commercialized society of today (cf. Rumbo 2002) – academic research on clutter and media context effects tends to focus on media vehicles.

Creating a hierarchy of clutter seems like an important way to achieve more precision in discussing clutter. What you refer to as clutter will depend on how far from the actual marketing message you extend your view. Structuring clutter in terms of different levels of aggregation should facilitate discussions of the problem.

On an overall level we have what could be described as *societal clutter*. This refers to the many marketing messages faced by an average consumer each day (as discussed in the introduction). The exposures take place in a number of different places such as in the street, in magazines, on TV and so forth. Marketing messages on this level stem from all types of marketing

⁴ For more detailed reviews of media context effects, please refer to De Pelsmacker et al (2007) and De Pelsmacker et al (2002)

communications efforts, for instance, events, PR, sponsorships, and advertising.

Societal clutter is always present. Even if marketers find new ways to communicate with their target audiences, for instance by creative use of new media (cf. Dahlén 2005), societal clutter cannot be avoided. What is more, any new marketing communications efforts will add to clutter on this level (Rosengren and Dahlén 2006). Generally speaking, academic research on societal clutter has been scarce. When considered, general – rather than brand specific – effects have been investigated (e.g., Grusell 2008; Shavitt et al 2004).

On a somewhat lower level of aggregation we have *media clutter*. This refers to the different messages communicated in a specific media vehicle such as in one issue of a magazine or during one TV show. During media consumption, consumers make trade-offs regarding what content to pay attention to. To some extent, they might also make trade-offs between different media consumed at the same time (Pilotta and Schultz 2005).

Previous research on this level has mainly looked at trade-offs in terms of advertising. For example, a typical magazine comprises close to 70 ads, advertising brands in an average of 18 product categories (Malaviya et al 1999). In American network TV, approximately 10-15 minutes of every hour is filled with advertising (Gough 2007). Focusing on advertising context might seem enough as, generally speaking, consumers are more likely to pay attention to editorial content (van Reijmersdal, Neijens, and Smit 2005). But, as pointed out by Ha (1996), both types of content compete for the attention of consumers. Just as consumers might not pay attention to all ads in a newspaper, they might not read all articles either (cf. McCauley and Nesbit 2005). For a marketer, it should be important to consider the competition posed by both types of content. When doing so, insights from media context research should be useful.

For marketers, media clutter is more controllable than societal clutter. Careful media planning should be one way to ensure as beneficial a context as possible (e.g., Kent 1993). Such planning should be helped by assessments of clutter quantity and competitiveness, as well as an understanding of consumers' perceptions of intrusiveness.

Immediate clutter refers to marketing messages in immediate proximity to each other, for instance, on the same page in a magazine or in the same ad break on TV. This is the most disaggregated level of clutter. As an example, although media clutter on American network TV is stable in terms of minutes per hour, the number of ads in each break is increasing due to shorter ads (Gough 2007). Immediate clutter is thus growing.

Academics who are explicitly interested in the immediate level mainly focus on either the immediate editorial content (e.g., De Pelsmacker et al 2002) or the immediate advertising content (e.g., Poncin et al 2006). Researchers not explicitly interested in clutter, but wanting to increase the realism of their viewing situations, often take this level of clutter into account (cf. Brown and Stayman 1992; McQuarrie 1998). In Brown and Stayman's (1992) meta-study approximately a third of all studies on attitude towards the ad used this type of approach. In a review of advertising experiments by McQuarrie (1998), 17% did. While neither of these two studies distinguish between imbeddedness in terms of advertising or editorial content, both should be important to achieve realistic viewing conditions for experiments (Ha 1996; McQuarrie 1998).

Even if quite a lot of research has been conducted on the immediate level, it might be less controllable from a marketer's perspective. Although the findings are important, the practical implications are limited as marketers will generally have little influence on which additional brands will be advertised within an ad break or what specific editorial content will be placed next to it. Whereas media planning might help you identify appropriate vehicles, it should be more difficult to ensure being placed next to editorial content or advertising that has a certain profile.

Conclusion: Effects of Clutter

Previous research on the effects of clutter has mainly focused on advertising. A distinction can be made between general and specific effects of clutter:

- *General effects*: Clutter leads to ad avoidance and ad skepticism, making it difficult for all marketers to get their messages across. Ad avoidance hinders brand awareness and ad skepticism makes it harder to achieve positive brand attitudes. These effects are driven by consumers' perceptions of clutter.

- *Specific effects*: Clutter quantity leads to information overload, lowering the chances of any specific ad getting attention. Competitive clutter leads to ad confusion. This effect has been found to transfer into lower brand attitudes and sales. The effects are driven by the actual quantity and competitiveness of clutter.

Research on media context has mainly been concerned with the relation rather than competition between editorial and advertising messages. There is, however, some indication that editorial content can cause competitive interference, thus supporting the notion of including some editorial content when conceptualizing clutter.

Looking at the literature on clutter and media context effects, it becomes clear that clutter can be investigated on different levels of aggregation:

- *Societal clutter*: The total amount of marketing messages within society. It is often referred to in general discussions regarding a commercialized society, but has not been highly researched.
- *Media clutter*: The different marketing messages within a specific media vehicle. This could be both advertising and editorial messages. However, previous research has mainly focused on advertising.
- *Immediate clutter*: Marketing messages in immediate proximity to each other. Previous research has considered either advertising or editorial messages.

Towards a Better Understanding of Clutter

As indicated by the review of previous research, clutter is a complex phenomenon. In part, this is due to the multifaceted nature of the message competition it sets out to denote, and, in part, it is due to the lack of a common understanding and definition of the term. When bringing together different research efforts, it becomes evident that there is, indeed, knowledge to be found. At the same time, gaps and areas in need of further investigations appear.

Whereas the current thesis hopes to add to our understanding of marketing communications clutter, I am aware that several important and pertinent issues will be left out. In the following sections I outline how the review of

previous research has informed the current thesis and what additions I intend to make to our understanding of clutter.

Sorting Out Clutter

In my review the need for a shared language for discussing clutter has become evident. The lack of a widespread conceptualization of clutter seems to have been standing in the way of efforts trying to contribute new insights into how message competition influences marketing communications effectiveness.

I suggest that clutter should be used to denote competition caused by all marketing messages surrounding a marketing communications effort. Expanding clutter in this way, points out that the challenges posed by message competition are not confined to advertising. I also suggest that structuring clutter in terms of level of aggregation should be helpful. My distinction between different levels of clutter is an attempt to provide a shared vocabulary for those interested in clutter.

Extending Clutter

Albeit lacking a common conceptualization of what clutter is, research to date has found that the effectiveness of an ad is influenced by other ads surrounding it. The effects are both general and specific. The general effects are shared between brands whereas specific effects refer to communication effects of a certain ad. Specific effects are more pronounced when consumers are not highly involved, for unfamiliar brands, and for ads within the same product category.

Marketing communications is, however, much more than advertising. The dominant position of advertising in research on clutter seems out of step with marketing communications practice. If my notion of clutter holds up, similar effects should be expected for marketing communications options other than advertising. As general effects are driven by perceived excessiveness and intrusiveness, this should be especially true for marketing communications practices that are widely used.

Studying Clutter

To account for clutter, a plethora of approaches and operationalizations have been used. Studies of overall clutter have mainly been survey-based, whereas

research on competitive clutter tends to have used experimental settings. A common denominator for the studies is their focus on advertising. Research on media context has, however, investigated the advertising context in terms of editorial content, but predominantly been concerned with the relation rather than competition between editorial and advertising messages.

I suggest that combining these two research traditions should give new insights. Studying clutter as comprising both advertising and editorial content, should also allow a test of whether or not my extended notion of clutter is appropriate. Finding ways to account for message competition within an experimental setting should be an important step in increasing our understanding of clutter.

Introducing the Articles

In addition to this introduction, my thesis contains five articles. The articles complement the conceptual discussion by empirically investigating communication effectiveness in a cluttered environment. Although my conceptual discussion has focused on understanding what clutter is and does, the articles offer investigations of marketing communication effects in different cluttered environments. The focus is not on the environments per se, but rather the necessity of including them in order to fully grasp the conditions for contemporary marketing communications. Separately and together the articles contribute new insights into the challenges posed by clutter.

The first two articles focus on competitive clutter and how it affects communication effects of slogans. Whereas previous research on competitive interference has mainly been conducted in experimental settings, focusing on immediate clutter of competing brands, these two articles study real brands and slogans, thereby inviting societal clutter into the assessment. The articles add a new dimension to current research on competitive clutter by studying clutter on a more aggregated level.

The following three articles focus on media clutter and how it affects decisions on where and how to communicate. They provide a test of my proposed extension of clutter. More specifically, the first of these articles investigates how media context might influence advertising effectiveness.

The other two assess the relative effectiveness of advertising and publicity in a cluttered media setting. The studies thus check the relevance of extending clutter to include more than advertising. Actual clutter in real newspapers and magazines is used as settings, meaning that media clutter is allowed to include both editorial and advertising content. This enables new insights into media planning and PR.

All articles challenge conventional wisdoms and point out how real world complexities might alter findings from experimental studies. In doing so they contribute to the literature on marketing communications clutter as well as to what is currently known about slogans, media choice and PR as such. By focusing on these three instances of marketing communications the articles collectively point towards the need to include cluttered environments in studies of marketing communications effectiveness.

In the following sections, the empirical part of the thesis is introduced. First, the methodology and studies conducted are presented. After that I introduce and summarize the five articles. When doing so, I focus on the role of each article within the scope of this thesis.

Methodology

The results presented in the articles come from four empirical studies. An overview of the studies is given in table 1. In the following, I will briefly go through how these studies were set up to study marketing communications in a cluttered environment.

To date, most advertising research has been conducted in a controlled experimental setting. This offers researchers control and enables them to isolate specific effects. Although such studies are indeed important, more ecologically valid approaches should provide complementary insights by assessing if results hold up in more complex settings (cf. Greenwald and Leavitt 1984; Muehling et al 1991). Whereas advertising experiments generally use forced exposures, advertising outside the laboratory must either win the attention of an audience or work while minimally attended to (McQuarrie 1998). Furthermore, any effects of a brand's communications will be dependent on what other brands are doing (McQuarrie 1998; Weilbacher 2001). Combining experimental studies with more ecologically valid ones should therefore be the best way forward (e.g., Tellis 2005).

The influence of clutter tends to be cumulative and general, making it hard to study in typical experiments (Speck and Elliott 1997a). For this thesis, creating settings that are representative for the cluttered environment of contemporary marketing communications was the main concern. Ecological validity was thus of major importance. In its original meaning ecological validity is not a validity type, but rather a method that calls for research with samples of settings and participants that reflect the ecology of application (Shadish, Cook, Campbell 2002). As the current thesis focuses on complex settings a uniform sample was deemed necessary. All studies therefore used student samples. This reduced the risk of errors due to random heterogeneity between subjects (Calder, Phillips, and Tybout 1982; Peterson 2001). To ensure that students were indeed part of the target audience, products and brands were selected based on their relevance for this population.

The use of real brands as stimuli was one way to increase ecological validity of the studies (Kent 2002; McQuarrie 1998). Consumers' current knowledge about and attitudes towards brands will influence how they perceive marketing communications (e.g. Rice and Bennet 1998, Tellis 1997). To better understand the effects of clutter on marketing communications effectiveness these differences need to be considered. By using real brands in my studies, the actual clutter of the market place is better accounted for. Including real brands trades off control in favor of the natural variance that consumers bring into their encounters with marketing communications (Muehling et al 1991).

Great care was also taken to ensure ecologically valid exposures both in terms of the stimuli used and the exposure setting (cf. Bergkvist and Rossiter 2006). All stimuli used (be it slogans, ads, or publicity) were either real or pre-tested to be realistic. The level of control over both viewing situation and stimulus materials varied from very low (using real slogans and previous exposure to them) to very high (using mock ads and forced exposures). Much effort was, however, given to ensure that the study included as realistic viewing situations as possible.

Table 1. Overview of Empirical Studies.

Study	Level of Clutter	Study Design	Stimuli	Sample	Article
A	Societal	No manipulation Accounting for previous experience by using real slogans.	Slogans Beer	n = 289	1, 2
B	Media	2 (brands) * 2 (magazines) Ads embedded in real magazines. Instructions to read through as normally done.	Print ads Skin care/ Sportswear	n = 157	3
C	Media / Immediate	2 (brand familiarity) * 2 (magazine) * 2 (cover / ad) Ads preceded by magazine cover vs. typical ad. Forced exposure.	Print ads Book store/ TV	n = 239	3
D	Media	2 (ad / publicity) * 2 (brand familiarity) Ad / Publicity embedded in real newspaper excerpt. Instruction to read through as normally done.	Print ad / Article Shampoo	n = 421	4, 5

Article 1. Brands Affect Slogans Affect Brands?

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Co-Authored with: Micael Dahlén

As pointed out in the review, most research on competitive clutter has taken place in a laboratory setting (e.g., Burke and Srull 1988; Keller 1991, for an exception see Danaher et al 2008). This article provides a more ecologically valid investigation into competitive interference by investigating real brands and slogans. The level of clutter accounted for is thus higher than in previous research, both in terms of the number of competing brands and the level of aggregation.

The decision to look at slogans was based on the contradictory role of slogans in previous research. By creatively summarizing the essence of a brand, slogans are said to increase the chances of a message being attended to and remembered (cf. Keller 2007). At the same time, empirical studies show that slogans are quite sensitive to ad confusion (e.g., Pham and Johar 1997), making them an interesting instance for studying the effects of clutter.

The data used in the article comes from study A. More specifically, 16 beer brands and their slogans were identified and divided into strong brands (rank 1-8) and weak brands (rank 9-16) based on syndicated sales figures. Using real brands and actual brand strength allowed us to complement experimental findings by basing our investigations on respondents' previous exposures to marketing communications. While previous studies have focused either on how clutter affects brand identification or brand evaluation we look at both these communication effects. Building on research on competitive clutter and literature on brand equity, we argue that the effects on brand attitudes are dependent on brand identification and moderated by brand strength.

The results show that brand equity influences slogan learning and evaluation; slogans for strong brands are better liked and more familiar than slogans for weak brands. The difference is reinforced at retrieval when a correct match is made, but competitive clutter makes it difficult for consumers to make such a match. When mismatching occurs, the effect of the slogan on the brand is greater than when the match is accurate. This means that strong brands lose and weak brands gain from brand-slogan confusion.

The results highlight the importance of brand schemas in determining the effects of advertising. More specifically, weak brands seem to benefit from ad confusion as this makes the brand schema effect less pronounced. Had a more stylistic experimental setting with mock brands been used, this would not have been discovered. The results also add to our knowledge of ad confusion by showing that the effect of a slogan on a brand is greater when consumers confuse competing slogans with each other.

Article 2. Brand-Slogan Matching in a Cluttered Environment

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The high levels of brand-slogan mismatching found in the first article, suggest that a better understanding of ad confusion should be useful. The second article focuses on the memory processes used by consumers when trying to remember what brand a slogan stands for. It also investigates how such memory processes influence the effects of using slogans as a marketing communications tool.

Article 2 is based on study A. Consumers' memory of slogans was used as a starting point. Based on respondents' assessments of slogan familiarity and confidence, we identify two types of memory processes for matching slogans with brands. When respondents are sure that they know a slogan (i.e., the slogan is perceived as highly familiar and respondents are confident that they know it) brand-slogan matching is based on cued retrieval. Often, however, slogans are recognized based on a more general sense of familiarity (i.e., the slogan is perceived as highly familiar, but respondents are not quite sure that they know it). In such cases matching would be based on constructive memory.

The results show that cued retrieval leads to correct brand-slogan matching, but at the same time leaves little room for the slogan to influence brand attitudes. When constructive memory processes are used, however, slogans influence brand attitudes. Article 2 thus sheds light on the underlying reasons for ad confusion and its consequences for slogans as a marketing communications tool. As consumers are generally uninterested in actively processing ads for brands (unless they already like a brand), most slogans

will be less confidently familiar and thus slogans will mainly affect brand evaluations at the time of retrieval.

The findings suggest that the cluttered environment has constrained the role of slogans as a brand building tool. Slogan mismatching due to constructive processing should be most likely to occur in highly competitive categories with a high reliance on communicative platforms. It should also be more common for unfamiliar brands and communications targeted at new audiences. These are the very same situations in which slogans have been suggested to be most useful.

Article 3. Could Placing Ads Wrong be Right?

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Co-Authored with: Micael Dahlén, Fredrik Törn, and Niclas Öhman

Given the kind of ad message confusion outlined in articles 1 and 2, the third article sets out to find a potential solution. More specifically, it investigates how to increase the chances of message elaboration. More elaboration should lead to stronger memory traces and thus lower the risk for confusion.

The article is inspired by media context research. The common practice of placing advertising in media with themes matching brands is used as a starting point (King, Reid, and Macias 2004; Moorman et al. 2002). This practice rests upon the notion of congruence facilitating processing and therefore enhancing communication effectiveness. However, we argue and find support for the opposite. Selecting a thematically congruent context means selecting an environment that is highly (competitively) cluttered. We argue that by placing ads in media with themes that do not quite match brands, advertising effectiveness can be increased.

The article is written based on studies B and C. In study B, ads for familiar brands were embedded in real magazines. The placements were either congruent or incongruent with a brand. Respondents were instructed to read through the magazines as they normally would, and then asked about their experience of the magazine and a focal ad. The findings show that thematic incongruence can increase advertising effectiveness.

To pinpoint the causes of this effect, study C uses a more traditional experimental setup. In this study, immediate advertising clutter is put up against media clutter. More specifically, we test if it is the overall thematic incongruence rather than the lack of competitive advertising that enhances effectiveness. The results show that incongruent placements lead to more processing and that the effect is stronger for familiar brands. The study also shows that these effects are due to overall media rather than immediate advertising clutter.

The findings highlight the importance of considering the context in planning marketing communications. The article points out a way to enhance processing and reduce the negative effects of, foremost, clutter competitiveness. To avoid constructive memory processes to take over brand-identification, it is important to provoke as much processing as possible at the time of exposure (cf. article 2). One way to do so is by inspiring consumers to think about how the brand fits in the selected media at the time of exposure.

The results also point to the value of creativity in marketing communications. In order to stand out in clutter, new and unexpected communications are needed. Generally, this is achieved by elements in ads or using new channels. This article suggests that traditional media can be used creatively as well. Thematically incongruent media placement challenge the expectations consumers have about brands and in doing so they add novelty and interest to the brand's communication.

Article 4. Advertising vs. Publicity in a Cluttered Environment

Forthcoming in *Journal of Current Issues and Research in Advertising*, Fall 2008.

The fourth article highlights the challenge posed by ad avoidance. More specifically, the use of PR as a strategy to avoid clutter is investigated. By explicitly comparing the ability of an ad and an article to attract attention to the brand, the relative merits of publicity and advertising is put in a new light.

The article is written based on study D. Respondents were exposed to a newspaper excerpt comprising either an ad or an article with reference to a corporate sponsorship. The ad and article were constructed to be typical

representatives of each communication format. As in article 3, respondents were instructed to read through the excerpts as they normally would and that they were free to spend as much (or little) time as they wanted on this task. After looking through the excerpt respondents were asked questions about the ad/article and the brand in it.

Although advertising is often criticized for its low attention levels, the findings show that it might, in fact, be preferable to publicity. In the context of a newspaper, advertising was found to be roughly 66% more effective than publicity in ensuring brand identification. This superiority was mainly due to higher overall attention. This finding highlights the fact that advertising is not the only marketing communications format that will have to compete for consumers' attention.

The results hold for both a familiar and an unfamiliar brand. Still, the importance of brand schemas is again highlighted. Both types of communications are more attended to when the brand is familiar. For unfamiliar brands, the potential upside of publicity is larger. The challenge, however, remains. Not many consumers will attend to an article about an unfamiliar brand and attracting attention to publicity seems even harder than attracting it to advertising.

The results point to the importance of using more realistic viewing situations in research on marketing communications. When comparing the strengths of publicity and advertising it does not make sense to use the exact same stimuli. Also, marketers and researchers need to consider that marketing communications clutter might come in many different shapes and that its effects are not restricted to advertising. The article thus provides support for my extended notion of clutter as all marketing messages surrounding a marketing communications effort.

Article 5. What's Credibility Got to Do with It?

In review for possible publication in Journal of Marketing Communications

In the final article, ad skepticism is put under the lens. This is done by looking at another proposed advantage of PR, namely credibility. As consumers ad skepticism grows, several voices have been raised suggesting that PR and the resulting publicity should be a way forward. As marketers are

not directly responsible for messages communicated in this format, publicity should be more credible and should thus have a higher impact on what consumers think of a brand. Still, empirical assessments of this advantage have shown inconclusive results.

The article is based on study D. By looking at respondents' perceptions of message credibility and message fit with the brand, the proposed credibility advantage of PR is investigated. The results show that even if credibility is, indeed, higher for messages communicated through publicity, consumers are not completely oblivious to the persuasive intent of editorial content. Whereas advertising is perceived to have a clear intention to sell, there is a general suspicion that attempts of manipulation occur in editorial content as well.

Although the findings support the received view that publicity is more credible they do not support interpreting this advantage as an indicator of higher communication effectiveness of publicity compared to advertising. By explicitly considering the chain of effects following exposure to publicity and advertising, the article provides a potential explanation for the contrasting findings in previous research. This again shows the value of using ecologically valid stimuli and procedures.

The article also highlights the dynamic nature of marketing communications. As consumers become increasingly familiar with marketers use of PR, they seem to develop coping strategies that are similar to those already found with regards to advertising. This further highlights the need for an extended view of clutter and the challenges it poses for marketers. Looking only at advertising is not enough. When considering clutter and coping strategies we need to open up for new types of marketing communications formats as well.

Discussion

In this thesis I have argued that message competition is an important challenge to contemporary marketing communications. Each day, consumers face hundreds of marketing messages; many of which are completely disregarded or discounted. Facing this challenge has long been a top priority for marketers (Danaher et al 2008, Webb and Ray 1979), but research on the topic seems to have been scarce (Nan and Faber 2004, Vakratsas and Ambler

1999). Through my empirical studies of marketing communications effects in cluttered environment and my synthesis of previous research efforts this thesis offers new insights on the matter.

My thesis contributes to our understanding of marketing communications effectiveness by explicitly considering that marketing communications does not exist in isolation; marketing messages continuously compete with each other, just like brands compete with other brands. This competition takes place in the immediate surroundings of a message as well as in the minds of consumers. It occurs at the time of exposure, but also before and after it. Message competition influences communication effectiveness. As obvious as this might seem, it is rarely taken into consideration in marketing communications research (Vakratsas and Ambler 1999; Weilbacher 2001).

In the following, I will discuss the contributions of my thesis to marketing communications research and practice. Although each article contributes to literature on the specific marketing communications issue it addresses, the focus here will be on their overall contributions to our understanding of clutter. To learn more about contributions specific to slogans (articles 1 and 2), media planning (article 3), and PR (articles 4 and 5) please refer to the specific articles.

Contributions to Marketing Communications Research

There have been several calls for research on the communicative environments of advertising (e.g., Nan and Faber 2004; Tellis 2005). This thesis answers to these calls and, as a result, makes several contributions to marketing communications research.

Synthesizing Clutter Research

By putting together research on clutter to date, a better understanding of the phenomenon is gained. The review offers a ground on which to build further research. When bringing together research on clutter, attitudes toward advertising, competitive interference, and media context it becomes clear that there is knowledge to draw upon and that the lack of research to some extent might have been overstated.

In synthesizing previous research it also becomes clear that message competition is always present. Whereas overall clutter affects marketers'

chances of gaining attention, competitive clutter alters communication effects before and after advertising has been attended to. Although marketers dealing with clutter have mainly been concerned with attention (e.g., Pieters et al 2002), this synthesis also points to the importance of helping consumers remember (cf. Kent 2002). The review also shows that effects are more likely to occur in low involvement situation, for unfamiliar brands, and within product categories. To fully understand the challenges posed by clutter it is not enough to look only at the actual marketing messages exposed in different contexts. Consumers' perceptions of clutter are also important as they breed general effects such as avoidance and skepticism.

My review complements that of Nan and Faber (2004), by providing more detail on the findings and approaches used. Structuring clutter research in terms of type of clutter studied (quantity vs. competitiveness), effects found (general vs. specific), and level of aggregation (societal, media, immediate) makes the current body of knowledge easier to overview and areas in need of further research emerge.

Sorting Out Clutter

The absence of a common understanding of clutter seems to have contributed to the lack of research. The fact that clutter might be used to refer to the number of ads in a magazine or the several hundreds of messages a consumer is exposed to each day has not been conducive to research. In putting forward a new way to conceptualize clutter this thesis offers a common ground on which to build.

Structuring clutter in terms of societal, media, and immediate levels contributes to our understanding of marketing communications clutter. The different levels of clutter constitute a framework to those interested in the challenges posed by a cluttered environment. Using it should reduce confusion regarding what challenge is considered. Any differences between research efforts should also become more evident. This should help future research and inspire new insights from researchers interested in clutter.

The articles on slogans presented in this thesis illustrate how the framework can add new insights. Articles 1 and 2 extend our knowledge of the effects of competitive clutter by using societal clutter as a unit of analysis and by using real brands and slogans as stimuli. This approach complements previous

experimental (e.g., Keller 1991; Burke and Srull 1988) and econometric studies (Danaher et al 2008). Through this approach, competitive interference is found to be beneficial for weak brands. Furthermore, ad confusion is found to be caused primarily by constructive memory errors.

Extending Clutter

This thesis also offers a broader perspective on clutter. Previous research has mainly considered clutter to be relevant to advertising. The dominant position of advertising in research on clutter, however, seems out of step with marketing communications practice. As suggested by my conceptualization of clutter, I believe that clutter should be relevant to all types of marketing communications. As shown by the empirical studies, extending clutter to all marketing messages surrounding a marketing communications effort makes sense. The positive effects of incongruent media placements are driven by the overall theme of a media vehicle rather than the immediate advertising content. This finding suggests that editorial content is indeed an important part of the cluttered environment.

Looking at publicity we also find that it can be even more sensitive to avoidance behavior than advertising. It also appears that consumers are not insensible to the fact that much editorial material stems from marketers. These results show that PR is not immune to clutter. It seems that when consumers become acquainted with different marketing communications tools, they come to react to them in much the same way as they react to advertising. One could thus expect the same to hold for other marketing communications tools such as events, product placements, and programming.

As marketers are changing their ways of communicating, the boundaries between editorial and advertising content are blurring (Balasubramanian 1994). The broader perspective on clutter and its effects offered in this thesis complements studies on how ad executions can be used to cut through clutter (e.g., Pieters et al 2002). In doing this, new insights into clutter are gained and the notion of clutter is transferred to include parts of the editorial content, most notably the ones marketers refer to as publicity, as well.

Studying Clutter

This thesis highlights the relevance of using ecologically valid settings for studying all types of marketing communications. When developing guidelines on the pros and cons of different communication formats it is important to ensure that the underlying comparisons reflect real choices available to marketers. For instance, to fully understand the value of publicity it must be investigated in a context where it is likely to occur. This means allowing publicity stimuli to contain information that would be likely to be found in such editorial material *and* to compete with other messages for consumers' attention.

As discussed above, the framework for clutter offers a tool for thinking about how this could be done. The different levels of clutter can be helpful in coming up with new approaches. For researchers interested in improving the ecological validity of their advertising experiments, the methods used in the empirical studies can also serve as an inspiration. The approaches are not new, but thinking about them in terms of clutter might be. Methodologically, I invite clutter into my studies by 1) using real brands and communication efforts and 2) using embedded and realistic stimuli. Although these approaches mean giving up control, they are useful for assessing such a complex phenomenon as clutter (cf. Speck and Elliott 1997a). Preferably the approaches should be combined with more controllable studies, as illustrated by the contributions made to competitive interference in article 1 (e.g., Keller 1991; Burke and Srull 1988) and to the source identification framework by Pham and Johar (1997) in article 2.

Contributions to Marketing Communications Practice

Although the contributions discussed above are relevant to practitioners as well, the focus here will be on the implications of these contributions for marketing practice.

A Framework for Clutter

The extension of clutter beyond advertising and the proposed framework in terms of level of aggregation should be as useful for practitioners as for marketing scholars.

First of all, structuring clutter in terms of societal, media, and immediate level enables a better description of the phenomenon. Whereas the common

understanding of clutter often seems to lie at the societal level (cf. Rumbo 2002), marketers tend to look mostly at clutter on the media level. However, marketers frequently use several media to communicate the same message to consumers (e.g., Keller 2001, 2007). To assess clutter for such campaigns, a higher level of aggregation is needed.

Second, a narrow focus on one level of clutter is problematic as it might increase challenges at another level. For instance, as marketers are concerned with the intensity of media and intermediate clutter they look for new creative ways to reach consumers (e.g., Dahlén 2005). Although there are no other ads in such new media, using them to advertise will add to societal clutter. Similarly, the growing clutter on TV is sometimes attributed to tests showing that 15 second spots performed less than half as bad as 30 second ones, but the tests did not take into account that the total number of spots would double (cf. Ray and Webb 1986). Deciding to communicate by mowing a message on a field⁵ would provide an uncluttered immediate environment, but consumers looking out of the airplane window might at the very same time be listening to a podcast or be in the middle of reading a magazine. Or, he or she might be put off by the field being yet another of the many channels used by marketers to communicate their messages.

Finally, by acknowledging the different levels of clutter, and their interrelationships, it becomes evident that clutter should always be kept in mind. Whenever you communicate there is competition. This competition will affect your efforts, either indirectly (through general effects) or directly. For instance, a new creative communication campaign using fields as a medium might cause negative reactions among consumers. These reactions are not necessarily based on their experience of the medium as such (i.e., a dislike of fields being used for other things than growing crops), but rather due to the medium being an addition to overall societal clutter.

The framework can thus be useful in assessing what the effects of a certain communication option will be and delineating any side effects that might occur. It provides a tool for dealing with clutter – both in terms of avoiding too much clutter and in understanding how a communication effort will add to societal clutter.

⁵ Again as in the campaign for SJ in which a message was mowed on a field close to an airport

Questioning Common Knowledge

For marketing practitioners the results presented in this thesis should also work as a caution against believing in received wisdom. As creative approaches make their way into the marketing mainstream, their effectiveness tends to become aligned with traditional advertising. Beliefs about their success, however, often live on. The use of banner advertising on the internet is one of many examples of such a development. Whereas the first banner ads received quite a lot of attention and high click-through, contemporary banners suffer from “banner blindness”, meaning that they tend to go by completely unnoticed (Cho and Cheon 2004).

As indicated by the studies on slogans, media choice, and marketing PR, industry wisdom and anecdotal evidence should be looked upon with caution:

In the case of slogans, the research presented in this thesis suggests that rather than being a helpful tool for establishing a brand’s position in the minds of consumers (cf. Keller 2007), a slogan might increase brand confusion and make brands more alike. Instead of clarifying the difference between brands, slogan repetition seems to make them similar. Believing that slogans will be the best way to ensure a strong position in a highly competitive category might be fatal. For strong brands such confusion is negative and should be avoided. For weaker brands, however, it can be beneficial and marketers should try to use it to their advantage.

Media is by far the most expensive part of marketing communications (De Pelsmacker et al 2007; www.irm-media.se). To ensure a good pay off on these investments is important. As advertising and editorial context has gained in importance, thematic congruence has become the default criterion in media selection (King et al 2004; Moorman et al 2002). But selecting thematically congruent media often means selecting a competitively cluttered environment. Our research shows that, for familiar brands, reaching your target audience through an incongruent media vehicle might be preferable.

Although PR, and the publicity it creates, has been suggested to make consumers more attentive to and more likely to trust a message (e.g., Ries and Ries 2002; The Economist 2006), my research suggests that this might not be the case. This thesis qualifies the claims of PR’s superiority over advertising. First, publicity might not be attended to, but if it is will be more

effective than advertising. Second, the higher credibility of editorial content might not benefit a brand. Advertising is clearly about a brand, and if an ad is credible this will be good for the brand. Publicity, however, might be credible, but the credibility is about the piece of news or media carrying it rather than the brand. Marketers should not settle for media mentions, but rather evaluate the effects of such mentions on actual brand perceptions.

As evident by these results any arguments suggesting a communication approach to be the “cure all” for clutter should be looked upon with caution. The empirical studies presented in this thesis show that clutter is, in fact, a relevant factor for marketing communication planning on several levels – ranging from what to say in a slogan, to where to place your ads, or even whether or not to use PR instead of advertising. Whereas clutter to date mainly has been the concern of media agencies, these findings suggest that it must indeed be considered by advertising and PR agencies as well.

Facing the Clutter Challenge

As suggested by the discussion this far, understanding clutter is an important first step in dealing with it. In this section I will, however, focus on what makes message competition more or less influential as well as how to face it.

As pointed out by Pieters and colleagues (2002), marketers have mainly applied two strategies to deal with clutter. The first is to outspend competition, that is, to ensure a high share of voice (e.g., De Pelsmacker et al 2007, Rossiter and Percy 1997). The second is to come up with creative executions that capture the attention of consumers (e.g., Ang and Low 2000; Reid, King and DeLorme 1998). Given that the negative effects of clutter are driven by consumers’ perceptions of excessive and intrusive marketing, the soundness of the first approach can be questioned. The approach inevitably adds to clutter quantity. What is more, recent research by Danaher et al (2008) shows that having an additional competitor advertise is generally more harmful than if one existing competitor increases its total ad volumes. The main driver of competitive interference is thus not the weight of advertising, but rather the number of competing brands.

As evident in the review, clutter is most problematic in situations where consumers have low involvement in taking part of a message. Given the many marketing messages out there, low involvement should be expected for

most marketing communications. Finding ways to raise involvement and get consumers to pay attention to the brand is crucial. To do this, creativity seems to be a more fruitful venue. Innovative advertising captures attention and increases brand identification (Pieters et al 2002). As shown by my research, creativity must not be constrained to executions, but could be employed in media selection as well. Choosing an incongruent media context makes the ad and the brand more interesting and persuasive.

Looking at previous research and the results presented in the current thesis it also becomes evident that the appropriate strategies for dealing with clutter depend on current brand equity. This is closely connected to involvement: Consumers are more interested in stronger, familiar, established brands and thus pay more attention to what they have to say as compared to weaker, unfamiliar, new brands. Although high equity brands are generally less prone to suffer from clutter, the effects are stronger when they do. Low equity brands have a hard time getting attention, but might benefit from being confused with stronger brands. For a strong brand, however, being confused with advertising for a weaker brand lowers brand evaluations.

For strong brands negative effects of competitive interference can be avoided by striving for uniqueness. Ensuring sufficient processing at the time of exposure is important, as this will lead to the messages being more liked and more likely to be remembered. In terms of media planning, such processing can be stimulated by placing ads in incongruent media contexts. Given their ability to attract attention, strong brands also have less to gain from publicity. The more intense processing of publicity has little effect on brand awareness – the brand is already established in the minds of the consumers. Advertising is enough to quickly remind consumers of the brand. Publicity might be useful in terms of its high credibility and potential to create brand interest, but such effects will come at the price of lower overall attention than if advertising is used. Also, in order for a credibility effect to occur, consumers must perceive publicity to be connected with the brand.

For weak brands, competitive interference for advertising should be used as an advantage. To achieve this, marketing communications should not be too unique and, if possible, not too closely connected to the brand at encoding. In part, this can explain why incongruent media placements are more beneficial to established rather than new brands. Forcing consumers to think about the placement might remind them of the weakness of the brand. For weak brands,

publicity could be a valuable tool to build brand awareness. Whereas publicity has an attention disadvantage to advertising, there is a clear advantage in terms of brand awareness. The challenge, however, remains. Not many consumers will attend to an article about an unfamiliar brand and attracting attention to publicity seems even harder than attracting it to advertising. When publicity is connected to the brand, the credibility effect should also be beneficial.

The need for careful communication planning is highlighted by the challenges posed by clutter (cf. Percy and Elliott 2005; Rossiter and Percy 1997). The results presented in this thesis suggest that well-crafted ads might be just as influential as publicity. Extreme claims regarding the death of advertising thus seem premature. To ensure effectiveness, marketers must carefully research their target audience in order to come up with relevant messages. They must creatively think about different means to communicate them, both in terms of communication options, media and actual execution. When relying on advertising, message credibility should be given high importance. In PR efforts, ensuring a strong brand-message link in publicity is essential.

Benefits of Clutter

The focus in the current thesis has been on the challenges of marketing communications clutter. As a consequence, mostly negative effects have been discussed. Still, there are benefits of clutter to be considered.

As discussed above, clutter might be used to the advantage of weak and unfamiliar brands. It is also possible for marketers to use competitive clutter to defend themselves against competition. Even when advertising does not ensure positive effects for the own brand, it can be valuable if used to dampen the effects of competing communication efforts (Danaher et al 2008). Furthermore, research by Jewell and Unnava (2003) shows that competitive clutter can be beneficial when repositioning a brand; the interference caused by competitive advertising facilitates the creation of new associations.

Media owners and consumers might benefit from clutter as well. For media owners, marketers are an important source of revenue. Several media, for instance most cable TV, internet sites, magazines, and newspapers reach

consumers free or at prices much below cost (Tellis 2005). Often, advertising is a prerequisite for ensuring high quality editorial content. Furthermore, as the media landscape is becoming more and more fragmented, media owners are increasingly relying on PR-based materials in developing their content. Without clutter this vast expansion of the media industry would not have been possible.

For consumers, clutter has several advantages. The most evident advantage is that clutter subsidizes much media consumption. However, marketing communications also functions as a source of information and enjoyment (e.g., O'Donohoe 1994). Through advertising, consumers receive information about different products available to them. Web pages and product folders offer more convenient means of evaluating different alternatives than visiting different stores. Marketing communication is also a part of popular culture, and consuming it might offer enjoyment and satisfaction without direct connection to the brands being promoted. An example is how new artists reach a mass audience through their music being played in ads (cf. Carp 2007).

Limitations and Further Research

Throughout this thesis, it has been my aim to contribute new insights into marketing communications by considering the cluttered environment in which it takes place. To provide such insights, several decisions and choices had to be made regarding what types of marketing communications and cluttered environments to study. As with all research, the findings presented in the current thesis are limited by these choices. The thesis is by no means a comprehensive guide to dealing with clutter, but rather one step in, what hopefully will be, a series of research efforts striving to increase our knowledge of what clutter means for marketing communications effectiveness.

In the following sections, I will discuss what I believe to be the most important limitations of this thesis and how future research might address them. Additional limitations and calls for future research are also highlighted in each article.

Conceptual Limitations

In this thesis, I have focused primarily on bringing together and complementing research on clutter in order to get a better understanding of the challenges posed by message competition. My focus has been on sorting out, extending, and studying marketing communications clutter. These efforts have been guided by my belief that clutter should be relevant to all marketing communications options, not only advertising.

My conceptualization of clutter is thus very broad. Although I believe that the empirical studies presented in this thesis show that this broadening of clutter is indeed fruitful to our understanding of marketing communications, I am aware that it might not be as excluding as it should (cf. Söderlund 2002). To some extent, it can be argued that by including some editorial context in clutter means that clutter loses its meaning. If clutter does not consist of just advertising it consists of everything. The conceptualization used in the current should perhaps be seen as tentative and open to improvement as the literature and understanding of clutter grows. By suggesting that clutter should be used to denote all marketing messages surrounding a marketing communications effort I expect to inspire both researchers agreeing with as well as those opposing to this notion. It is my hope that both groups of researchers will contribute further to clutter research.

Another problem with my conceptualization is that it does not address when clutter is high or low. As indicated in my review of clutter conceptualizations, there is no established way to determine the intensity or level of clutter from a marketer's perspective. Also, as the effects of message competition might be positive, for instance for weak brands, it is not satisfactory to conclude that high clutter is at hand in situations when competing messages are detrimental to advertising effectiveness. My review of clutter effects suggests that clutter might be more of a given and that marketers must assess clutter in different situations in terms of both message quantity, message competitiveness, and consumers' perceptions of message intrusiveness. Anyhow, additional conceptual work on the matter is needed.

Methodological Limitations

Although the methods used in the current study might lead the reader to believe that this thesis is conclusive, it is rather discovery-oriented. The studies should be seen as attempts to increase our understanding of clutter,

rather than providing the best tools to overcome the challenges posed by it. Whereas I believe that the studies together clearly point towards the relevance of considering clutter in marketing communications research, the generalizability of specific findings are constrained by the study designs chosen.

The focus on ecological validity means that a lot of noise is included in the study designs. To deal with this, I focused on realistic settings rather than random samples. Student samples were used to ensure homogeneity of respondents (Calder et al 1982). All products were selected with this sample in mind, thus ensuring that students were, in fact, part of the target market of the investigated brands. Students have, however, been found to evaluate advertising differently than the general public (James & Sonner 2001; Soley and Ried 1983). This does not necessarily mean that the response processes of interest in the current study are different from those of the general population (e.g., Calder et al 1982; McQuarrie 1998). In the future it would, however, be useful to use complementary samples.

The generalizability of each study is also limited by the stimuli used. More specifically, by focusing on low involvement products and non-purchase situations, the findings are mainly applicable to a low involvement setting. The studies should be representative for a vast amount of “everyday ad consumption”. It is in these situations that the consequences of clutter are most noted. It should, however, also be interesting to investigate the effects of clutter in more high involvement settings. Furthermore, the use of single point communications, such as one ad or one article, means that the complexity of contemporary marketing communications campaigns is not taken into account. Future research is needed to further assess the impact of clutter on integrated marketing communications campaigns.

As a final note, the studies only consider intermediary effects of marketing communications (cf. Rossiter and Percy 1997; Percy and Elliott 2005). Although studying these effects allows us to assess why, how, and where in the sequence that leads to purchases a communication effort is effective or ineffective (Tellis 2005), actual behaviors are not assessed. Additional research is needed in order to better understand how clutter influences actual choice behaviors (cf. Danaher et al (2008) who show that competitive interference indeed does influence sales).

Further Research

In addition to the complementary studies needed in order to address some of the conceptual and methodological limitations of the current thesis, the thesis also points out the need to continuously investigate consumers' reactions to emerging marketing communications options. Friestad and Wright (1994) suggest that a "change of meaning" occurs as consumers become aware of different tactics used by marketers. This change of meaning affects how marketing tactics are perceived and thereby it influences their effects. As argued in this thesis, such reactions are not constrained to advertising. Marketers need to be aware of consumers' knowledge and opinions of different marketing communications options and research should help build such awareness.

Furthermore, as the popularity of hybrid formats grows, more and more marketer-controlled editorial content are reaching consumers. In the future, it should be important to better understand how consumers react to this type of editorial content. The reactions should lie at the intersection between general and specific effects of clutter. An updated view of persuasion knowledge in terms of different hybrid communications such as programming, events, and sponsorships seems to be needed. It should also be interesting to investigate in detail how consumers perceive marketing messages included in the editorial content in terms of intrusiveness.

Epilogue

It should by now have become clear that this thesis is about the abundance of marketing messages in our environment. It should also be evident that I wish to make a contribution to our understanding of the challenges posed by it. Hopefully, you are now better equipped to understand why many TV ads go by unattended, why a young girl sometimes ends up buying the wrong beer brand, and why Croatia might never get a visit from our middle-aged man. And, if you are eager for more (or if you still have not quite gotten it), reading through the actual articles that now follow will give you a second go. Enjoy!

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Article 1:

Brands affect slogans affect brands?

Competitive interference, brand equity and the brand-slogan link

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Brands affect slogans affect brands? Competitive interference, brand equity and the brand-slogan link

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Abstract

Brand slogans have been subject to much interest from both practitioners and researchers, the reason being that slogans may have positive effects on their brands. Previous research has mainly focused on the slogan effects when the brand is given (for example, in controlled experiments). Based on the fact that most brands face severe competitive interference, this paper tests the effects of correct and incorrect brand-slogan attribution on both slogan and brand evaluations in an empirical study. The results show that slogans may work as carriers of brand equity. Slogan learning is biased by the brand's equity so that slogans for strong brands are generally better liked than slogans for weak brands; however, by way of competitive interference, this equity may be incorrectly attributed to a competing brand. The authors investigate how the brand-slogan link differs between weak and strong brands and provide indications of how to avoid the negative effects and capitalise on the positive effects of competitive interference.

INTRODUCTION

Previous research suggests that brand slogans are effective cornerstones in building brand equity. They provide continuity throughout advertising campaigns and facilitate the establishment and maintenance of a strong brand identity.¹⁻³ In a study of the relationship between advertising and financial performance, Mathur and Mathur⁴ found that changes in brand slogans affected firms' annual profits by an average of US\$6-8m. Researchers have uncovered several positive effects of brand slogans, for example, enhanced product differentiation and

brand recall,^{5,6} and improved brand evaluations and product beliefs.⁷⁻⁹

Marketers invest substantial sums of money in their brand slogans¹⁰ as a means to create a brand identity and enhanced brand presence.^{11,12} Thus, the slogan is assumed to either prime specific brand associations (eg 'M&Ms melt in your mouth, not in your hand') and affect brand evaluations indirectly by way of consumers' perceptions of these associations, or act as a direct carrier of the brand's equity (eg 'Carlsberg, probably the best beer in the world'), reminding consumers of their liking for the

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brand and reinforcing the brand equity at repeated exposures. Whereas most research has focused on the slogan's ability to prime brand associations,¹³⁻¹⁵ the present study investigates the untested notion of how the slogan may act as a direct carrier of brand equity.¹⁶⁻¹⁸ For the slogan to act as a carrier of brand equity, the brand must first affect the slogan so that the brand's equity 'rubs off' on the brand slogan, and the brand slogan must later be attributed correctly to the brand. In this paper, the authors investigate how brand equity affects evaluation of the brand slogan, and what happens to a brand when it is correctly or incorrectly attributed with the brand slogan.

Brand equity research has found that a brand's equity affects evaluation and interpretation of brand-related information so that the information (in the present case, the brand slogan) fits with consumers' previous perceptions of the brand.¹⁹⁻²¹ Due to competitive interference, however, the brand slogan may later become separated from the brand in consumers' memories. Competitive interference is a continuously increasing problem for advertisers, as most product categories have multiple advertising brands.^{22,23} Law²⁴ reports that 41 per cent of the television advertising during one prime-time hour has at least one competitor brand also advertising. In a Dutch study, 20 per cent of the advertising for well-known beer brands was wrongly attributed to other brands and almost 40 per cent of the consumers attributed a leading brand's slogan to competing brands.²⁵

Whether the effects of failed brand-slogan attribution are positive or negative may depend on the brand's

strength. Research has shown that competitive interference may inhibit the activation of existing brand schemas when consumers encounter advertising.²⁶⁻²⁹ Thus, consumers cannot use their existing perceptions of the brand when evaluating advertising. This means that the slogan for a strong brand may be *less* positively evaluated than if the brand schema (holding positive associations and evaluations) were activated, and the slogan for a weak brand (holding less positive associations and evaluations) may be *more* positively evaluated. Furthermore, if the slogan acts as a carrier of brand equity, incorrect brand-slogan attribution may have negative effects on the brand when a weak brand's slogan is attributed to a strong brand, and have positive effects when a strong brand's slogan is attributed to a weak brand.

Building on competitive interference research and the literature on brand equity, the authors argue that incorrect brand-slogan matching is good for weak (less popular) brands and bad for strong (popular) brands. This notion is tested in an empirical study. First, the effect of brand equity on slogan learning and evaluation is investigated. Thereafter, the authors analyse the effects of competitive interference on brand evaluations for strong and weak brands. The paper ends with implications for how to take advantage of the positive effects and avoid the negative effects of competitive interference among slogans for weak and strong brands.

SLOGAN LEARNING AND EVALUATION

Brand slogans have been subject to an increasing body of research during the last 30 years. Because of the many

positive effects of slogans reported above, a number of studies have been devoted to slogan learning and evaluation. Studies have mainly investigated the effects of customer demographics and product usage,^{30–34} media exposure,^{35–37} and slogan wording and modality.^{38–40} Interestingly, several studies have failed to produce significant results related to user characteristics. The ability to recall and correctly match slogans with brands has differed marginally (if at all) between consumers with respect to age, sex, media habits and consumption frequency. Similarly, the studies relating slogan learning and evaluation to media exposure (eg measured as ‘share-of-voice’) have yielded non-significant results. The research focusing on slogan wording and modality has been more fruitful in revealing that slogans with wordplay, ambiguity and high imagery are more memorable and liked. A review of the literature thus suggests that slogan learning and evaluation is dependent not so much on consumer characteristics, but rather on the characteristics of the brand slogan.

One major slogan characteristic that previous research has overlooked is the brand. Slogans have a general structure where a unique brand is associated with a claim.^{41,42} Therefore, one could expect interplay between the brand and the claim in the learning process. For example, claims are more easily encoded and retrieved for familiar brands compared to unfamiliar brands.⁴³ At the same time, semantically related slogan claims may facilitate retrieval of brand names.^{44–46}

Previous studies have shown that brand recall and slogan recall need not correlate strongly and to a large extent may be independent measures.^{47–49}

Most notably, slogans are more easily recalled than brands. This pattern has been found irrespective of age and product usage.⁵⁰ Furthermore, the slogans of highly familiar brands are frequently matched with the wrong brands in memory tests.^{51,52} Even though evocation of the slogan and the brand need not always interact, however, the authors argue that the learning of slogans is biased by inferences from the (familiar) brand. Furthermore, the brand affects evaluations of the slogan at retrieval.

Brand equity and slogan encoding

Studies have shown that consumers make inferences from the brand schema when encountering brand-related information.⁵³ That is, the brand affects the interpretation of the new information which is encoded.^{54,55} Broniarczyk and Gershoff⁵⁶ suggest that a major indicator of brand equity is the difference in evaluation of new information and advertising between strong (liked) and weak (less liked) brands; information and advertising related to strong brands are automatically better liked. Thus, the brand attitude should ‘rub off’ on the slogan so that the slogan for a popular brand is encoded as likable. Therefore, one could expect slogans for strong brands to be more liked than slogans for weak brands (H_{1a}).

The brand does not only have an impact on the interpretation of brand-related information, it also affects consumers’ inclination to expose themselves to and process the information. Strong brands attract attention and consumers process information related to strong brands more than information for weak brands.^{57,58} Moreover, infor-

mation for strong brands is both easier and more pleasant to process because of a more sophisticated brand schema.^{59,60} In the case of slogans, consumers should thus devote more attention to and, in turn, be more familiar with slogans for strong brands than weak brands (H_{1b}).

H_{1a}: *Slogans for strong brands are more liked than slogans for weak brands.*

H_{1b}: *Slogans for strong brands are more familiar than slogans for weak brands.*

Brand equity and slogan retrieval

With multiple competing brands, slogans within the same product category tend to share similar semantic and associative features to some extent.^{61,62} Familiarity with slogans therefore does not necessarily mean that consumers can attribute them correctly to brands. Law⁶³ found that repetition of a specific slogan in fact could decrease the probability of correct brand-slogan matching. This is because the resulting familiarity also increases generalisation between slogans with similar semantic or associative features.⁶⁴ In a study by Reece *et al.*,⁶⁵ consumers were significantly more successful in attributing slogans to the correct category than the correct brands. Kent and Kellaris⁶⁶ argue that consumers have greater knowledge of common rather than distinct properties of brands in a category, which could facilitate stronger category-slogan than brand-slogan links.

Keller⁶⁷ suggests that consumers, in the case of competitive interference, evaluate advertising based on general product category perceptions. This is

because competitive interference inhibits activation of the brand schema holding the brand associations and brand equity of the advertising brand.⁶⁸ Hence, advertising evaluations should decrease for strong brands and increase for weak brands, if one can assume that category evaluations are of roughly neutral valence.⁶⁹ The conclusion is that advertising for strong brands benefits from correct attribution to the brand because the brand schema is activated reminding consumers of the brand's equity, whereas advertising for weak brands does not benefit from correct attribution to the brand for the same reason. In H_{1a}, the authors argued that slogans for strong brands are more liked than slogans for weak brands because of biased encoding. This advantage is expected to be enhanced at retrieval if consumers are able to match the slogans with the brands. That is, matching a slogan for a strong brand with the correct brand has a positive effect on slogan evaluations (H_{2a}), whereas matching a slogan for a weak brand with the correct brand has a negative effect on slogan evaluations (H_{2b}).

H_{2a}: *Correct brand-slogan matching has a positive effect on attitude towards the slogan for strong brands.*

H_{2b}: *Correct brand-slogan matching has a negative effect on attitude towards the slogan for weak brands.*

BRAND EVALUATIONS

H₁ and H₂ concern the effects of the brand on slogan evaluations, that is, how the brand equity rubs off on the slogan; however, slogans have been proven to affect brand evaluations as well.⁷⁰⁻⁷² Marketers invest substantial

sums of money in their brand slogans⁷³ as a means to create a brand identity.⁷⁴ H₁ suggests that brand equity affects the encoding of brand slogans so that the slogans become carriers of the brand equity, ie the slogans receive 'slogan equity'. By way of the slogan equity, repetition of the slogan may remind consumers of their liking for the brand and, in this way, reinforce and enhance the brand's equity. Due to competitive interference, however, the slogan may be attributed to the wrong brand and the slogan equity may thus be rubbed off on a competing brand so that consumers believe that they like that brand better.

Slogan equity, competitive interference and brand evaluations

Even though slogans are linked to brands at encoding, the brand-slogan link may weaken over time. When multiple brands advertise within a product category, they tend to use advertising and slogans that share similar semantic and associative features.^{75,76} As consumers are generally better at remembering an inferred meaning of a claim rather than the exact phrase,⁷⁷ repeated advertising of similar slogans results in generalisation of slogan meanings.⁷⁸ This helps to explain why slogans are more easily recalled than brands in previous studies;^{79–81} whereas the brands are unique, the meanings of similar slogans are generalised into multiple pathways in a consumer's associative memory. As the number of pathways increases in a consumer's memory, the strength of each path, including the path to the brand, is reduced.^{82,83} This means that the spreading activation of a slogan may

result in the retrieval of a number of brands within the product category.⁸⁴ If H₁ holds, the slogan carries the brand equity from the original brand at encoding, even though the slogan may be linked to another brand at a later stage. Therefore, one could expect that competitive interference between weak and strong brands would add negative brand equity from a weak brand's slogan to a strong brand and add positive brand equity from a strong brand's slogan to a weak brand. The negative effect of slogan interference on strong brands and the positive effect of slogan interference on weak brands is summarised in H_{3a} and H_{3b}.

H_{3a}: *Slogan interference among weak and strong brands is negative for strong brands.*

H_{3b}: *Slogan interference among weak and strong brands is positive for weak brands.*

Brand equity and evaluation order

Brand-slogan matching may affect evaluations of both the slogan (H₂) and the brand (H₃). Whether one outweighs the other may depend on brand equity. Spreading-activation models of memory suggest that strong brands are central nodes in their own associative networks, whereas weak brands tend to be one among several competing nodes.^{85,86} All pathways pass through the central node, which affects interpretations of related information. As the strong brand is the central node in its network, the brand slogan should have less influence over the brand than the brand has over the slogan. The weak brand is not the central node in its network and is therefore more

susceptible to influence from the brand slogan.

Previous research on consumer information processing similarly suggests that strong brands are more likely to affect perceptions of brand-related stimuli. Consumers are motivated to process information about strong brands^{87,88} and therefore process the information top-down, starting from the brand.⁸⁹ Therefore, consumers would evaluate the brand slogan based on the brand. Consumers are not motivated to process information about weak brands and are therefore more likely to process the information bottom-up, starting from the advertisement stimulus.⁹⁰⁻⁹² Therefore the brand slogan is more likely to affect the evaluation of the brand.

Summarising, brand evaluations are expected to be more likely to affect slogan evaluations than the other way around for strong brands (H_{4a}). Conversely, slogan evaluations are expected to be more likely to affect brand evaluations than the other way around for weak brands (H_{4b}).

H_{4a}: *Brand evaluations are more likely to affect slogan evaluations for strong brands.*

H_{4b}: *Slogan evaluations are more likely to affect brand evaluations for weak brands.*

METHOD

A method similar to Reece *et al.*⁹³ was used. Respondents were exposed to a number of brand slogans and asked to evaluate each slogan and match it with a brand. In order to test the hypotheses, the authors compared reactions to slogans between respondents who could correctly identify the spon-

soring brand and respondents who could not. Thus, the study used the natural variance that the respondents bring to the advertisement exposure setting.⁹⁴ This is in line with the recommendations of several advertising researchers to use a more realistic method, instead of creating artificial responses through manipulations.⁹⁵⁻⁹⁷

Beer was chosen as the product category for the study. Beer has been an attractive product category for research over the years.^{98,99} This is a heavily advertised product category with many competing brands. Furthermore, the differences between products are small and the reliance on communicative platforms is great.

The brand slogans

Sixteen brand slogans were tested in the study. Eight were slogans for strong brands and eight were slogans for weak brands. The brands were classified based on syndicated sales figures (Market Monitor), where the strong brands were within the top eight selling brands and the weak brands were among the following brands on the list. The reason for classifying brands nine-16 on the list as weak brands is that they are likely to be less popular than the top eight brands but they are still heavily advertised and fairly well known. Brands further down on the list are not generally known by consumers and are thus not suited for testing the effects of brand equity.

The classification of strong and weak brands was validated in a pre-test, where 74 business students rated each brand with respect to brand attitude (see measures below). The mean brand attitude was $M = 4.47$ for the

strong brands and $M = 3.46$ for the weak brands (significantly different at $p < 0.01$).

Procedure

One hundred and ninety-one respondents participated in the study. They were recruited by intercept outside two large college campuses. Respondents were handed a questionnaire with a cover story stating that the researchers were investigating consumers' knowledge of brand slogans. The slogans were listed consecutively with immediate ratings of each slogan. The respondent evaluated each slogan on measures of familiarity and attitude towards the slogan and then identified the correct brand in an open-ended question. Each respondent rated eight slogans (four weak and four strong brands), yielding a total of 648 slogan responses. The order of slogans was rotated. A number of filler questions followed after the slogans. At the end of the questionnaire brand attitude was measured for each brand (without reference to the slogans).

In order to test H_4 , a second study was conducted based on the method used by Kenny.¹⁰⁰ Ninety-eight students were recruited in a similar fashion and presented with a similar questionnaire; however, brand attitude was measured first in this questionnaire and the slogans were given at the end. In this way, the authors could compare the correlations between brand and slogan evaluations, first, when the slogan preceded the brand and, secondly, when the brand preceded the slogan. The rotated order of evaluations facilitates a test of causality, in order to learn whether slogan evaluations affect brand evaluations more

than brand evaluations affect slogan evaluations.¹⁰¹

Measures

Attitude towards the slogan was measured on a seven-point semantic differential scale consisting of three items. The following items were used: good/bad, pleasant/unpleasant, favourable/unfavourable. An index was produced by averaging the responses to the items (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.95$). The measure was taken from MacKenzie and Lutz.¹⁰²

Slogan familiarity was measured on a seven-point semantic differential scale consisting of two items. The items used were: familiar/unfamiliar, never seen or heard/often seen or heard. An index was produced by averaging the responses to the items (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.95$). The measure was taken from Pieters *et al.*¹⁰³

Brand-slogan matching was measured with an open-ended question where respondents were asked to write down the brand they believed the slogan was advertising.

Brand attitude was measured with a three-item semantic differential scale taken from Loken and Ward¹⁰⁴ and Simonin and Ruth.¹⁰⁵ The items were: good/bad, negative/positive, satisfactory/unsatisfactory. An index was produced by averaging the responses to the items (Cronbach's $\alpha = 0.90$).

RESULTS

In order to test H_{1a} , which states that slogans for strong brands are more liked than slogans for weak brands, differences in attitude towards the slogan were compared in a *t*-test

Table 1 Mean comparisons between weak and strong brands

	Weak brands		Strong brands		Difference
Attitude towards the slogan	3.78		4.40		$t = 7.53, p < 0.01$
Slogan familiarity	2.88		4.51		$t = 16.20, p < 0.01$
Correct brand-slogan match	Yes	No	Yes	No	
Attitude towards the slogan	3.51	4.30	4.91	4.12	$t = 2.54, p < 0.01$ (weak brand) $t = 6.57, p < 0.01$ (strong brand)
Slogan familiarity	4.75	5.27	5.80	4.81	$t = 1.99, p < 0.01$ (weak brand) $t = 3.56, p < 0.01$ (strong brand)

(see Table 1). The mean attitude towards the slogan was significantly higher ($p < 0.01$) for strong brand slogans ($M = 4.40$) than for weak brand slogans ($M = 3.78$), supporting H_{1a} . The difference in slogan familiarity (H_{1b}) was even greater (see Table 1). The mean rating of familiarity was $M = 4.51$ for strong brand slogans and $M = 2.88$ for weak brand slogans ($p < 0.01$). In addition, a simple chi-square test revealed that respondents were able to match correctly 81.9 per cent of slogans for strong brands with the right brands, whereas only 29.9 per cent of slogans for weak brands were matched correctly.

H_{2a} and H_{2b} were tested by comparing the evaluations of slogans that respondents were able to identify and match correctly with the brand and slogans that respondents were unable to match with the brand. The results are listed in Table 1. For strong brands, the mean attitude towards the slogan was $M = 4.91$ for the correctly matched slogans and $M = 4.12$ for the slogans that were not correctly matched ($p < 0.01$). Therefore, H_{2a} is supported. The opposite pattern was found for weak brands. The correctly matched slogans received a mean attitude evaluation of $M = 3.51$, which was significantly

lower ($p < 0.01$) than the mean attitude for the slogans that were not correctly matched ($M = 4.30$). Thus, H_{2b} is supported. Interestingly, analyses of slogan familiarity followed the same patterns (see Table 1). The correctly matched slogans for strong brands were perceived as more familiar ($M = 5.80$ versus $M = 4.81, p < 0.01$), whereas the correctly matched slogans for weak brands were perceived as less familiar ($M = 4.75$ versus $M = 5.27, p < 0.01$) than the slogans that were not correctly matched.

In order to test the effects of slogan interference on brand evaluations (H_{3a} and H_{3b}), brand attitude was compared between brands that were attributed the slogan of a strong brand and brands that were attributed the slogan of a weak brand (Table 2). Strong brands received a mean brand attitude evaluation of $M = 3.92$ when they were attributed the slogan of a weak brand, which was significantly lower ($p < 0.01$) than when they were attributed the slogan of a strong brand ($M = 4.74$). Therefore, H_{3a} is supported. Weak brands received a mean brand attitude evaluation of $M = 4.43$ when they were attributed the slogan of a strong brand, which was significantly higher ($p < 0.01$) than when they were attributed the slogan of a

Table 2 Competitive inference and brand attitude

Brand attitude	Weak slogan	Strong slogan	
Weak brands	3.75	4.43	$t = 9.12, p < 0.01$
Strong brands	3.92	4.74	$t = 8.98, p < 0.01$

Table 3 Attitude towards the brand \times attitude towards the slogan correlations and brand-slogan matching

	Correct brand-slogan matching		Incorrect brand-slogan matching	
	Weak slogan	Strong slogan	Weak slogan	Strong slogan
Weak brand	0.26		n.s.	0.78
Strong brand		0.24	0.58	n.s.

All r 's $p < 0.01$

weak brand ($M = 3.75$). Thus, H_{3b} is supported.

Lending further support to H_{3a} and H_{3b} , the correlation analyses in Table 3 reveal a stronger correlation between slogan evaluations and brand evaluations when slogans for weak brands are matched incorrectly with strong brands and when slogans for strong brands are matched incorrectly with weak brands, than when the slogans are matched correctly with the brands ($r = 0.58$ versus $r = 0.24$ for strong brands and $r = 0.78$ versus $r = 0.26$ for weak brands). A test of differences between the correlation coefficients using Fisher's r -to- z transformation¹⁰⁶ revealed that both differences were significant at $p < 0.01$.

Based on Kenny,¹⁰⁷ H_{4a} and H_{4b} , concerning the most likely causal directions of evaluations between slogans and brands, were tested by comparing the slogan evaluation \times brand evaluation correlations between respondents who rated the brand before they rated the slogan and respondents who rated the slogan before they rated the brand. The

correlation coefficients are listed in Table 4. The differences between the correlation coefficients were tested using Fisher's r -to- z transformation¹⁰⁸. For strong brands, the attitude towards the brand \times attitude towards the slogan correlation was significantly higher ($p < 0.01$) when brand evaluation preceded slogan evaluation ($r = 0.38$) than when slogan evaluation preceded brand evaluation ($r = 0.15$). This indicates a direction of causal influence from the brand to the slogan. H_{4a} is supported because brand evaluations are more likely to affect slogan evaluations for strong brands. The opposite result was found for weak brands. The attitude towards the brand \times attitude towards the slogan correlation was significantly higher ($p < 0.01$) when slogan evaluation preceded brand evaluation ($r = 0.47$) than when brand evaluation preceded slogan evaluation ($r = 0.21$). This indicates a direction of causal influence from the slogan to the brand. H_{4b} is supported because slogan evaluations are more likely to affect brand evaluations for weak brands.

Table 4 Attitude towards the brand \times attitude towards the slogan correlations and brand-slogan evaluation order

Weak brands		Strong brands	
Brand precedes slogan	Slogan precedes brand	Brand precedes slogan	Slogan precedes brand
0.21	0.47	0.38	0.15

Differences $p < 0.01$

DISCUSSION

The present study adds to the slogan research by showing that brand equity is an important factor influencing slogan learning and evaluation. The analyses revealed a simple main effect of brand equity suggesting that slogans for strong brands are better liked and more familiar than slogans for weak brands, irrespective of respondents' ability to match them correctly with a brand. Thus, slogan learning seems to be biased by the brand so that the brand receives a certain slogan equity at encoding.

The differences between slogans for strong and weak brands were reinforced at retrieval when respondents were able to match the slogan with the correct brand. Upon correct matching, slogans for strong brands were more liked and familiar, whereas, interestingly, slogans for weak brands were both less liked and less familiar. The negative effect of the weak brand on liking of the slogan is intuitive, activation of the brand schema reinforces the brand's poor slogan equity. The negative effect of correct matching on slogan familiarity does deserve further elaboration. A plausible explanation is that the increased liking generated from the inability to attribute the slogan to the weak brand is somewhat mistaken for familiarity. The literature on implicit memory processes

suggests a strong unconscious link between liking and familiarity.^{109–110} Familiar stimuli are easy to process and are therefore better liked.^{112,113} On the other hand, consumers are more likely to process stimuli that they like,^{114,115} and the increased processing could be mistaken for familiarity.

Thus far, the study has shown that the brand's equity rubs off on the brand slogan. The presented results reveal that the brand slogan, in turn, affects evaluation of the brand. Brands attributed with a strong brand's slogan (exhibiting high slogan equity) were better liked than brands attributed with a weak brand's slogan (exhibiting low slogan equity). Although correlations between slogan evaluations and brand evaluations were statistically significant when the slogans were correctly matched with the brands, the correlations were much greater when the slogans were incorrectly matched so that a strong brand was attributed with a weak brand's slogan and a weak brand was attributed with a strong brand's slogan. In other words, slogan equity seemed to play a more important role in the case of competitive interference and transfer of equity from one brand to another. While weak slogan equity did have an impact on the sponsoring weak brand, it seemed to have a significantly greater impact on a strong brand and, similarly, strong

slogan equity seemed to have a significantly greater impact on a weak brand.

This result adds to the literature on competitive interference by suggesting that the link between the brand and the slogan has a greater effect when consumers confuse competing slogans with each other. In other words, rather than just working as a defensive marketing element ensuring advertising continuity and carrying brand equity, slogans may in effect increase confusion between brands and actually be damaging to strong brands and beneficial to weak brands when incorrectly matched with brands. A plausible explanation for the fact that correlations between brand and slogan evaluations were greater in the case of incorrect brand-slogan matching than in the case of correct brand-slogan matching is that well-established brand perceptions are robust and difficult to alter with advertising.¹¹⁶ When consumers know the sponsor of the advertising (in the present case, the brand slogan), they activate the existing brand schema and hence there is little effect on brand evaluations.¹¹⁷ Consumers may even treat the advertising as a separate entity, meaning that evaluations of the advertising and the brand need not correlate strongly.^{118,119} When consumers do not know the sponsor, however, they may use reconstructive memory to fit a brand to the advertising (in the present case, the brand slogan), thereby adjusting advertising and brand evaluations to each other.^{120,121}

As the presented results suggest that brand evaluations may affect slogan evaluations *and* that slogan evaluations may affect brand evaluations, the question arises as to which effect is greater. The final result that was

reported adds to the literature on brand equity by suggesting that the relationship between slogan evaluations and brand evaluations is moderated by brand equity. For strong brands, brand evaluations were more likely to affect slogan evaluations, whereas slogan evaluations were more likely to affect brand evaluations for weak brands. This presents somewhat of a paradox. While strong brand slogans have higher slogan equity, strong brands are less susceptible to influence from their slogans. Weak brand slogans have lower slogan equity but are more susceptible to influence from their slogans.

The title of this paper asks the question of whether brands affect slogans affect brands. This chain of effects may occur when a strong brand's equity biases the learning of its slogan, which is later incorrectly attributed to a weak brand. Thus, it becomes extremely important for strong brands to link the slogan closely to the brand and avoid slogan generalisation. On the other hand, a strong brand need not cause so much worry about an attractive design of its slogan. Slogan uniqueness is more important than attractiveness, as the latter is likely to come automatically for a strong brand. For a weak brand, on the other hand, one would not want to tie the slogan closely to the brand at encoding. Uniqueness would not be a desired feature. In fact, a weak brand may gain from initially establishing a slogan without a link to the brand, and later communicating the brand together with the established slogan. Establishing a 'brand-less' slogan in consumers' minds may be difficult, but it may have two positive effects in return. First, once established, the slogan equity (which has not been

negatively biased at encoding) rubs off on the weak brand. Secondly, when later linked to the brand, the slogan increases attention and motivates consumers to process the brand advertising for the weak brand (which consumers are otherwise less prone to do).^{122,123}

In summary, the present study has shown that learning and evaluation of brand slogans are dependent on brand equity. Slogans are biased by brands at encoding; however, competitive interference may influence both slogan and brand evaluations as the slogans become separated from their brands in consumers' minds. This yields different implications for brand managers depending on the brand's equity. As strong brands have greater slogan equity, their goal should be not to give away equity to competing weak brands. Hence, the slogan's link to the product category should not be too strong. The primary function of the slogan is to remind consumers of their liking for the brand (eg 'brand X tastes great' rather than 'brand X is a great tasting beer'). A more extreme suggestion would be to not use a slogan at all, since it has little effect on the evaluation of a strong brand. As weak brands are more affected by slogan evaluations, their goal should be to reap the benefits of slogan generalisation, through initially forming less strong brand-slogan links. Instead, the desired link is between the slogan and the product category (eg 'dark beer tastes great' rather than 'brand X's dark beer tastes great'). Such a slogan would increase slogan generalisation and hence increase the probability that consumers will attribute a strong brand's slogan to the weak brand and also achieve a slogan equity unbiased by the weak brand that can, once

established, rub off on the sponsoring brand.

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Article 2:
Brand-Slogan Matching in a Cluttered Environment

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Brand–Slogan Matching in a Cluttered Environment

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ABSTRACT *Slogans are generally considered to be useful in building brand equity. In today's cluttered environment, however, consumers often match slogans with brands other than the actual sponsoring brand. Still, research on slogans has mainly focused on slogan effects when the brand is given (for example, in controlled experiments). By using real slogans and brands, this study increases our understanding of how slogans work in the presence of several competing slogans and brands. It is found that mismatching of slogans and brands can be explained by the different memory processes used by consumers. The cued retrieval process generally leads to the correct brand being identified, whereas the constructive memory process is sensitive to memory distortions. However, constructive memory allows for a larger influence of the slogan on the brand than does cued retrieval. The study adds to research on slogans and on source identification. Suggestions on how to use slogans in a cluttered environment, such as creating annoying and irritating slogans or using variations of slogans, are given.*

KEY WORDS: Brands, slogans, source identification, competitive interference, constructive memory

Introduction

Slogans are generally considered to be useful in building brand equity as they facilitate the establishment and maintenance of a strong brand identity and provide continuity throughout advertising campaigns (cf. Celsi and Olson, 1988; Keller, 2003; Reece *et al.*, 1994). In a study by Mathur and Mathur (1995), the announcement of a new slogan was found to increase the market value of firms with an amount that, on average, corresponded to a \$6–8 million increase in annual profits. This finding indirectly points out the value attached to slogans by marketers and investors alike. Direct support for the value of slogans comes from experimental studies in which slogans have been found to influence product beliefs (Ennis and Zanna, 1993) and brand evaluations (Boush, 1993; Pryor and Brodie, 1998).

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However, in these experimental studies the brand has been given. For slogans to have the same effect outside a controlled environment, consumers must accurately match the slogan with the sponsoring brand (Pham and Johar, 1997; 2001). Can one really expect correct brand-slogan matching to happen?

Brands exist in a cluttered environment where they have to compete with other products and brands for consumers' attention. Given the many messages they encounter, consumers often confuse marketing communication efforts by different sponsors (cf. Brengman *et al.*, 2001; Johar and Pham, 1999; Kent and Kellaris, 2001). In the case of slogans, such competitive interference seems to be recurrent. Several researchers report that consumers frequently are unable to match a slogan with its sponsoring brand (e.g., Dahlén and Rosengren, 2005; Reece *et al.*, 1994). In one study, as much as 39% matched a leading brand's slogan with other brands (cited in Pham and Johar, 1997). Mismatching means that the positive effects found in experimental studies might not be realized. Furthermore, when mismatching occurs, a different brand within the same product category is often identified as the sponsor (Reece *et al.*, 1994), suggesting that competitive interference might result in the slogan benefiting a competing brand (cf. Dahlén and Rosengren, 2005). Still, marketers invest substantial sums in their slogans (Mathur and Mathur, 1995) and count on them to build brand identity and enhance brand presence (Keller, 2003; Reece *et al.*, 1994). In the light of brand-slogan mismatching such investments seems questionable. Given the cluttered media environment and the intense competition facing most brands, a better understanding of why mismatching occurs and what the effects might be should be important for marketers.

Traditionally, brand-slogan matching has been thought of in terms of cued retrieval. The slogan is considered a retrieval cue that activates the brand in the mind of the consumers. Brand-slogan matching can, however, be based on three different memory processes: cued retrieval, constructive memory, or pure guessing (Johar and Pham, 1999; Pham and Johar, 1997). Building on the source identification framework by Pham and Johar (1997), we suggest that sensitivity to competitive interference and the potential value of a slogan will vary depending on how brand-slogan matching is made. In an empirical study of beer brands and their slogans, we investigate brand-slogan matching accuracy, the interrelationships between brand and slogan evaluations, and sensitivity to competitive interference. We end the article with suggestions on how to use slogans in the presence of competitive interference.

The Influence of Slogans on their Brands

Slogans are expected to affect how consumers perceive a brand, both in its own right and in relation to its competition. More specifically, a slogan can influence a brand by:

1. Creating brand awareness by linking the brand to a product category (Keller, 2003; Keller, 1993).
2. Shaping brand evaluations by priming specific brand associations (Boush, 1993; Ennis and Zanna, 1993; Pryor and Brodie, 1998).
3. Shaping brand evaluations by transfer of likeability (cf. Brown and Stayman 1992; Haley and Baldinger, 1991; Muehling and McCann, 1993).

4. Reinforcing brand awareness and evaluations by serving as a memory aid (Keller, 1993; Mathur and Mathur, 1995; Reece *et al.*, 1994).

A slogan can fulfil one or more of these functions. The most powerful slogans are those that contribute to the brand in multiple ways (Keller, 2003). The slogan tells the consumer what the brand is about and, potentially, it will influence what consumers think about the brand and how they evaluate it (functions 1–3). Linguistic devices such as word play and rhyme can be used to enhance memorability for the slogan. Moreover, the fact that slogans can be used over time and over different advertising campaigns further contribute to their memorability. The slogan as such thus becomes a carrier of brand equity (function 4). For instance, Carlsberg's 'Probably the best beer [lager] in the world' clearly connects the brand with the beer category (1). 'The best' primes the association of number one (2) in a likeable way ('probably') that should be beneficial to the brand (3). When exposed to the slogan, consumers' perceptions about Carlsberg are likely to be influenced. 'Probably the best beer [lager] in the world' becomes a carrier of the essence of the Carlsberg brand (4).

A prerequisite for slogans to fulfil any of these functions is, however, that the brand and the slogan are accurately linked together by the consumers (Pham and Johar, 1997, 2001). If, for instance, consumers who are exposed to 'Probably the best beer [lager] in the world' do not match it with Carlsberg, the slogan will not affect their perceptions about the Carlsberg brand. Carlsberg will thus not benefit from its slogan investment. Furthermore, if consumers match the slogan with another brand, the investments made by Carlsberg might be transferred to that brand instead. If, lets say, Heineken, is identified as the sponsor, the perceptions evoked by the slogan will be projected on Heineken instead of Carlsberg (Dahlén and Rosengren, 2005; Pham and Johar, 2001). The consumer will attribute the associations of 'the best' and the likeability of the slogan to Heineken. Although being mistakenly matched with the slogan could be beneficial for Heineken, it must not be. Associations that are beneficial to Carlsberg might not be as positive for Heineken. The associations might even make consumers uncertain of what Heineken actually stands for (Brenngman *et al.*, 2001). If this is the case, both brands will suffer from consumers' inability to make an accurate brand-slogan match.

Brand-slogan matching is thus important from both the sponsoring and the confused brand's point of view. Awareness of how consumers' match a slogan with a brand should help marketers understand when mismatching is likely to occur and how to create slogans that reduce the risks of such mismatching.

Competitive Interference and Brand Identification

Competitive interference is a continuously growing problem for marketers. As the volume of brands and brand messages increases, it is becoming more and more difficult for marketers to gain enough consumer attention to build memory for their brands and communication efforts. According to Kumar (2000), consumers can be expected to recall less than 25% of the advertising they are exposed to on an average day. Clutter has also been shown to make consumers less able to match marketing communication efforts and brands; even if consumers remember the message they

cannot always tell which brand stands behind it. Brand identification problems have been found for diverse efforts such as advertising (e.g., Burke and Srull, 1988; Kent and Kellaris, 2001), sponsorships (e.g. Johar and Pham, 1999; Pham and Johar, 2001), and slogans (e.g. Law, 2002; Reece *et al.*, 1994).

Previous research has shown that consumers use one of three memory processes when matching brands and marketing communications: (1) cued retrieval; (2) memory construction; or (3) pure guessing (Pham and Johar, 1997). Cued retrieval is based on semantic memory for the brand-message link. Although cued retrieval is the default option, it requires a clear memory trace for the brand-message link. In the presence of several competing brands, consumers are often unable to encode marketing communications enough for such a link to be formed (Law, 2002). Clutter decreases the chances of cued retrieval being used for brand identification. Instead, consumers can try to either reconstruct a link in their mind or guess the sponsoring brand. Given that consumers are somewhat motivated to make an accurate match, constructive memory is the most likely process (Johar and Pham, 1999; Pham and Johar, 1997). To identify a sponsoring brand, consumers either refresh memory traces from previous exposures or try to infer who the potential sponsor could be by comparing the message to their knowledge of potential brands (Pham and Johar, 1997).

Which matching process will be used thus depends on consumers' memory for a specific piece of communication (see Figure 1). The memory can be characterized in terms of level of familiarity and confidence. Consumers can either be confident in their familiarity (i.e. have a clear memory trace) or they can be less confident in their familiarity (i.e. attribute it to a general sense of familiarity). Consumers are able to distinguish between these two types of familiarity (Law, 2002; 1998) and this assertion will determine which matching process will be used. For instance, in the case of slogans, matching due to cued retrieval is based on a strong sense of

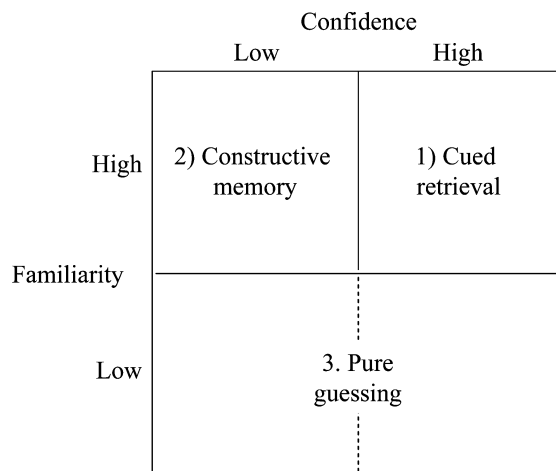


Figure 1. Brand-slogan matching processes

familiarity; consumers are confident that they know the slogan (1). When the sense of familiarity is less confidently held, consumers will try to reconstruct their previous memory for the slogan in order to match it with a brand (2). If the slogan is not at all familiar, the only way to match it with a brand would be through guessing (3).

Accuracy of Brand–Slogan Matching

The frequent mismatching of slogans to brands could be explained by the memory process used. Consumers are generally quite familiar with slogans and good at recognizing them (e.g. Dotson and Hyatt, 2000; Moore and Stephens, 1975). This is true regardless of age and whether or not consumers are actually part of the target group (Dotson and Hyatt, 2000). Due to high levels of familiarity, brand–slogan matching based on guessing is less likely to take place (cf. Johar and Pham, 1999; 1997). Brand–slogan matching should thus be based on either cued retrieval or constructive memory.

The competitive interference found in studies of brand–slogan matching (e.g. Keiser, 1975; Reece *et al.*, 1994) should mainly be due to matching based on constructive memory processes. Cued retrieval is generally rather effortless and involves few memory errors (Law, 2002; Pham and Johar, 1997). As the brand–slogan link is clearly remembered, mismatching is unlikely to take place. Although the high levels of recognition and familiarity might be interpreted as support for brand–slogan matching based on cued retrieval, this is not necessarily the case. Memory for a brand and its slogan has been found to be somewhat independent (e.g. Keiser, 1975; Moore and Stephens, 1975); a consumer might be able to remember a brand and its slogan without being able to match the two together. The constructive processes used by consumers to come up with a match in the absence of a clearly remembered brand–slogan link, are sensitive to memory distortions (Law, 2002; Pham and Johar, 1997). The information provided in the slogan might not always lead to the correct brand being identified. Overall, cued retrieval should thus be more accurate than constructive memory.

H1: Brand–slogan matching based on cued retrieval is more accurate than brand–slogan matching based on constructive memory.

Triggers of Brand–Slogan Matching

The two matching processes rely on different information in order to establish a brand–slogan match. The relative influence of the brand and the slogan will differ (cf. Leigh, 1992), which, in turn, should influence the potential role of the slogan as a builder of brand equity as well as what makes an accurate match more likely.

Consumers are more likely to pay attention and process information related to brands that they like (Rice and Bennett, 1998). This means that slogans for well-liked brands are more likely to have gone through enough processing for cued retrieval to be possible. The brand prompts the consumers to pay attention to its marketing communication. As well-liked brands are likely to be central nodes in their own

associative networks (Kent and Allen, 1994; Kumar and Krishnan, 2004), we would expect the information to be processed top-down starting with the brand (Leigh, 1992). The established brand schema should thus influence how the consumers perceive the slogan. This means that consumers would evaluate the slogan based on their evaluations of the brand.

Constructive memory uses the slogan to guide its matching efforts. The slogan is perceived as familiar; either due to actual exposure or to contextual effects (Pieters *et al.*, 2002). This familiarity makes consumers motivated to try to remember where they might have seen the slogan before or what brand would be the most likely to use it (Pham and Johar, 1997). The information is processed bottom-up, starting from the advertising stimulus (Leigh, 1992). The slogan as such is the most important cue to making a brand-slogan match. What consumers think about the slogan should influence which brand they will match it with. Consumers should thus evaluate the brand based on their evaluations of the slogan.

The two matching processes imply differences in the mutual influence between the brand and the slogan. When cued retrieval is used, the brand schema will guide processing of the slogan. The opposite is expected when retrieval is based on constructive memory. Thus, we hypothesize:

H2a: When matching is based on cued retrieval, brand evaluation is more likely to affect slogan evaluation.

H2b: When matching is based on memory construction, slogan evaluation is more likely to affect brand evaluation.

Given the central role of the brand in cued retrieval (H2a) and the slogan in memory construction (H2b), the brand and the slogan should have different impact on matching accuracy as well. That is, the relative importance of the brand and the slogan should influence the circumstances under which an accurate brand-slogan match is most likely to occur.

For cued retrieval, matching accuracy should be guided by what consumers think about the brand. The more consumers like the brand, the more likely they are to encode information regarding it (Rice and Bennett, 1998), and the more encoding, the more accurate the brand-slogan match. As the slogan is processed based on the brand schema, however, consumers' evaluations of the slogan as such should be less important.

How consumers evaluate a brand is less likely to affect matching accuracy for constructive memory. As consumers are generally better at remembering an inferred meaning of a claim rather than the exact phrase (Harris *et al.*, 1989), repeated advertising of slogans often result in generalization of slogan meaning. As consumers are generally more knowledgeable of common rather than distinct properties of brands in a category, the generalized slogan is more likely to be connected to the product category than to any specific brand (Kent and Kellaris, 2001). The slogan will cue the product category and the activation reaching each brand will be low, thus increasing the risk for retrieval error (Unnava *et al.*, 2003). Furthermore, the absence of a clear memory for previous exposures, often leads to familiarity being misattributed to positive affect (Holden and Vanhuele, 1999;

Nordhielm, 2002), making such slogans well-liked. In the absence of a clear memory for the brand–slogan match, a more liked slogan should be linked to the product category making it harder for consumers to match it with the sponsoring brand.

The different influence of the brand and the slogan for the two matching processes should thus be reflected in the triggers of matching accuracy. In the case of cued retrieval, a well-liked brand will lead to processing of the brand–slogan link and make accuracy higher. For constructive memory, the generalized familiarity with the slogan is interpreted as liking. However, as the generalized slogan is more closely linked to the category than to any brand, the more liked the slogan the less accurate the match. Thus, we hypothesize:

H3a: When matching is based on cued retrieval, brand liking is higher for correct matches than incorrect matches.

H3b: When matching is based on memory construction, slogan liking is lower for correct matches than incorrect matches.

Sensitivity of Brand Slogan Matching

As suggested in H1 the frequent mismatching of slogans to brands is dependent on which matching process consumers use. Memory cues (e.g. Keller, 1991a; b) and varied advertising executions (e.g. Unnava and Burnkrant, 1991; Unnava and Sirdeshmukh, 1994) are generally suggested as strategies to overcome the negative effects of competitive interference. However, the usefulness of the two strategies should vary depending on which brand–slogan matching process is used. The rationale for using memory cues is that they directly activate the brand. The use of memory cues is thus contingent on matching based on cued retrieval (cf. Pham and Johar, 1997). When consumers have no clear link between the memory cue and the brand, as is often the case for slogans (Law, 2002; Reece *et al.*, 1994), memory cues should be of less use. Varied advertising executions, on the other hand, aims to enrich the associative network of the consumers. Although it means that the link between a specific execution and the brand might become weaker, it enhances the general familiarity with the brand. Such variations should facilitate constructive memory processes (cf. Pham and Johar, 1997).

Although brand–slogan matching based on cued retrieval is brand-driven whereas brand–slogan matching based on memory construction is slogan-driven (H2–H3), cued retrieval should be more sensitive to variations in slogan formulations. If the memory trace and the memory cue do not exactly match, it will lead to confusion and reduce the accuracy of brand–slogan matching. For memory construction, the more generalized familiarity with the slogan means that no such discrimination can be made. Variations might even enrich the amount of cues available when constructing the brand slogan link, thereby increasing its accuracy. Thus, we hypothesize:

H4a: When brand–slogan matching is based on cued retrieval, matching accuracy will be sensitive to variations in the slogan.

H4b: When matching is based on memory construction, matching accuracy will be improved by variations in the slogan.

Method

A method similar to Reece *et al.* (1994) was used. Respondents were exposed to a number of slogans and asked to evaluate each slogan and to match it with a brand. The study thus used the natural variance that the respondents *bring to* the ad exposure setting (Muehling *et al.*, 1991). This is in line with the recommendations of several advertising researchers to use a more ecologically valid method, instead of creating artificial responses through manipulations (cf. Celsi and Olson, 1988; Greenwald and Leavitt, 1984; Muehling *et al.*, 1991).

Beer was chosen as the product category for the study. Beer has been an attractive product category for research during the years (e.g. Allison and Uhl, 1964; Orth *et al.*, 2004). It is a heavily advertised product category with many competing brands. Furthermore, the differences between products are small and the reliance on communicative platforms is great.

The Slogans

Sixteen slogans were tested in the study. To ensure that all slogans were heavily advertised and familiar to the respondents, real slogans among the top 16 brands of beer were chosen as stimuli. The brands were selected based on syndicated sales figures (Market Monitor). All but two (Carlsberg and Tuborg) of the brands were domestic.

In order to create a situation where memory of the brand–slogan link must be constructed, half of the slogans were modified somewhat. When modifying the slogans, the general spirit of the slogan was kept but the phrasing was varied. For instance, the original slogan of one of the brands: ‘The bright moments of life’ was modified into ‘Life is bright’.¹ This practice is similar to that used of cognitive psychologists when studying encoding variability (cf. Unnava and Burnkrant, 1991). The distinction between actual and modified slogans was used to test hypotheses 4a and b.

Procedure

Two hundred and eight-nine respondents participated in the study (age: 19–27 years, 65% male). They were recruited by intercept at two large college campuses. Respondents were handed a questionnaire with a cover story stating that the researchers were investigating consumers’ knowledge of slogans. As an incentive to participate, a lottery was arranged with gift certificates valued at approximately €10 serving as a prize. Respondents were allowed to answer the questions at their own pace. Test leaders were available for questions during the answering process. When finished, respondents handed back the questionnaires to the test leaders.

The slogans were listed consecutively with immediate ratings of each slogan. The respondents evaluated each slogan on measures of attitude toward the slogan,

familiarity, and confidence in their familiarity. They then matched the slogan with a brand in an open-ended question. Each respondent rated eight slogans (4 actual and 4 modified), yielding 928 matched slogan responses.

The order of slogans was rotated. Measures of brand attitudes and a number of filler questions followed the slogans. In order to test hypothesis 2, brand attitude was measured first and the slogans at the end of the questionnaire for 98 of the respondents. This way, the authors could compare the correlations between brand and slogan evaluations when (1) evaluation of the brand preceded the slogan; and (2) evaluation of the slogan preceded the brand. The rotated order of evaluations facilitates a test of causality (Kenny, 1975).

To distinguish between cued retrieval and constructive memory processes, measures of slogan familiarity and confidence (see below) were used. The slogan responses were split in half (high and low) based on slogan familiarity and confidence (cf. Figure 1). To avoid matching based on pure guessing; only highly familiar slogan responses were used in the analysis. We thus ended up with two groups of slogan matches: cued retrieval (high familiarity, high confidence, $n=448$) and memory construction (high familiarity, low confidence, $n=246$).

Measures

Attitude toward the slogan was measured on a seven-point semantic differential scale consisting of three items: good/bad, pleasant/unpleasant, favourable/unfavourable. An index was produced by averaging the responses to the items (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.94$). The measure was taken from MacKenzie and Lutz (1989).

Slogan familiarity was measured on a seven-point semantic differential scale consisting of two items. The items used were, familiar/unfamiliar, never seen or heard/often seen or heard. An index was produced by averaging the responses to the items ($r=0.705^2$, $P<0.01$). The measure was taken from Pieters *et al.* (2002). The respondents were also asked to rate how *confident* they were in their familiarity on a scale adapted from Berger and Mitchell (1989): not at all certain/very certain and completely confident/not at all confident. An index was produced in the same way as for familiarity ($r=0.963$, $P<0.01$).

Brand-slogan matching was measured with an open-ended question where respondents were asked to write down the brand they believed the slogan was advertising. To reduce the risk of response editing limiting the amount of answers based on constructive memory processes (cf. Johar and Pham, 1999), respondents were asked write down the first brand that came to their mind and not be too worried about the accuracy of their responses. Correct matches were coded 1 and incorrect 0.

Brand attitude was measured with a three-item semantic differential scale taken from Loken and Ward (1990) and Simonin and Ruth (1998). The items were good/bad, negative/positive, satisfactory/unsatisfactory. An index was produced by averaging the responses to the items (Cronbach's $\alpha=0.90$).

Results

Hypothesis 1, that brand-slogan matching based on cued retrieval is more accurate than brand-slogan matching based on constructive memory, was tested by

comparing the accuracy rates for matching based on each memory process. Overall, matching based on cued retrieval was significantly ($Chi2=30.16$, $P<0.01$) more accurate (73%) than matching based on constructive memory (52%). The results thus support H1. Consumers are more accurate when using cued retrieval than when using constructive memory to match a slogan with its sponsoring brand.

Hypotheses 2a and b, whether brand evaluations are more likely to influence slogan evaluations or the other way around, were tested based on Kenny (1975). The respondents were divided into two groups; group 1 consisted of respondent who rated the brands before they rated the slogans and group 2 of respondents who rated the slogans before the brands. Using Fisher's r-to-z transformation, slogan attitude \times brand attitude correlations for the two groups were compared. A stronger correlation in group 1 suggests a casual influence from brand evaluations to slogans, and a stronger correlation in group 2 from slogan evaluations to brands.

When cued retrieval was used (H2a), brand attitude \times slogan attitude correlations were significantly higher ($P<0.05$) in group 1 ($r=0.43$) compared to group 2 ($r=0.21$). This indicates a direction of influence from the brand to the slogan and supports H2a. When cued retrieval is used, brand evaluations are more likely to affect slogan evaluations than the other way around. The opposite result was found for matching based on memory construction (H2b). The brand attitude \times slogan attitude correlation was 0.23 in group 2, and non-significant in group 1 (Table 1). This indicates a direction of causal influence from the slogan to the brand and supports H2b. Slogan evaluations are used in forming brand evaluations when brand-slogan matching is based on constructive memory.

In order to test what drives accurate matching for cued retrieval (H3a) and memory reconstruction (H3b), respectively, brand attitudes and slogan attitudes between correctly and incorrectly matched slogans were compared (see Table 2). To avoid confusion with the results found in H2a-b, respondents who used cued retrieval and who had not been asked about brand attitudes before their matching of the slogans were used to test H3a. Subsequently, only those who had answered brand attitudes before matching were used to test H3b.

When cued retrieval was used brand attitudes were significantly higher ($P<0.05$) for correctly identified brands ($M=4.54$) than for incorrectly identified brands ($M=3.96$). For slogan attitudes, however, there was no significant difference. The results support H3a. When cued retrieval is used, accuracy is greater for better-liked brands. When constructive memory was used, there were no significant differences in terms of brand attitudes. Slogan attitudes were, however,

Table 1. Attitude toward the brand \times attitude toward the slogan correlations and brand-slogan evaluation order

Cued retrieval		Constructive memory	
Brand precedes slogan	Slogan precedes brand	Brand precedes slogan	Slogan precedes brand
0.429**	0.211**	n.s.	0.226*

Correlation significant * $P<0.05$ ** $P<0.01$

Table 2. Brand and slogan evaluations and matching accuracy

	Correct	Incorrect	
<i>Cued retrieval</i>			
Brand attitudes	4.54	3.96	$t=2.31, P=0.022$
Slogan attitudes	5.33	5.11	n.s.
<i>Constructive memory</i>			
Brand attitudes	4.09	3.92	n.s.
Slogan attitudes	4.10	4.85	$t=2.48, P=0.015$

significantly higher ($P<0.05$) for incorrectly ($M=4.85$) than correctly matched slogans ($M=4.10$). The results thus support H2b. When the brand–slogan match is based on a constructive memory process, the more liked the slogan the less accurate the match.

Hypotheses 4a–b concerned the difference in accuracy for actual and modified slogans for the two matching processes (see Table 3). For cued retrieval, accuracy of actual slogans (80%) was significantly higher ($P<0.01$) than for slogan variations (61%). The accuracy of brand–slogan matching through cued retrieval is thus sensitive to differences in memory cues, as suggested by H4a. As hypothesized (H4b), the same reduction in accuracy was not found when constructive memory was used. The accuracy for actual slogans (35%) was lower ($P<0.01$) than for modified slogans (80%), supporting H4b. Variations have a positive effect on matching accuracy when constructive memory is used to match a slogan with a brand.

Discussion and Managerial Implications

Slogans are generally assumed useful in building brand equity, but few empirical investigations have actually tested this assumption. The present study adds to slogan research by investigating the effects of slogans on brands in a cluttered environment. Previous studies of slogans have mainly focused on slogan effects *or* on brand–slogan matching *per se*. By combining these two aspects, the current study

Table 3. Sensitivity of matching accuracy

	Correct	Incorrect	
<i>Cued retrieval</i>			
Overall	73%	27%	
Actual	80%	20%	$\chi^2=18.05, P<0.01 n=448$
Modified	61%	39%	
<i>Constructive memory</i>			
Overall	52%	48%	
Actual	35%	65%	$\chi^2=13.97, P<0.01 n=246$
Modified	60%	40%	

sheds light on the underlying reasons for competitive interference and its consequences for slogans as a marketing communications tool.

Two Processes

The current study shows that mismatching of slogans and brands can be understood in terms of the different memory processes consumers use. The cued retrieval process generally leads to the correct brand being identified, whereas the constructive memory process is sensitive to memory distortions. But, paradoxically, constructive memory allows for a larger influence of the slogan on the brand than does cued retrieval.

When matching is based on cued retrieval, the brand is central. The brand attracts attention, makes the slogan liked, and reduces the risk for competitive interference. 'Brand gravity' is at hand. However, the accuracy of brand-slogan matching is sensitive to slogan variations; consistent use of a single slogan over time seems to be a requirement. Cued retrieval means that brands will influence slogans rather than the other way around (cf. Dahlén and Rosengren, 2005). Of the suggested functions of slogans listed in this article, only the fourth – that of brand equity reinforcement – seems to be at hand. When allowing for real world variations, slogans do not quite fulfil their brand building promise. As correct brand-slogan matching rests mainly on brand-initiated processing, the slogan will have little if any effect on brand perceptions. The risks of causing interference might thus overshadow the benefits.

In the absence of a clearly remembered brand-slogan link, constructive memory will be used. The slogan becomes a central element of the matching process. Slogan liking is transferred to the brand, but the more liked the slogan is, the more sensitive it will be to competitive interference. 'Slogan gravity' draws several brands to the slogan, resulting in reduced accuracy of brand-slogan matching. Using variations of the slogan, however, could be a way to overcome such interference. If overcome, the slogan will have the ability to influence brand equity (functions one, two, and three).

It thus seems that the cluttered environment of today's brands has constrained the role of slogans as a brand building tool. Slogan mismatching due to constructive processes is likely to occur in highly competitive categories with a high reliance on communicative platforms. Furthermore, it should be more common for unfamiliar brands and communications targeted towards new audiences. Cued retrieval can be expected when there are few competitors in a category, the brand is well known, and when the target audience consists of current buyers or experts. Constructive memory when there are many competitors in the category, the brand is new or unfamiliar, and when the target audience consists of new buyers or novices.

The End of the Slogan as we Know it?

The conditions under which constructive memory processes are expected are the same as the conditions under which competitive interference of ad claims have been found to be a major problem (e.g. Kent and Allen, 1994; Kent and Kellaris, 2001) and for which slogans have been suggested to be the most useful. Rather than clarifying the differences between brands slogan repetitions seems to make them

more similar. Practices such as building brand awareness by connecting the brand with a category in a slogan would increase this tendency even more.

One way to overcome competitive interference would be to create annoying, dim, or irritating slogans. Using slogans that consumers do not like, gives marketers two advantages. First, as slogan gravity tends to draw brands to slogans that are liked, disliked slogans would reverse this effect and thus increase brand–slogan matching accuracy. Second, an annoying slogan should stand out from competing slogans hence making it less prone to generalization. By explicitly testing for slogan likeability, and choosing the less liked alternatives, the negative effects of slogan generalization could be avoided. Although this might seem counterintuitive, the fact that competitive interference is mainly a problem in mature and highly competitive categories suggest otherwise. In such markets, brand salience rather than brand differentiation has been found to be important (cf. Ehrenberg *et al.*, 1997). The key is to be noticed, not to be liked. The recommendation is thus in line with theorizing showing that unexpected and disliked advertising can be beneficial for mature brands as it increases consumers' interest in the brand (e.g., Dahlén *et al.*, 2005; Machleit *et al.*, 1993).

Another way to overcome competitive interference would be to change the role of the slogan in marketing communications. Keller (2003) suggests that brands develop brand mantras to ensure organizational understanding of the brand position. Similarly, slogans might be more useful for guiding marketing communication efforts than as a communicative tool directed at consumers. To reduce the competitive interference several variations of the slogan could be developed.

The When and Whys of Slogan Usage

For marketers not willing to give up on slogans, finding ways to ensure sufficient processing of the brand–slogan link is important. Although familiar brands have a clear advantage when it comes to creating strong brand–slogan links, carefully considered media planning could help ensure processing that is less brand-related. Placing advertisements with slogans in unexpected media vehicles leads to increased processing and improved memory for ad-related information (cf. Törn *et al.*, 2006). In addition, by avoiding the thematic overlap between the slogan and media the contextual richness of the slogan memory trace should be reduced, thereby decreasing the risk of slogan generalization.

Media planning can also be used to reduce the potential for constructive memory to err. The current practice of repeating slogans verbally increases slogan generalization tendencies, as they are heavily dependent on consumer recall. By placing slogans in visual media only, the risk for competitive interference can be reduced, as brand–slogan matching then will be based on recognition rather than recall. Such matching will leave less room for constructive processes (cf. Kent and Machleit, 1990). Furthermore, timing of media can be used. Constructive memory has been found to influence perceptions of actual experiences (e.g., Braun, 1999; Braun-LaTour and LaTour, 2005). To avoid such mistaken attributions, placing ads and slogans near to the purchase becomes an important way to reduce the risk of competitive interference (Dahlén and Nordfält, 2004).

Limitations and Further Research

The results presented in this study are limited by the fact that a student sample and slogans from only one category (beer) were used. The study was a first effort to understand the frequent mismatching slogans to brands and of what it means for slogans' functions as brand equity builders. To increase the ecological validity of the study, a correlational design and real slogans were chosen. Beer was seen as an appropriate category for two reasons. First, it is mainly targeted to a younger audience thus making the choice of a student sample less problematic. Second, the reliance of communicative platforms and the number of competing brands in the category makes it an interesting point of departure for research on slogans in a cluttered environment.

Although our findings are consistent with previous studies of source identification (e.g., Johar and Pham, 1999; Pham and Johar, 1997; 2001) we cannot completely rule out other causes for the effects found. The current study does, however, add a new dimension to these studies, as most of them have used a strict experimental design and novel stimuli. The additions made in this study should be further tested, nevertheless. Preferably in an experimental setting where alternative explanations can be controlled for and actual processes be closely monitored. Of special interest are the results regarding different effects of communications for different matching processes (cf. H2) and the applicability of different strategies to increase matching accuracy (cf. H4).

The findings align with the growing interest in constructive memory processes in consumer research (cf. Braun, 1999; Braun-LaTour and LaTour, 2005). By allowing for a more complex view of memory processes, such studies have found that memory for actual experiences of a product can be changed by marketing communications. This study shows that the same holds for incorrectly matched slogans and similar results could be expected regarding other types of marketing communications as well. The validity of this expectation, however, must be tested in future studies.

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Endnotes

1. Translation into English by the authors, in the questionnaire all slogans were in their original language.

2. We report the correlation coefficient rather than Cronbach's alpha because our measure only consists of two items (cf. Verhoef, 2003, footnote 2).

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Article 3:

Could Placing Ads Wrong be Right?

Advertising Effects of Thematic Incongruence

Micael Dahlén, Sara Rosengren, Fredrik Törn, and Niclas Öhman

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COULD PLACING ADS WRONG BE RIGHT?

Advertising Effects of Thematic Incongruence

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ABSTRACT: This paper adds to the research on media-context effects with two experimental studies of thematic (in)congruence (i.e., advertising placed in media with themes that are either congruent or incongruent with the advertised brands). We hypothesize that by challenging expectations, placing ads in thematically incongruent media could enhance ad processing. Furthermore, employing theory on information incongruence, we hypothesize that thematic incongruence could enhance advertising evaluations and produce stronger perceptions of existing brand associations. The results support the hypotheses and suggest that effects are moderated by brand familiarity.

Flip through the pages of an automotive magazine and you are sure to find advertising for cars. Similarly, readers of a beauty magazine will encounter ads for makeup brands. These are examples of thematic congruence, where advertising is placed in media with themes matching the brands. As advertising context and the editorial environment are gaining importance in the media-planning process, thematic congruence has become the default criterion in media selection (King and Reid 1997; King, Reid, and Macias 2004; Moorman, Neijens, and Smit 2002). Whereas there has been ample research on advertising context and congruence effects relating to the immediate editorial environment (for a review, see, e.g., De Pelsmacker, Geuens, and Anckaert 2002), thematic congruence has still received relatively scarce attention (for exceptions, see Dahlén 2005; Moorman, Neijens, and Smit 2002).

The research conducted to date suggests that matching advertising with the total media context enhances its effectiveness. Apart from the obvious reason that placing an ad in a medium with a similar theme should guarantee a good audience match (those reading an automotive magazine are likely to be in the market for car products), the rationale for choosing a congruent context for advertising would be that it facilitates processing of the ad. This is in line with the literature on congruence: A congruent context eases comprehension of the advertising (e.g., Goodstein 1993; Kamins, Marks, and Skinner 1991). Thematic congruence has been found to enhance

ad recall (Moorman, Neijens, and Smit 2002) and produce stronger target associations and more positive evaluations than neutral or incongruent media (Dahlén 2005).

However, a premise for the facilitating effect of congruence on processing is that consumers would otherwise experience some difficulty in comprehending the advertising (e.g., Goodstein 1993). Whereas this is often the case in advertising experiments using mock brands and unfamiliar exposure vehicles (e.g., Dahlén 2005), most of the advertising in major media is sponsored by established and well-known brands (Kent 2002). Advertising for these brands activates consumers' prior knowledge of the brands (so-called brand schemata), which guides attention and processing of the information content (e.g., Kent and Allen 1994). Thus, the value of external processing help is reduced. Therefore, a congruent context for the ad may not increase processing; in fact, it could actually reduce it. Furthermore, selecting a similar theme does not necessarily lead to a perfect audience match. Not all potential car buyers read car magazines, for example, and most car buyers could be expected to read other magazines besides car magazines as well. In many cases, target audiences will thus overlap in their media habits. For instance, to reach fashion-oriented car buyers when marketing a fashionable car, advertisers' best option may be to reach them through an ad in a beauty or fashion magazine.

In this paper, we challenge the conventional wisdom and suggest that placing ads in a medium that is thematically incongruent with the brand may be beneficial. Although congruence might be useful in trying to reach the desired target audience, we suggest that reaching parts of that audience using thematically incongruent magazines might increase the effectiveness of an ad. In a first study, we test the effects of thematic incongruence experimentally by inserting ads for two familiar brands in real magazines. We hypothesize that an incongruent media placement will defy consumer expectations, and that as consumers try to resolve the incongruence, they will process

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the advertising more. Increased processing and successful resolution should lead to enhanced evaluations and strengthened brand associations. A second study rules out competing explanations and replicates the main findings. Furthermore, it tests the moderating effect of brand familiarity.

ADVERTISING EFFECTS OF THEMATIC INCONGRUENCE

Consumers develop knowledge about brands when encountering brand-related information such as advertising, packaging, and trying out products. Over time, as brands become increasingly familiar, consumers' brand knowledge and brand perceptions build a rather robust memory structure, typically referred to as a brand schema. The brand schema could be considered a kind of investment: It is the end result of all previous processing that a consumer has devoted to the brand, and it pays off by reducing the effort that is required on future encounters with the brand. When consumers encounter new information about a brand, the brand schema is activated, and the information is interpreted in light of it. The brand schema also forms expectations about where and how the brand will be encountered in the future (Alden, Mukherjee, and Hoyer 2000; Dahlén et al. 2005).

When brand information conforms to expectations (such as when a car brand advertises in an automotive magazine), there is little need to process the information in-depth to relate it to the existing brand schema (Kent and Allen 1994; Machleit, Allen, and Madden 1993). In contrast, information that defies expectations (such as when a car brand advertises in a beauty magazine), encourages people to pay attention to the information and motivates them to think about it (Fiske, Kinder, and Larter 1983). Indeed, previous research has shown that ads which are incongruent with an evoked schema elicit more processing than ads which are schema-congruent (Goodstein 1993; Moore, Stammerjohan, and Coulter 2005). Advertising in a thematically incongruent medium will conflict with the brand schema, as the advertising does not fit with the brand's existing associations or previous media placements. This should lead consumers to engage in more extensive processing to resolve the incongruence (e.g., Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989). Consequently, we expect that

H1: An ad is processed more (less) when advertising is placed in a thematically incongruent (congruent) medium.

Previous research shows that successful resolution of incongruent information can enhance evaluations of advertising for two reasons. First, more thorough processing leads to enhanced confidence in resolution judgments, which is usually interpreted as a greater liking of the ad and the brand (e.g., Lee 2000). Second, incongruent information produces a kind of entertainment value, as it challenges the consumer and

presents him or her with a puzzle to solve. Solving the puzzle that the thematically incongruent ad placement offers should thus produce positive affect and a sense of accomplishment (Peracchio and Meyers-Levy 1994; Phillips 2000). Therefore, we hypothesize:

H2: Ad and brand attitudes are more (less) positive when advertising is placed in a thematically incongruent (congruent) medium.

One obvious argument against thematically incongruent ad placements would be that even though evaluations may be enhanced, there is a risk that the brand image (i.e., its core associations) will be diluted: Whereas a thematically congruent medium would share target associations with the brand, a thematically incongruent medium provides associations that are incongruent and may interfere with the brand's existing associations. However, we expect that a thematically incongruent medium will not dilute, but rather reinforce, existing brand associations.

When advertising conforms to expectations (as would be the case in a thematically congruent medium), the consumer needs to activate the brand schema only briefly to confirm his or her existing knowledge of the brand. The conflicting information from a thematically incongruent medium, however, should provoke more extensive activation of the brand schema, as the consumer searches for potential explanations and elements that could match (Dahlén et al. 2005; Kent and Allen 1994). The more extensively the brand schema is activated, the more salient its content should become. Searching for a match, the consumer reiterates the brand associations that are stored in the schema and the very repetition of these associations should strengthen their ties with the brand. We therefore hypothesize that consumers perceive brand associations more strongly when encountering an ad in a thematically incongruent medium:

H3: Brand associations are perceived more (less) strongly when advertising is placed in a thematically incongruent (congruent) medium.

STUDY 1

A method similar to that of Moorman, Neijens, and Smit (2002) was used to test the hypotheses. Participants were exposed to one target ad and several filler ads inserted in either a brand-congruent or brand-incongruent magazine and then asked to indicate their reactions to the advertisement and the brand.

Stimulus Development

Magazines were chosen as the medium for a number of reasons. First, magazines are well suited for tests of thematic congruence as they are usually thematically organized. Second, print

media are reader paced, meaning that participants can process the ads for as long as they want (cf. Muehling, Lacznia, and Stoltman 1991). This makes magazines suitable for research on information congruence (Lee 2000). Third, by using magazines, the present research aligns with previous research on thematic congruence (Moorman, Neijens, and Smit 2002).

To come up with appropriate brands and magazines, we conducted a series of pretests using participants from the same population as (but not included in) the experiment. In a first pretest ($n = 38$), several brands were rated on familiarity (using a scale of 1 to 7, ranging from "not at all familiar with" to "very familiar with") and associations (along 14 dimensions of brand personality taken from Aaker 1997). To ascertain suitable levels of associative overlaps between brands and magazines, participants were also asked to rate a list of magazines on the associations (Kusumoto 2002). Based on the results, two familiar brands with significantly different brand associations were selected: L'Oréal (familiarity: $M = 5.87$; associations: successful, up-to-date, charming, cheerful, and imaginative, all $M > 5$) and Gore-Tex (familiarity: $M = 5.51$; associations: tough, reliable, down-to-earth, honest, and intelligent, all $M > 5$). The associations differed significantly ($p < .01$) between the brands and the five strongest associations for each brand rated below 4 (scale midpoint) for the other brand. The brands were then matched with magazines that shared associations with each brand. *Cosmopolitan* magazine scored high, and did not significantly differ, on any of L'Oréal's top five associations ($M > 5$), whereas it rated significantly lower on Gore-Tex's top five associations ($M < 4$). Similarly, *Outdoor Sports* magazine scored high on and did not differ significantly on any of Gore-Tex's top five associations ($M > 5$), whereas it rated significantly lower on L'Oréal's top five associations ($M < 4$).

In a second pretest ($n = 30$), brand–magazine fit was explicitly tested using a two-item (match/fit), seven-point scale. L'Oréal had a high fit ($M = 6.16$) with *Cosmopolitan* magazine and a low fit ($M = 2.32$) with *Outdoor Sports* magazine, while Gore-Tex had a low fit ($M = 2.42$) with *Cosmopolitan* magazine and a high fit with *Outdoor Sports* magazine ($M = 6.11$).

To avoid any confounding effects of previous exposure (Moorman, Neijens, and Smit 2002), a professional advertising agency developed a new ad for each brand (both ads featured a headline, a model, and the brand logo). Thirty participants indicated how well the ad fit the brand in the same manner as in the previous test. The results showed that both the L'Oréal ad ($M = 6.12$) and the Gore-Tex ad ($M = 5.95$) were highly representative of their brands.

Procedure

The ads were placed in regular (not yet released) copies of the magazines, to provide a real environment comprising editorial material and advertising for other brands. A sample of 157 col-

lege students (53% female, 47% male) participated in the study. Students were randomly assigned to one of the four brand–media combinations. They were told that they participated in a study of different magazines and their only instructions were to "look through the magazine in the same fashion that you normally do for this type of magazine." Once participants were finished browsing the magazine, they were asked to fill out the questionnaire (starting with some filler questions). Target questions were arranged to first measure memory for all advertising (including the test ad), followed by brand associations and brand attitude. Next, participants were instructed to turn back the pages in the magazine to inspect the test ad and answer questions about processing time and ad attitude.

Measures

Processing (H1) was measured by self-reported study time: "Approximately how long did you study the ad when you looked through the magazine the first time? About _____ seconds." Although self-reports may not give completely accurate measures of actual study time, there should be no systematic differences between conditions.

As more processing should lead to better memory, we also used ad memory as an indicator of processing. Ad-related brand recall was examined by asking participants to "name all brands, for which you have just seen ads." Ad-related brand recognition was examined by asking participants to "Please tick the names for the brands, for which you have just seen ads." A list with all brands that were advertised in the magazine was presented. To control for false recognition, several brands not advertised in the magazine were also included in the list. No participant falsely marked an additional brand, however. For both measures, answers were coded as 1 (focal brand recalled/recognized), or 0 (focal brand not recalled/recognized).

For H2, ad attitude was measured on a seven-point semantic differential scale consisting of three items: good/bad, pleasant/unpleasant, favorable/unfavorable. An index was produced by averaging the responses to the items (Cronbach's $\alpha = .93$). Brand attitude was measured with the following three items: good/bad, negative/positive, and satisfactory/unsatisfactory. The averaged index had a Cronbach's $\alpha = .94$.

Brand associations (H3) were measured by asking, "How well do you think the following adjectives describe the brand?" Participants rated each adjective on a seven-point Likert-type scale. We employed the five brand associations that were found to be associated most strongly (all $M > 5$) with each brand in the pretests.

Results

For purposes of testing H1 and H2, the four different conditions were combined into two main conditions (brand–media

congruent exposure and brand–media incongruent exposure). H3 had to be tested separately since the set of brand associations were unique to each brand. A MANOVA (multivariate analysis of variance) was run on all dependent variables (excluding brand associations). We also included gender, magazine readership (measured as number of issues read last year, 0–12), and attitude toward the magazine (same measure as brand attitude, Cronbach's $\alpha = .83$) as covariates. Gender ($F = 6.32, p < .01$) had a significant main effect on processing and ad attitude, attitude toward the magazine ($F = 3.00, p < .01$) on ad attitude, and there were no significant effects of readership ($F < 2$). The main effect of thematic congruence on the dependent variables was significant, $F(5, 146) = 9.12, p < .01$, Wilks's $\lambda = .76$. Planned comparisons were used to test for differences between the two conditions (see mean values in Table 1).

H1 stated that when an ad is placed in a thematically incongruent medium, processing of that ad would be higher relative to when the ad is placed in a thematically congruent medium. Analysis of the self-reported study time of the ad showed a significant difference ($p < .01$) between the congruent and incongruent conditions, such that study time was longer for the incongruent media placement ($M = 4.26$ seconds) than for the congruent media placement ($M = 2.40$ seconds). Planned comparisons for ad-related brand recall and recognition showed significant ($p < .01$) results in the same direction. Therefore, H1 is supported.

Continuing with H2, ad attitude and brand attitude were hypothesized to be rated more (less) positively in the thematically incongruent (congruent) condition. The analysis showed a significantly ($p < .01$) higher ad attitude in the incongruent condition ($M = 4.31$) than in the congruent condition ($M = 3.62$). However, although in the hypothesized direction, we found no significant difference in brand attitude between the two conditions ($M_{\text{incongruent}} = 5.07$ versus $M_{\text{congruent}} = 4.78$). The results give only partial support for H2.

To test H3, two separate MANOVAs using the five most strongly held associations of each brand as dependent variables were run. GoreTex: $F(5, 68) = 4.76, p < .01$, Wilks's $\lambda = .80$; L'Oréal: $F(5, 67) = 3.76, p < .01$, Wilks's $\lambda = .90$. Planned comparisons were used to test for differences between the two conditions (see Table 1). For GoreTex, significant (all $p < .05$) differences were found on all associations. For L'Oréal, however, we only found significant ($p < .05$) differences for three (out of five) associations. The results mostly support H3.

Discussion

Taken as a whole, Study 1 suggests that placing ads for familiar brands in thematically incongruent media could enhance advertising effectiveness. Consumers exposed to an ad placed in "wrong" rather than "right" media processed the ad more and

remembered the brand better. The thematically incongruent media context also enhanced ad attitudes and strengthened brand associations. Media incongruence did not influence brand attitudes, however. Although this was contrary to our expectations, the nonsignificant effect on brand attitude is in line with previous research showing that attitudes toward well-known brands are stable and hard to affect through advertising (e.g., Machleit, Allen, and Madden 1993). For these brands, it would be more important to keep the brand salient and interesting to consumers—for instance, by making them think about what the brand stands for.

We used real magazines and brands to simulate a real scenario as much as possible. Finding support for our proposed effects in such a setting suggests that the effects are, indeed, likely to occur in a real-life setting. The ecologically valid setting did, however, constrain our findings in several ways. The general set-up of the experiment did not allow us to test our theoretical reasoning in detail. Even though incongruently placed ads were processed more, we cannot know for sure that such processing involved resolving the incongruence rather than just dealing with novel stimuli as such. The benefits that were uncovered in Study 1 could therefore have been due to a simple novelty effect: The more uniform the surrounding (ad and editorial) material in the magazine, the more the incongruently placed ad will stand out. Numerous studies have shown that novelty increases processing, memory, and evaluations (cf. Lynch and Srull 1982). To actually show that the effects were due to incongruence, a more detailed assessment of the type of processing would be needed. Our theoretical reasoning would also be strengthened if we could show that the incongruence effects mainly occur for familiar brands with established brand schemas.

Another limitation of the current study is that in using real magazines we could not control for competing ads or competition from the immediate editorial environment. As thematic congruence is a widely applied criterion in media selection, head-on advertising competition is fierce among similar brands that select the same media (Kent 2002; Moorman, Neijens, and Smit 2002). Competing advertising increases generalization so that the links become stronger between each ad and the product category and weaker between the ads and the brands (see, e.g., Keller 1991; Law 2002). It could therefore be that the effects found were due to high levels of competitive interference in congruent magazines rather than the unexpectedness of placements in incongruent magazines.

STUDY 2

A second study was conducted to rule out competing explanations and to replicate the findings from Study 1. To provide a more conclusive test of theory, processing was measured in terms of ad-evoked thoughts. This allowed us to track

TABLE I
Advertising Effects of Thematic Incongruence: Study I

	Congruent medium	Incongruent medium	η^2	Planned comparisons
Advertising processing and evaluation				
$F(5, 146) = 9.12, p < .01, \text{Wilks's } \lambda = .76$				
Processing time	2.40 seconds	4.26 seconds	.07	$p < .01$
Ad-related brand recall	.27	.64	.14	$p < .01$
Ad-related brand recognition	.68	.88	.06	$p < .01$
Ad attitude	3.62	4.31	.05	$p < .01$
Brand attitude	4.78	5.07	.01	n.s.
Brand associations				
<i>GoreTex</i>				
$F(5, 68) = 4.76, p < .01, \text{Wilks's } \lambda = .80$				
Tough	4.89	5.69	.10	$p < .01$
Reliable	4.76	5.70	.10	$p < .01$
Down-to-earth	4.21	4.61	.14	$p < .05$
Honest	4.36	5.22	.12	$p < .01$
Intelligent	4.21	4.86	.07	$p < .05$
<i>L'Oréal</i>				
$F(5, 67) = 3.76, p < .01, \text{Wilks's } \lambda = .90$				
Successful	3.96	4.58	.07	$p < .05$
Up-to-date	4.51	5.00	.07	$p < .01$
Charming	3.82	4.31	.08	$p < .01$
Cheerful	3.66	3.89	.01	n.s.
Imaginative	2.96	3.25	.03	n.s.

Note: n.s. = not significant.

the response process following exposure in detail. We also included brand familiarity as a factor. To reduce potential confounds, only one thematic cue was used: a magazine cover or one typical ad from the magazine. Using only the magazine cover as a cue enabled a clear focus on the thematic (rather than immediately surrounding editorial) congruence. Using only a typical ad as a cue enabled us to see whether it is the advertising featured in the magazine (rather than the magazine itself) that was the basis for congruence judgment. By excluding all other material from the magazine, we made sure that novelty/contrast or competitive interference due to the uniformity of the surrounding editorial and advertising could not come into play. To replicate the findings, a new set of brands and magazines were used.

In Study 2, we thus employed a 2 (familiar brand/unfamiliar brand) \times 2 (magazine/ad) \times 2 (congruent/incongruent) full factorial, between-subjects design. Participants were exposed to the same ad for a familiar (unfamiliar) brand, immediately preceded by a cover (ad) from a magazine that was thematically congruent (incongruent) with the brand.

Stimulus Development

Brands and magazines were chosen in the same manner as in Study 1. In a first pretest ($n = 29$), a number of brands and

magazines were rated on familiarity and spontaneous associations to them were listed. In a second pretest ($n = 30$), the three most-mentioned associations for each brand and magazine were rated. Based on the results, we selected two familiar brands that differed significantly from each other in terms of brand associations: a hi-fi brand (familiarity: $M = 6.10$; associations: modern, unique, and exclusive, all $M > 5$) and a bookstore brand (familiarity: $M = 6.61$; associations: knowledgeable, practical, and versatile, all $M > 5$). The associations differed significantly ($p < .01$) between the brands, so that the three most strongly held associations for each brand rated below 4 (scale midpoint) for the other brand. The brands were then matched with magazines that scored similarly on the three associations. A home decorating magazine scored high on and did not differ significantly on any of the hi-fi brand's top three associations ($M > 5$), whereas it rated significantly lower on the bookstore brand's top three associations ($M < 4$). Similarly, a career magazine scored high on and did not differ significantly on any of the bookstore brand's top three associations ($M > 5$), whereas it rated significantly lower on the hi-fi brand's top three associations ($M < 4$). The hi-fi brand had a high perceived fit ($M = 6.10$) with the home decorating magazine and a low fit ($M = 1.93$) with the career magazine, whereas the bookstore brand had a low fit ($M = 2.50$) with the home decorating magazine, but a high fit with the career magazine ($M = 6.37$).

Five participants were given a random issue of each magazine and asked to choose an ad that was typical of the advertising in the magazine. All five participants agreed on two ads that were used in the study. New ads were professionally developed for both brands (with real, old ads as models) to represent typical, but not previously exposed, ads for the brands. Both ads featured a headline, a picture of the product, and the brand logo. For the unfamiliar brand conditions, the familiar brand's logo was changed into a mock brand's logo (resembling the familiar brand's name and design).

Procedure

A sample of 239 college students (46% female, 54% male) participated in the study, making a cell size of approximately 30 participants. Students were randomly assigned to one of the eight conditions. The questionnaires contained either (1) a magazine cover followed by the test ad, or (2) an ad from the magazine followed by the test ad. Participants were told that they participated in a study of advertising and their only instructions were to "look at the pages for as long as you wish and then please proceed to answer a number of questions."

Measures

All measures were taken immediately after exposure, and with the exception of processing, they were identical to those used in Study 1. To assess processing (H1), we measured ad-evoked thoughts. More specifically, participants were asked to write down their spontaneous thoughts in immediate reaction to the advertising, offering as many (or as few) thoughts as they wanted. At the end of the questionnaire, participants were asked to go back to the listed thoughts and checkmark any thoughts that concerned the fit between the advertised brand and the preceding magazine cover/ad. This provided us with a direct test of consumers' judgments of fit between the advertised brands and the context (magazine cover or ad). Testing the notion from the discussion of Study 1's results, we also included a simple one-item measure of brand interest: 1 (the brand is not at all interesting) to 7 (the brand is very interesting).

Results

Manipulation Check

Tests of perceived fit and brand familiarity yielded results in line with our manipulations. The congruently placed ads rated significantly higher ($F = 11.29, p < .01$) on perceived fit than the incongruently placed ads ($M_{\text{congruent}} = 5.25$ versus $M_{\text{incongruent}} = 2.44$), and there were no differences between the

magazine cover and ad conditions ($F < 1$). Brand familiarity was significantly higher ($F = 8.17, p < .01$) for the familiar brands than for the unfamiliar brands ($M_{\text{familiar}} = 5.60$ versus $M_{\text{unfamiliar}} = 2.11$).

Tests of Hypotheses

A MANOVA was run on all dependent variables (excluding brand associations, which were tested separately for each brand). Gender, magazine readership (measured as number of issues read last year, 0–12), and attitude toward the magazine (same measure as brand attitude, Cronbach's $\alpha = .83$) were included as covariates. Only attitude toward the magazine had a significant effect ($F = 2.33, p < .05$) on ad attitude.

Turning to our manipulated factors, neither thematic congruence ($F < 2$) nor context type (magazine cover versus ad, $F < 1$) or brand familiarity ($F < 2$) had any significant main effects. However, the thematic congruence \times context type interaction term had a significant effect on ad-evoked thoughts, ad attitude, and brand attitude, $F(6, 239) = 2.11, p < .05$, Wilks's $\lambda = .91$. Furthermore, the thematic congruence \times brand familiarity \times context type interaction term had significant effects on all the dependents, $F(6, 239) = 4.96, p < .01$, Wilks's $\lambda = .86$. Separate MANOVAs on the two brands' associations produced significant effects only from the thematic congruence \times brand familiarity \times context type interaction term, $F_{\text{hi-fi brand}}(3, 118) = 3.12, p < .01$, Wilks's $\lambda = .89$, and $F_{\text{bookstore brand}}(3, 121) = 4.54, p < .01$, Wilks's $\lambda = .85$. A closer inspection of the results showed that effects of thematic congruence only materialized when the magazine cover served as a cue. Ad and brand evaluations did not differ between conditions when an ad from the magazine was the cue. For clarity, we will only report planned comparisons between conditions where the magazine cover served as a cue (mean values are displayed in Table 2).

As seen in Table 2, ads that were placed in a thematically incongruent magazine evoked more thoughts and matching processes compared to ads in thematically congruent magazines ($p < .05$), thus supporting H1. In line with H2, they also enhanced ad attitude ($p < .05$), brand interest ($p < .05$), and to a limited extent, brand attitudes ($p < .10$). The effects of the media placement were greater for the familiar brands (all dependent variables higher at $p < .01$, except total thoughts, $p < .05$) than for the unfamiliar brands. For the latter, there was only an increase in matching thoughts at $p < .01$, and significant effects on total thoughts, ad attitude, and brand interest at $p < .05$.

As the MANOVAs revealed no main effects of the thematic congruence of magazine covers on brand associations, Table 3 only lists planned comparisons on familiar brands and unfamiliar brands, respectively. The patterns are identical for both sets of associations, with thematically incongruent ad placements

TABLE 2
Advertising Processing and Evaluation: Study 2

	Congruent medium	Incongruent medium	η^2	Planned comparisons
<i>Main effect</i>				
$F(6, 239) = 3.96, p < .01, \text{Wilks's } \lambda = .90$				
Total thoughts	.77	1.21	.05	$p < .05$
Matching thoughts	.15	.80	.07	$p < .05$
Ad attitude	4.06	4.67	.06	$p < .05$
Ad credibility	4.65	4.85		<i>n.s.</i>
Brand attitude	4.50	4.84	.02	$p < .10$
Brand interest	4.52	5.01	.07	$p < .05$
<i>Familiar brand</i>				
Total thoughts	1.11	1.56	.05	$p < .05$
Matching thoughts	.23	1.07	.10	$p < .01$
Ad attitude	4.15	4.99	.12	$p < .01$
Ad credibility	4.91	5.44	.07	$p < .01$
Brand attitude	5.05	5.73	.08	$p < .01$
Brand interest	4.72	5.23	.12	$p < .01$
<i>Unfamiliar brand</i>				
Total thoughts	.44	.88	.04	$p < .05$
Matching thoughts	.11	.55	.08	$p < .01$
Ad attitude	3.96	4.37	.06	$p < .05$
Ad credibility	4.38	4.35		<i>n.s.</i>
Brand attitude	3.99	4.12		<i>n.s.</i>
Brand interest	4.33	4.75	.04	$p < .05$

yielding stronger target associations. Whereas all differences are directionally similar, they were only significant for the unfamiliar brands, qualifying our predictions in H3.

We employed Baron and Kenny's (1986) procedure to test whether the effects of thematic incongruence were mediated by matching thoughts (i.e., thoughts matching the medium with the advertised brand). For the familiar brands, we used ad and brand attitudes as dependents, and for the unfamiliar brands, we used a brand association index (as all associations behaved similarly in the previous tests, we joined them for a more clear and simple test; Cronbach's $\alpha = .90$). (See Table 4.)

In the first step, media placement affected ad and brand attitude, as well as brand associations, in separate regressions (both $p < .01$). Second, media placement was regressed on amount of matching thoughts, which were found to have a significant effect ($p < .01$). Third, ad and brand attitude, as well as brand associations, were regressed on matching thoughts in separate regressions, with significant effects (both $p < .01$). Finally, when both media placement and matching thoughts were included, the squared partial correlations indicating the effect of the experimental condition dropped compared with when it had been used as a single independent variable. The results suggest that matching thoughts may mediate the posi-

tive effects of the thematically incongruent ad placements on ad attitude, brand attitude, and brand associations.

Discussion

The results of Study 2 replicate the main findings from Study 1, mostly supporting H1 to H3. Thematic congruence of the magazine had a significant main effect on ad-evoked thoughts and ad attitude, as well as on brand attitude and interest. This suggests that placing advertising in a thematically incongruent medium produces positive effects. Further analyses revealed an interaction effect with brand familiarity, suggesting that the effects were significantly more pronounced for the familiar than for the unfamiliar brands. This provides more compelling evidence for our reasoning that familiar brands should gain more from incongruent ad placements because of their established brand schemata. The results also showed that there was a mediating effect on evaluations from consumers' thoughts about the match between the brand and the medium. The "wrongfully" placed advertising made consumers think more carefully about the ad ("why is it placed here, what is the brand really about?"), and in doing so, they became more certain that their conclusion was "right" ("I know what the

TABLE 3
Brand Associations: Study 2

	Congruent medium	Incongruent medium	η^2	Planned comparisons
Hi-fi brand associations				
<i>Familiar brand</i>				
Modern	6.00	6.30		<i>n.s.</i>
Unique	5.42	5.78		<i>n.s.</i>
Exclusive	6.44	6.60		<i>n.s.</i>
<i>Unfamiliar brand</i>				
Modern	3.78	4.36	.12	$p < .01$
Unique	3.00	4.12	.17	$p < .01$
Exclusive	3.55	4.53	.20	$p < .01$
Bookstore brand associations				
<i>Familiar brand</i>				
Knowledgeable	5.60	5.76		<i>n.s.</i>
Practical	5.88	6.12		<i>n.s.</i>
Versatile	5.50	5.80		<i>n.s.</i>
<i>Unfamiliar brand</i>				
Knowledgeable	4.21	5.20	.21	$p < .01$
Practical	3.66	5.00	.23	$p < .01$
Versatile	3.44	4.80	.24	$p < .01$

TABLE 4
Regression Coefficients, Tests of Mediation

Variable	Standardized β	Statistics
<i>Ad attitude</i>		
Media placement	.19	$t = 2.88, p < .01$
Media placement (matching thoughts included)	.09	$t = 1.81, p < .05$
Matching thoughts	.21	$t = 5.42, p < .01$
<i>Brand attitude</i>		
Media placement	.16	$t = 1.99, p < .01$
Media placement (matching thoughts included)	.05	<i>n.s.</i>
Matching thoughts	.23	$t = 5.67, p < .01$
<i>Brand associations</i>		
Media placement	.16	$t = 3.04, p < .01$
Media placement (matching thoughts included)	.09	$t = 1.90, p < .05$
Matching thoughts	.24	$t = 5.32, p < .01$

brand is about and what the advertising says!”). This feeling of being right then rubbed off on ad and brand evaluations for the familiar brands.

Although the strengthening effects on brand associations were directionally the same as in Study 1, they were only significant for the unfamiliar brands. This result could be seen as

curious, as one would expect familiar rather than unfamiliar brands to benefit more, as was the case with the other dependent variables. A closer inspection of the absolute values of brand associations in Table 3 could lead one to suspect ceiling effects for the familiar brands. That is, whereas the thematically incongruent ad placement exerted positive effects on all brands, associations for the familiar brands were already so strong that they could not be significantly enhanced (whereas there was plenty of room for strengthening the unfamiliar brands’ associations). The reason that brand associations were enhanced for the familiar brands in Study 1 but not in Study 2 could be that processing was higher overall in the second study. When there was no competing material, the congruent media placement did a better job of evoking brand associations (requiring the incongruent condition to achieve even higher values for significant effects to materialize). Therefore, we would guess that Study 1 provides a better test of the media placement’s ability to enhance brand associations.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The results of our studies contribute to our understanding of advertising context effects in a number of ways. First, they extend Moorman, Neijens, and Smit’s (2002) research, lending further support to the notion that total editorial context, in the form of thematic congruence, affects advertising effectiveness. Whereas Moorman, Neijens, and Smit (2002) only found effects on memory, we also found effects on ad attitude, brand associations, and (for familiar brands) brand attitude.

More important, our results are opposite to theirs, as we suggest that thematic incongruence rather than congruence has positive effects on processing, and thereby, memory. One explanation for the contrasting results could be the employed level of incongruence. Moorman, Neijens, and Smit used lifestyle, interior decorating, and health magazines to test their hypotheses. These three magazines seem to have a certain thematic overlap (lifestyle could manifest itself in both interior decorating and health, for example) and therefore might not have been incongruent “enough” for the processing effects found in our study to occur. In the present study, the thematic overlaps between the employed media were tested to be low; thus, the incongruence should be greater. The conflicting results could perhaps also serve as an illustration of the type of source confusion discussed in Kent (2002). Due to competitive interference, ads and media may become dissociated, so that consumers match the two based on an ex-post judgment of fit (“Would the brand have advertised in that magazine/would the magazine have run that ad?”). As suggested by Pham and Johar (1997), provoking such thoughts at the time of exposure could enhance both processing and accuracy of memory. Indeed, the results from Study 2 suggest that such thoughts mediated the positive effects of the thematically incongruent ad placement.

Second, our results add to Dahlén’s (2005) findings on the creative aspect of media choice. Whereas Dahlén studied the communicative power of untraditional (“creative”) media, the present study shows that placing advertising in traditional media can be creative as well: Choosing the “wrong media” could make the ad and the brand more interesting and persuasive. As consumers become familiar with a brand, they form expectations regarding its advertising (Alden, Mukherjee, and Hoyer 2000; Dahlén et al. 2005). Thematically incongruent media placements challenge these expectations and thus add novelty and interest to the brand’s communication, giving rise to more careful processing of the advertising.

Managerial Implications

Thematically incongruent media should not be a basis for the bulk of advertising, where reach and repetition are still important issues. But recent research suggests that media scheduling is optimized when there is a mix between low-involvement exposures and more highly involving exposures (Janiszewski, Noel, and Sawyer 2003). Thematically incongruent media placements could thus balance the bulk of mere exposure-inducing advertising (in congruent media) with more attention- and processing-stimulating exposures (in incongruent media). Overlaps between target groups and media audiences should provide ample opportunities to identify media where advertising for a specific brand is unexpected but relevant. This is true mainly for products with a broad target audience, such

as cars. In fact, following previous research arguing for media selection based on brand absorption and impact on positive buyer responses rather than frequency and reach goals (cf. Kusumoto 2002; Pingol and Miyazaki 2005), it might even be beneficial to allow for some degree of mismatch to make the impact of the ad message significantly stronger.

Thematically incongruent media placements are especially interesting for mature brands. They have established brand schemata, which reduce their need for help from the advertising context to be processed and comprehended. In fact, research shows that highly familiar brands stand the risk of becoming too familiar and predictable. The major issue for these brands is not to increase awareness or liking, but rather to increase consumers’ interest in and desire to come in contact with the brand (Machleit, Allen, and Madden 1993). A thematically incongruent media placement provides a possibility to challenge consumers’ perceptions of predictable brands: Rather than necessarily expecting enhanced brand evaluations, the primary goal should be to increase consumers’ interest and the likelihood that they will want to come in contact with the brand. Our second study showed that placement in thematically incongruent media did indeed make the brand more interesting.

Limitations and Further Research

The present research employed four specific media and brand/product categories. These may have produced idiosyncratic effects. For instance, one could speculate that *Cosmopolitan* and L’Oréal appeal more to a female than a male target group. Indeed, gender and attitude toward the magazine were found to exert significant effects as covariates in the first study. Gender was not a significant covariate in the second study, however, whereas attitude toward the magazine still was. Including the variables as covariates in the analyses suggests that they were not driving forces behind our results. Nevertheless, the significant effects of attitude toward the magazine as a covariate in both studies suggest that it deserves more attention in the future, possibly as a moderator. Magazine readership was also included as a covariate, but had no significant effect in either study (although previous research has found it to moderate ad evaluations; see, e.g., Appel 1987). Furthermore, there may be a difference in effects between consumers who are familiar with the brand and those who are also users of the product category, a distinction that was not measured in this study. It should be noted that the conclusions in this paper must always be qualified by the fact that there must be a good fit between the media audience and the advertiser’s target group. This, of course, sets boundaries for what type of products incongruent placements could be a real option. Further research is needed to explore what those boundaries are and whether product type could moderate the advertising effects of incongruent placements.

The present studies manipulated congruence as a dichotomous variable. However, congruence can reach levels from complete congruence to extreme incongruence. Our operationalization of incongruence could best be described as moderate, as it appeared to be resolvable (cf. Meyers-Levy and Tybout 1989). We do not propose the employment of any degree of thematic incongruence. We believe that the results are applicable only to moderate incongruencies that can benefit from enhanced elaboration, but are still resolvable from an incongruence-processing perspective. Employing extreme incongruence (such as placing cigarette or candy ads in a health magazine) might trigger inferences harmful to the brand, as well as to the magazine, and yield negative evaluations from the inability to make sense of the placement. Moreover, we did not measure actual behavior. Research suggests that consumers may react differently to incongruence when there is actual choice involved. For instance, Campbell and Goodstein (2001) found that consumers' preferences for moderately incongruent products over congruent ones were reversed when perceived risk increased in a purchase. Future research is needed to qualify our results with respect to actual behavior and levels of perceived risk.

Research on brand extensions has shown that level of incongruence is, in part, a matter of repetition. Consumer acceptance of incongruent elements increases with repeated exposures (e.g., Lane 2000). This would suggest that there is a dynamic aspect to thematically incongruent media placement. Whereas we tested only one exposure, repeated exposures in the same medium may reduce the thematic incongruence (and over time may therefore have an assimilating rather than contrasting effect). This deserves further attention. There is also a dynamic aspect to brand associations. The present studies found that thematic incongruence can strengthen established brand associations, but a brand manager might want to alter or add new associations to the brand. Future research is needed to understand whether, for example, ads for a car that have been altered to better align with women's needs would be more effective if placed in a car magazine or in a beauty magazine. Would improved opportunities for making sense of and resolving the incongruent choice of medium outweigh the strength of established associations?

The present research employed student samples. They were used for convenience, given our goal of having full control over the exposures in a "laboratory-like" setting. Participants were indeed in the target groups for the test brands and magazines. Still, the results should be interpreted with the specific samples and test situations in mind.

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Article 4:
Advertising vs. Publicity in a Cluttered Environment
Effects on Attention and Brand Identification

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ABSTRACT

The cluttered environment of most marketing communications poses a major challenge. PR is often suggested to break through clutter in a way that advertising does not; by being part of the editorial content, publicity should get more attention than comparable ads. Based on advertising clutter research, we argue that *advertising* will have an advantage over publicity in gaining attention and ensuring brand identification. An empirical study of publicity and advertising embedded in actual newspapers is presented in support of this argument. Implications for familiar and unfamiliar brands are discussed and additional studies and better PR evaluation practices are called for.

INTRODUCTION

Many marketers agree that advertising clutter poses a major problem; as the number of advertising messages increases, so do consumers' ad avoiding behaviors (Elliott and Speck 1998, Speck and Elliott 1997b). When exposed to ads which are of no interest to them, consumers skip pages, change channels, or direct their attention elsewhere. PR is often suggested as a solution to this problem (e.g., Kitchen 1993, Loda and Coleman 2005, The Economist 2006, Williamson 2003). By drafting press releases, holding press conferences, and putting together press kits, marketers can make their way into the editorial parts of media traditionally out of bounds. As media is consumed for its editorial content, the resulting articles (i.e., publicity) are assumed to get more attention than advertising.

The empirical support for this assumption is, however, limited. Little is actually known about the ability of publicity to gain attention and ensure brand identification in a cluttered environment. What we do know is that consumers' media habits are complex and incomplete (Pilotta and Schultz 2005). For instance, approximately 50% of American newspaper readers attend to half or less of a newspaper's content on an average day (McCauley and Nesbit 2005). When exposed to *editorial content* which is of no interest to them consumers *again* skip over pages, change channels, or direct their attention elsewhere. Just as with advertising, some publicity is noticed and some is not. Still, attention is often taken for granted when discussing PR. This is, for instance, manifested in the practice of evaluating PR efforts based

on media coverage, opportunities to see, and advertising equivalents (Gregory 2001, Tench and Yomans 2006) as well as in research studies using forced exposures to assess the communication effects of publicity (e.g., Hallahan 1999, Loda and Coleman 2005, for an exception see Lord and Putrevu 1998 study 1). Although the latter studies point to the advantages of publicity in terms of credibility and persuasiveness, the effects cannot materialize without attention to the communication and the brand.

The current study investigates publicity and advertising within the clutter of a newspaper. Based on advertising clutter research, we argue that advertising has an advantage over publicity in gaining attention and ensuring brand identification. An empirical study of publicity and advertising embedded in actual newspapers is presented. The stimuli materials focus on the same brand and sponsorship activity, but vary in content and form to represent typical publicity and advertising. The findings suggest a need for further studies of the relative strengths of publicity and advertising in marketing communications. They also highlight the need for improved methods of measuring PR efforts (cf. Gregory 2001).

MARKETING COMMUNICATION CLUTTER

Clutter is generally used to denote the high level of marketing messages surrounding most consumers. Although marketing practitioners and researchers have long acknowledged clutter as a key challenge (e.g., Ray and Webb 1986, Webb and Ray 1979), there is little research on how it affects marketing communications (Nan and Faber 2004, Vakratsas and Ambler 1999). Before moving on to its effects on publicity and advertising, a brief discussion of marketing communication clutter should therefore be useful.

To date, studies of clutter have mainly been concerned with advertising. Taking the perspective of consumers, Elliott and Speck (1998, Speck and Elliott 1997a) define clutter as the perceived excess of advertising messages within a medium. In their view, clutter comprises all ads that consumers do not want to be exposed to. Clutter has been found to reduce attention, processing, and memory for advertising (Nan and Faber 2004, Webb and Ray 1979). The effect is often explained in terms of information overload; due to limited cognitive resources consumers cannot attend to all the information exposed to them (Nan and Faber 2004). Moreover, even if they do attend to an ad and remember the message in it, clutter makes it difficult for consumers

to associate this message to the right brand (Pham and Johar 1997, Dahlén and Rosengren 2005). The effects of clutter are stronger when consumers are not very involved (Burke and Srull 1988, Keller 1991), and when the advertised brand is unfamiliar (Kent and Allen 1994, Laroche et al 2006).

As the media landscape is changing, our conceptualization of clutter might need to be extended beyond advertising. A sharp distinction between editorial and advertising content no longer seems valid. For instance, the internet has led to advertising messages being included in e-mails and chat rooms (Edwards et al 2002). Furthermore, the growing reliance on PR among marketers is likely to increase the amount of publicity-based editorial content (Balasubramanian et al 2006, Sheehan and Guo 2005). By applying Elliott and Speck's notion of clutter to *marketing communication messages* that consumers do not want to be exposed to, editorial content could also be clutter (most notably the parts that marketers would refer to as publicity). In the following sections we discuss the relative merits of advertising and publicity within the clutter of a newspaper. Drawing on research on advertising clutter we investigate the effects of such a cluttered environment on attention and brand identification. By using these dependent variables the study aligns with previous research on advertising clutter.

EFFECTS OF CLUTTER ON PUBLICITY AND ADVERTISING

Attention is an important first response to print communication (e.g., Rossiter and Percy 1997). Attention usually denotes the general distribution of mental activity being assigned to a stimulus and can refer to both that which receives mental activity (i.e., the direction or focus of attention) and the duration of that activity. We will refer to the first aspect as attention and the latter as processing (cf. MacInnis and Jaworski 1989). Brand identification (the ability of consumers to point out the brand featured in the communication) is used to denote the sought outcome of such attention and processing.

The aim of any marketing communication effort is to shape consumers' brand knowledge, either by making the brand more salient or by affecting brand perceptions and evaluations. Marketers would be wise to ensure that consumers allocate enough attention and processing resources to comprehend and elaborate on a brand message (Ducoffe and Curlo 2000, MacInnis et al 1991).¹ Cluttered media environments make it impossible for consumers to attend to all information they are exposed to. At the time of exposure (e.g.,

when reading a newspaper containing publicity and advertising), pre-attentive processes will determine what is attended to (Ducoffe and Curlo 2000, Nördfalt 2005). Such processes are to a large extent dependent on features of the stimuli (Pieters and Wedel 2004). Editorial content generally receives more attention than advertising (Lord and Putrevu 1993, van Reijmersdal et al 2005). This is sometimes referred to as intentional exposure – a newspaper is read for its news, and news stories are therefore more likely to gain attention than are the ads surrounding them.

As publicity is part of the editorial content it should have a better chance than advertising of being attended to (van Reijmersdal et al 2005). However, competition exists not only between advertising and editorial content, but also within the editorial content (cf. McCauley and Nesbit 2005, Pilotta and Schultz 2005). As most editorial content looks the same, perceptual features are less likely to affect attention. Instead, attention will be directed towards conceptually relevant articles. Seen from this perspective, publicity will compete with other news stories for consumers' attention. For instance, a marketing message regarding a corporate sponsorship will have to compete with other news stories on issues such as tax cuts and public policies if communicated through publicity. Even if editorial content generally will be more attended to than ads, in competition with other stories a publicity news story might not always come out on top.

Given that the key information in both communication formats is roughly the same, we believe that the probability of attention to the brand will be higher if the message is communicated through an ad rather than a news story. Ads can be carefully crafted to attract attention, reduce noise, and enhance clarity of a *brand* message, whereas publicity will be in the hands of journalists striving to communicate a *news* message (Lord and Putrevu 1993). When publicity is used, the resulting news story will generally contain more information and be aimed at communicating something else than the brand (for instance, something new or entertaining). In a pre-attentive trade-off between the costs and gains of attending the message (cf. Ducoffe and Curlo 2000), the gains of attending to the brand message are about the same, but the costs are lower for advertising. The higher processing demands of the news story make the message more likely to be “de-selected”. As attention is a prerequisite for information to be stored in memory (Nördfalt 2005, Rossiter and Percy 1997), advertising should also be more likely to lead to brand identification. When communicating a brand in a newspaper, we thus believe

that an ad should have a better chance to gain consumers' attention than a news story. This should, in turn, translate into higher levels of brand identification.

H1: An ad will a) receive more attention and b) lead to higher brand identification than a news story communicating a brand message

Although attention functions as an initial threshold, memory for a stimulus is dependent on the amount and nature of the cognitive activity accompanying the processing of it (e.g., MacInnis and Jaworski 1989). When initial attention is accompanied by processing, memory for the communication should be better. This means that although the threshold for processing publicity is higher (cf. H1), the expected benefits of overcoming it should be too. When attended to, publicity should be processed more intensely than ads (Lord and Putrevu 1993), which, in turn, should have a beneficial effect on brand identification. When consumers actually attend to the communication, we thus hypothesize that publicity will be processed more and, consequently, lead to higher brand identification.

H2: When a news story and an ad communicating a brand message is attended to, the news story will a) be processed more and b) lead to higher brand identification than the ad

METHOD

Four hundred and twenty one business undergraduates (53% females) participated in the study. The hypotheses were tested in an experiment using a 2 (publicity, ad) x 2 (familiar brand, unfamiliar brand) between-subjects design. Although not in the hypotheses, brand familiarity was included as a factor since previous studies have shown the effects of clutter to be greater for unfamiliar than familiar brands (e.g., Kent and Allen 1994, Laroche et al 2006). Allowing for different levels of familiarity thus increases the generalizability of the findings.

A procedure similar to Lord and Putrevu (1998 study 1) was used. Stimulus materials were embedded in a two-page color excerpt of a newspaper using desktop publishing software. When developing the stimuli the main objective was to ensure that they included typical elements for publicity and articles, respectively. Participants were instructed to read through the excerpt the same way they normally read a newspaper. The instructions clearly stated

that participants were free to skip over parts of little or no interest to them. They were thus allowed to use as much (or little) time as they wanted. After looking through the newspaper excerpts, the participants answered a few questions regarding non-stimuli newspaper content (filler questions) followed by the dependent measures.

Stimulus materials

The stimulus materials were constructed to ensure a realistic exposure setting. To enable this we needed: 1) a product category that was a) relevant to the participants and b) commonly communicated through both PR activities and advertising, 2) a viewing situation that exposed all participants to the stimulus without forcing them to attend to it, and 3) publicity and ad stimuli that were comparable to each other but included specific features of each communication format (e.g., branded content and execution in ads but not publicity, complex information in publicity but not ads). A series of pre-tests with participants from the same subject pool as (but not included in) the main experiment were used to develop the stimulus materials.

Shampoo was selected as the target product category. The category is highly advertised and has frequently been used in advertising research (e.g., Laroche et al 2006). Furthermore, PR is commonly used in the category (Bashford 2005, Kitchen 1993, Williamson 2003). A pre-test showed participants to be frequent consumers of shampoo (average usage per week = 4, n=47). To account for differences between unfamiliar and familiar brands, two brands with different levels of familiarity were selected based on a pre-test of familiarity with shampoo brands (familiar brand 6.21, unfamiliar brand 1.18, on a scale: 1=unfamiliar, 7=familiar, n=30).

The internally paced viewing situation of print media allows for the natural variation in attention and processing needed (Lee 2000, Muehling et al 1991). Therefore, newspapers were selected as the medium. Newspapers are also a common target for PR efforts (Tench and Yomans 2006) and thus a typical medium for publicity and advertising alike. A pre-test showed that participants read newspapers on average five times a week (n=47). To reduce stimulus specific effects, two of four major newspapers in the region where the study was conducted were used. As reader behaviors should differ depending on media vehicle credibility (cf. van Reijmersdal et al 2005), the selection was based on a pre-test of newspaper credibility. By using two levels of credibility it is possible to assess if participants followed the

instructions to read through the newspapers as they normally would do. The most credible (5.93) and the least credible (2.12) newspapers were chosen (on a scale: 1=not credible, 7= credible, n=30). A pre-test showed that students were familiar with both the credible and less credible newspaper (6.2 and 5.9, respectively, on a scale: 1=unfamiliar and 7=familiar, n=47).

To ensure comparable publicity and ad stimuli, an article and an ad were developed. Both focused on a name sponsorship of a public indoor swimming pool. Name sponsorships are commonly used by marketers as a focal point of integrated marketing communications (e.g., Clark et al 2002), thus meaning that they are likely to lead to publicity and to be used in ads. Furthermore, several name sponsorships had recently been announced by brands of consumer packaged goods in the region of study. Sponsoring an indoor swimming pool was deemed appropriate for the product category and thus suitable for both the familiar and unfamiliar brand. The focal object was the same in both stimuli (familiar/unfamiliar brand and sponsorship), but the typical aspects of each communication format was maintained. Not allowing such differences in the experimental stimuli would reduce the realism of the stimuli (Lord and Putrevu 1993). Previous studies have predominantly used the same information – labeled either as an ad or editorial content advertising (e.g., Cameron 1994, Hallahan 1999, Lord and Putrevu 1998). This approach would, however, lead to an atypical article or ad (or possibly both), which could in itself attract attention.

Publicity was operationalized as a news story written by a journalist. It predominantly consisted of text and included a picture of the actual swimming pool (including a brand signature). The ad included a picture, a few copy points connecting the shampoo to the swimming hall, and a clear brand signature. A pre-test showed that both ad and article were typical representatives of the communication formats (article=6.6, ad=6.1, scale 1=does not include typical elements of articles/ads and 9=includes typical elements of articles/ads, n=80). That both stimuli were perceived as typical also indicates that our choice of shampoo and a name sponsorship were not seen as uncommon or unrealistic in either format.

The news story and the ad were of equal size and were embedded in a two-page color excerpt of the newspapers using desktop publishing software. The pages included both editorial and advertising content. As real excerpts were used, the natural editorial-to-advertising ratio was kept for each newspaper.

The stimulus materials were placed in the space originally occupied by advertising. The stimulus materials are available in Appendix 1.

Measures

An off-line attention measure was used to measure *attention* (cf. van Reijmersdal et al 2005). Specifically, participants were asked: “When looking through the newspaper did you notice an article/ad about a shampoo brand?” with answers “yes” or “no”. The attention measure thus focused on overall attention to the stimuli. Answers were coded as: 1=article/ad attended to and 0= article/ad not attended to.

Brand identification was examined by asking participants: “Do you remember the name of the brand mentioned in the article/ad?” with answers “yes” or “no”. Participants were also asked to fill in the name of the brand. Answers were coded as: 1=target brand identified (i.e., answering “yes” and filling in the target brand) and 0=target brand not identified (i.e., answering “no” or answering “yes” and not filling in the target brand).

Processing was measured by self-reports of processing time and cognitive effort. Specifically, processing time was measured by self-reported study time: “Approximately how long time did you spend on the article/ad? About ___ seconds”. Although self-reports do not give completely accurate measures of the actual duration, they can be useful as a proxy (cf. Törn et al 2006). Participants were also asked to assess the cognitive effort put into processing the article/ad: How much effort did you put into thinking about the article/ad? (1=little effort, 7=much effort).

RESULTS

To ensure that participants read the newspaper as they would normally do, we compared the high versus low credibility newspaper on the dependent variables (cf. van Reijmersdal et al 2005). The credible newspaper received higher scores supporting the notion that the credible newspaper was read more carefully than the less credible newspaper ($ps < .01$). As no interactions were found the results were aggregated over the two sources.

To test hypotheses 1, attention and brand identification for participants exposed to the news story was compared to those exposed to the ad. The proportions were compared based on a *Chi2* test. Attention was lower for the

news story (36%, $n=75$) than for the ad (69% $n=145$). The difference was significant ($Chi2 = 45.96, p < .01$). The same pattern was found for brand identification, which was significantly lower for the news story (33%, $n=70$) than for the ad (55%, $n=116, Chi2 = 19.99, p < .01$). Overall, the ad had an advantage over the news story, thus supporting H1. Given that marketers are truly interested in brand identification, advertising was roughly 1 2/3 (116/70) more effective than publicity.

Hypothesis 1 was supported for both the familiar and the unfamiliar brand (see table 1). As suggested by previous studies, the familiar brand generally received more attention and achieved higher brand identification than the unfamiliar brand. All differences were in the hypothesized direction and, with the exception of attention to the ad, significant. The lack of significance for attention to the ad could be due to a ceiling effect. The advantage of advertising for brand identification was larger for the unfamiliar brand (50/25 or 2 times more effective) than for the familiar brand (66/45, approximately 1 1/2 times).

Table 1. Overall Attention and Brand Identification (H1)

	Overall	Familiar	Unfamiliar	
Attention				
Publicity	36%	44%	27%	$Chi2 = 6.41,$ $p < .01$
Ad	69%	73%	65%	$Chi2 = 1.62,$ ns^*
	$Chi2 = 45.69,$ $p < .01$	$Chi2 = 11.92,$ $p < .01$	$Chi2 = 30.47, p$ $< .01$	
Brand Identification				
Publicity	33%	42%	24%	$Chi2 = 7.47,$ $p < .01$
Ad	55%	66%	45%	$Chi2 = 9.33,$ $p < .01$
	$Chi2 = 19.99,$ $p < .01$	$Chi2 = 11.92,$ $p < .01$	$Chi2 = 10.13,$ $p < .01$	

* $p > .10$

To test hypothesis 2, participants who did not pay attention to the news story/ad during exposure were excluded. This means that only those who stated that they attended to the stimuli are part of the analysis ($n=220$). Processing time and cognitive effort was compared using t tests. The average processing time for the news story (13 sec.) was significantly longer than for

the ad (4 sec., $t = 5.13$, $p < .01$) and the estimated cognitive effort was higher (news story = 2.97, ad = 2.21, $t = 3.54$, $p < .01$). Furthermore, brand identification was higher for the news story (93%, $n=70$) than for ad (80%, $n=116$, $Chi2 = 6.73$, $p < .01$). Given attention, the news story outperformed the ad on processing and brand identification. Processing time and cognitive effort were both positively correlated with brand identification (*Spearman's Rho* .175 and .207, respectively, both $ps < .01$), lending some support to the notion that this effect was due to the increased processing of publicity. The results thus support H2.

With two exceptions, hypothesis 2 hold for both the familiar and the unfamiliar brand (see table 2). Although the direction is as expected, participants self-reported cognitive effort did not differ significantly ($p = .07$) between the news story and ad for the unfamiliar brand. Furthermore, there was no effect on brand identification for the familiar brand. These deviations will be discussed further below.

Table 2. Processing and Brand Identification Given Attention (H2)

	Overall	Familiar	Unfamiliar	
Processing time				
Publicity	13.2 sec.	11.3 sec.	16.5 sec.	<i>ns*</i>
Ad	3.75 sec.	3.2 sec.	4.3 sec.	<i>ns*</i>
	$t = 5.13, p < .01$	$t = 5.42, p < .01$	$t = 2.87, p < .01$	
Cognitive Effort				
Publicity	2.97	2.98	2.96	<i>ns*</i>
Ad	2.21	2.08	2.35	<i>ns*</i>
	$t = 3.54, p < .01$	$t = 3.15, p < .01$	$t = 1.87, p = .07$	
Brand Identification				
Publicity	93%	96%	89%	<i>ns*</i>
Ad	80%	90%	69%	$Chi2 = 9.96,$
	$Chi2 = 6.73,$	<i>ns*</i>	$Chi2 = 4.23,$	$p < .01$
	$p < .01$		$p = .03$	

* $p > .10$

DISCUSSION

By including clutter, the current study puts the relative merits of publicity and advertising in a new light. Although advertising is often criticized for its low attention levels, the study shows that it might, in fact, be preferable to publicity. In the context of a newspaper, advertising was found to be roughly

1 2/3 more effective than publicity in ensuring brand identification. This superiority was mainly due to higher overall attention. The actual relationship between the two communication formats will, of course, depend on execution and topic. The point here is that there is no theoretical reason to assume that publicity is automatically better at getting consumers' attention. Advertising is designed to function in a cluttered environment in a way that publicity is not. Overall, the study shows that counting on PR to cut through clutter is hasty. If, however, clutter is overcome, publicity is indeed a valuable tool. When attended to, publicity was processed more than advertising, which, in turn, resulted in better brand identification. Furthermore, although not investigated in the current study, in the latter case the higher credibility of publicity should add further to the positive effects in terms of persuasion (cf. Loda and Coleman 2005).

The results hold for both a familiar and an unfamiliar brand. Still, there are some differences regarding potential gains of using either format. Familiar brands generally have an advantage both in terms of attention and brand identification. For familiar brands, the more intense processing of publicity has little effect on brand identification – the brand is already established in the minds of the consumers. Advertising allows the marketer to quickly remind consumers of the brand. Publicity might be useful in terms of its high credibility (e.g., Loda and Coleman 2005) and potential to create brand interest (cf. Machleit et al 1993), but such effects will come at the price of lower overall attention. For unfamiliar brands, publicity could be a valuable tool to build brand awareness. Whereas it has an attention disadvantage to advertising, there is a clear advantage in terms of brand identification; in the current study, only 69% of participants who attended to the ad for the unfamiliar brand were able to recall the name of the brand, for publicity 89% were. The challenge, however, remains. Not many consumers will attend to an article about an unfamiliar brand and attracting attention to publicity seems even harder than attracting it to advertising.

The results point to the importance of using more realistic viewing situations in research on marketing communications. In doing so it makes an important contribution to the IMC literature. When developing guidelines on the pros and cons of different communication formats it is important to ensure that the underlying comparisons reflect real choices available to marketers. For instance, to fully understand the value of publicity it must be investigated in a context where it is likely to occur. This means allowing publicity stimuli to

contain information that would be likely to be found in such editorial material *and* to compete with other messages for consumers' attention. Furthermore, marketers and researchers need to consider that marketing communication clutter might come in many different shapes. To fully understand how clutter affects marketing communication effectiveness, the notion of "advertising clutter" might need to be complemented by "editorial clutter" (to denote competition between a marketing message and other editorial content) or "category clutter" (to denote competition between a marketing message and competitors' brand messages regardless of format). Defining clutter as messages that consumers do not want to be exposed to should be a helpful starting point in figuring out what those different shapes of clutter might be.

Another important consideration highlighted by the current study is the need for better PR evaluation practices (cf. Gregory 2001). Evaluations based on opportunities to see and media coverage are not satisfactory. Getting into the editorial content does not equal getting consumers' attention. Any comparison between media space gained and the cost of buying equivalent advertising space says nothing about effects. It is suggesting an ad campaign to be evaluated based on the total time of spots bought or the number of posters printed. Multiplying such calculations to account for credibility will distort the values even more. To find out the effects of PR efforts consumer responses must be measured. The current study suggests that when improving such measurement it might be enough to track attention. When publicity is attended to, it should be a strong source of influence and the brand is likely to be identified.

Limitations and future research

The results presented in this article are limited by the fact that only one product category and one specific form of publicity and advertising were used. Furthermore, the use of a student sample and single-point communication rather than an integrated campaign restricts the generalizability of the findings. The study is a first effort to understand the relative benefits of publicity and advertising in a cluttered environment. More studies are needed to assess whether the results will hold up in different media and for different products. For instance, perceived advertising clutter is generally quite low in newspapers compared to other media such as tv or magazines (Speck and Elliott 1997b). This could have affected our results. Furthermore, our operationalization of publicity as a news story represents only one form of publicity. Although our publicity stimulus was deemed to

be a good representative of such articles it would be useful to investigate how other forms of publicity (e.g., product tests and reviews) compare to advertising in a cluttered environment. Also, future studies of negative PR and potential synergies between publicity and advertising in a cluttered environment are needed.

Another limitation of the current study is the dependent variables used. The naturalistic approach allowed only self-reported measures of the dependent variables. Consequently we could not assess whether reported attention or inattention equaled actual attention. Future studies should use other measures of attention and memory in order to track the actual process in more detail. Furthermore, attention, processing, and brand identification have been found to be affected by clutter. In using these variables, the current study thus aligns with existing literature on advertising clutter. However, less research has been conducted with regards to the effects of clutter on other dependent measures of interest to marketers (Nan and Faber 2004). There is a need for future studies investigating how clutter affects variables such as message credibility, brand associations, brand attitudes, and brand purchase intentions – and not just for advertising but for publicity and other types of marketing communications (e.g., promotions and events) as well. Such studies could probably benefit from research on media context effects (e.g., Jun et al 2003, Törn et al 2006) and competitive interference (e.g., Burke and Srull 1988, Dahlén and Rosengren 2005).

The reported findings suggest that intentional exposure to editorial content does not equal intentional exposure to publicity; even if consumers generally are interested in the editorial content of media, not all such content is of equal interest to them. As consumers become more knowledgeable about marketing PR they are likely to develop more refined “publicity spotting” skills (cf. van Reijmersdal et al 2005). Such knowledge and skills could lead to publicity savvy and publicity avoiding behaviors similar to those consumers use to deal with advertising (cf. Speck and Elliott 1997b). As the literature on marketing PR grows, “PR savvy” or “PR persuasion knowledge” should be interesting aspects to consider. Questions that might be worth asking include: What factors/cues lead consumers to identify editorial content as publicity? Do they affect the attention paid to such content? If consumers develop a kind of persuasion knowledge for PR efforts, what will this mean for the credibility of publicity?

Endnote

¹ Sometimes the levels of attention and processing needed are extremely low. Even pre-attentive processing (“mere exposure”) can be enough to create positive brand-related outcomes (e.g., Janiszewski 1993, Lee and Labroo 2004). This effect is mainly due to perceptual fluency, meaning that mere exposure facilitates the processing of perceptual features of a stimulus. Publicity is, however, less likely to have this effect as the perceptual features of an article (headline, pictures, etc.) are not connected to the brand in the same way as they are in advertising (where logotype, package etc. are central elements in the communication).

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APPENDIX. STIMULI MATERIALS

Less credible newspaper

Page 1.



Page 2. News story (left) / Ad (right)

2. EXPRESSEN

27 FEBRUARI 2005

Jag har alltid varit ett sportkärvar och till följd av det har jag alltid varit en sportkärvar. Men när jag blev sportkärvar blev jag sportkärvar. Jag har alltid varit ett sportkärvar och till följd av det har jag alltid varit en sportkärvar. Men när jag blev sportkärvar blev jag sportkärvar.

Parkeringsböter, snöröjningsproblem och trängselskatt

Hur står bilisterna ut i Stockholm?

Jag är upprörd av Stockholms...
Skall inte på Ericsson...
Wella bygger ny simanläggning i Stockholmsregionen...
Storbankerna ger dig ingenting.
1,5% ränta på lönekontot.
Byt till ICA Banken idag! www.ica.se

2. EXPRESSEN

27 FEBRUARI 2005

Jag har alltid varit ett sportkärvar och till följd av det har jag alltid varit en sportkärvar. Men när jag blev sportkärvar blev jag sportkärvar. Jag har alltid varit ett sportkärvar och till följd av det har jag alltid varit en sportkärvar. Men när jag blev sportkärvar blev jag sportkärvar.

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Storbankerna ger dig ingenting.
1,5% ränta på lönekontot.
Byt till ICA Banken idag! www.ica.se

SVENSKA DAGBLADET

50 skattelöjnen tog död på Ödemplan

BUSH FÖRSÖKER CHARMA EUROPISKA KRITIKER

Dödlig svamp angriper svenskar efter tsunamin

Kaotiskt på UD vid katastrofen

Skandal "Pim-Pim" omringar David Cameron

Svenskars sjukattityd hårdnar

Check för personalen när Ericsson stänger

Måltidare utsmågade i vapen

Kina störsproducent av piratkopior

Unga för eget bilsittsk

Exklusiva SOFFOR

BRITFURN

NU 10% RABATT GALLER AVEN FÖR BESTÄLLNING

Page 2. News story (left) / Ad (right)

SVENSKA DAGBLADET

BRÄNNPUNKT 2

Flykten möjlig efter vänskap med vårdare

Ännu ligger kyrkan mitt på Ödemplan

Skar städ- planering på tre års sikt numera?

Wella bygger ny samlingslokal i Stockholmsförstads Kista

Wella har ett utgångspunkt i att utveckla och utveckla i hela världen

Wella-shampoo

Justieminister kommer till Bryssel idag

INLÄGG: Kvinna kläms av tre bråkbrister

Rädda assyrerna från Iraks kaos

SVENSKA DAGBLADET

BRÄNNPUNKT 2

Flykten möjlig efter vänskap med vårdare

Ännu ligger kyrkan mitt på Ödemplan

Skar städ- planering på tre års sikt numera?

Wella SHAMPOO & BALSAM

Justieminister kommer till Bryssel idag

INLÄGG: Kvinna kläms av tre bråkbrister

Rädda assyrerna från Iraks kaos

Note: Both stimuli show the ads for the familiar brand. In the unfamiliar brand condition the only change was the actual brand name.

Article 5:
What's Credibility Got to Do with It?
Effects of Message Credibility in Publicity and Advertising
Sara Rosengren

In review for possible publication in Journal of Marketing Communications

ABSTRACT

Publicity is often said to have a major advantage over advertising in terms of its higher credibility. Empirical assessments of this advantage have, however, shown inconsistent results. In the current study, the effects of message credibility on brand attitude and purchase intention for the two communication formats are compared. The findings suggest that although publicity is perceived as more credible, the effects of message credibility are stronger for advertising. These effects are found to be mediated by the perceived connection between message and brand for publicity but not for advertising. Implications of these findings for marketing communication research and practice are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

PR is the fastest growing discipline within marketing communications (The Economist 2006). By drafting press releases, holding press conferences, and putting together press kits, marketers are increasingly making their way into the editorial content of media. The resulting publicity is often said to be more effective than advertising (e.g., The Economist 2006; Ries and Ries 2002; Stammerjohan et al. 2005). Whereas advertisers clearly wish to sell their brands, the editorial content – of which publicity is part – does not. This should heighten message credibility and make publicity more effective than advertising (Lord and Putrevu 1993; Stammerjohan et al. 2005). To get this advantage, however, control over the message must be given up.

Even though the credibility advantage, sometimes referred to as the third-party effect (Hallahan 1999b; Loda and Coleman 2005), is widely cited, the grounds for claiming it are not clear. Source credibility research shows that there is no straightforward relationship between credibility and persuasiveness (Pornpitakpan 2004; Wilson and Sherrell 1993). The lack of control over the message also means that what marketers perceive as publicity might be seen by consumers as news stories (cf. Lord and Putrevu 1993), and thus not affect their brand perceptions. What is more, consumers are aware of the potential biases in media as well as in advertising (Geary 2005; Hallahan 1999b).

The empirical evidence of a third-party effect is also limited. To date, research has mainly investigated potential synergies between publicity and advertising (e.g., Jin 2003; Loda and Coleman 2005; Stammerjohan et al. 2005; Wang 2006) and therefore says little about the relative advantages of the two formats. When comparisons have been made, the results have been inconclusive (for a review, see Loda and Coleman 2005). Although publicity is often more credible than advertising (e.g., Loda and Coleman 2005; Putrevu 2005; Wang 2006), this advantage does not always carry over to brand attitudes and purchase intentions (Hallahan 1999a; Loda and Coleman 2005).

To better understand the claimed third-party effect further empirical studies seem needed. This article presents a step in this direction. Using literature on source credibility (e.g., Pornpitakpan 2004; Wilson and Sherrell 1993) and persuasion knowledge (e.g., Campbell and Kirmani 2000; Friestad and Wright 1994), we argue that the response processes for publicity and advertising differ. In an empirical study, we compare the effects of message credibility on brand and purchase intention for publicity and advertising, respectively. We also investigate the potential mediation of perceived brand-message connection (i.e., the extent to which consumers perceive a message to be connected to the sponsoring brand) for such effects. By using ecologically valid stimuli with communications for real brands embedded in actual newspapers we increase the generalizability of our findings.

PUBLICITY VS. ADVERTISING

The growing popularity of PR in marketing can in part be explained by the move towards integrated marketing communications (e.g., Keller 2001; Kitchen et al. 2007). To deal with an increasingly complex and competitive environment, marketers can no longer rely on advertising only when communicating with their target audiences. Contemporary marketing communications therefore typically employs a host of different communication options.

Publicity and advertising represent the two main types of non-personal communication formats available to marketers. Advertising denotes messages in media that are paid for and that clearly identify the sponsor, whereas publicity represent messages in media that are not (directly) paid for and that do not identify the sponsor (Balasubramanian 1994; Wang and Nelson 2006).

Publicity is thus marketing communication that is initiated by the company (through different PR activities), but reaches the target audience through another sender. Common examples are media stories on products or activities undertaken by brands.

Publicity and advertising are said to offer an asymmetric structure of pros and cons (Balasubramanian 1994). When it comes to the message, advertising offers control over content and format, whereas publicity does not. However, as the sponsor is identified, the credibility of a message is lower for advertising than for publicity.

As suggested in the introduction, there is, however, little and inconclusive empirical research on these relative strengths and weaknesses and how they affect communication effects such as brand attitudes and purchase intentions (Hallahan 1999a; Loda and Coleman 2005). Furthermore, when comparisons have been made, they have mostly been based on the same message being labeled as either editorial content or advertising (e.g., Putrevu 2005; Wang 2006). Although using the same message would offer an opportunity to isolate the effects of each format, it would not take into account the lack of control associated with publicity. In reality, lack of control means that publicity will rarely, if ever, contain exactly the same information or look the same way as an ad (Lord and Putrevu 1993). In the current study, we add new understanding to the relative strengths of publicity and advertising by explicitly linking credibility to communication effects and by using stimuli that are representative for communications generally encountered by consumers.

MESSAGE CREDIBILITY

Credibility usually refers to judgments made by message receivers with regards to the believability of a source. Credibility is thus a perceived rather than an objective property. A source is considered credible if the message it communicates is judged as truthful or valid (i.e., credible) and thus worthy of serious consideration (for reviews of source credibility research, see Pornpitakpan 2004; Wilson and Sherrell 1993). The actual effect on persuasion could thus be said to lie in what the source “does” to the credibility of a message.

Although assessing a source is fairly straightforward in personal communication, it can be complex in mediated communications, where there are generally several sources at play at the same time (Goldsmith, Lafferty, and Newell 2000; Haley 1996). In advertising research, measures of credibility have been used to assess several different sources: endorsers used in an ad (“endorser credibility”, Goldsmith, Lafferty, and Newell 2000), professions of such endorsers (“credibility of professionals”, Bush, Moncrief, and Zeithaml 1987), brands advertised in an ad (“corporate credibility”, Goldsmith, Lafferty, and Newell 2000), advertising media used (“medium credibility”, Dahlén and Edenius 2007), as well as an overall assessment of the ad (“ad credibility”, Cotte, Coulter, and Moore 2005). In public relations research, source credibility has been investigated in terms of journalists writing a news story (Geary 2005), spokespersons cited in it (Callison 2004), media vehicles publishing it (Kaufman, Stasson, and Hart 1999), as well as an overall assessment of an article (Hallahan 1999a). The persuasive effects of these different sources have also been found to differ. For instance, Goldsmith, Lafferty, and Newell (2000) found the effect of corporate credibility to be separate from that of endorser credibility. More specifically, corporate credibility affected both ad and brand perceptions whereas endorser credibility only influenced ad perceptions.

In the current study we will focus on consumers’ overall assessments of message credibility (i.e., the equivalent of article credibility in publicity and ad credibility in advertising). Message credibility is a global assessment and should therefore take consumers’ credibility perceptions of all elements used in an article or ad into account (cf. MacKenzie and Lutz 1993). By focusing on message credibility our study aligns with the credibility assessments made in previous comparisons of publicity and advertising (e.g., Loda and Coleman 2005; Wang 2006) as well as with general statements regarding credibility made by advocates of the third-party effect (cf. Hallahan 1999b).

MESSAGE CREDIBILITY IN PUBLICITY AND ADVERTISING

A receiver’s assessment of source intent has long been considered an essential aspect of source credibility (Pornpitakpan 2004). Friestad and Wright (1994; 1995) have suggested that such assessments are dependent on consumers’ persuasion knowledge. Persuasion knowledge is a loose set of beliefs or intuitive theories about persuasion. It includes ideas about what an influence agent is trying to achieve, as well as how they are trying to achieve

it (Campbell and Kirmani 2000). In the following, we will discuss how this should influence message credibility and communication effectiveness for publicity and advertising.

Message Credibility and Persuasion Knowledge

Consumers approach information conveyed by publicity and advertising differently (Hallahan 1999a; Lord and Putrevu 1993). Advertising suffers from schema-based suspicion (e.g., Dahlén and Edenius 2007; Obermiller and Spangenberg 1998). Consumers know that marketers control advertising messages and expect them to have a certain bias. One way to deal with this bias is to discount ad credibility (Dahlén and Edenius 2007). When a brand is included in the editorial content the marketer no longer has this control and, consequently, there should be less need for consumers to adjust their reactions (Lord and Putrevu 1993). Whereas consumers are aware of advertisers' self-interests in creating advertising, journalists are expected to provide an accurate and objective account of the stories they are reporting (Hallahan 1999b; Ries and Ries 2002). As publicity does not reveal the marketer as a source, consumers should be less likely to use their persuasion knowledge to discount these messages. Thus, in line with the third-party effect, we hypothesize that publicity will be more credible than advertising:

H1: Message credibility is higher for publicity than for advertising

Persuasion knowledge is, however, not only used to assess marketers' motives, but also more generally for media or even persuasion amongst friends (Campbell and Kirmani 2000; Friestad and Wright 1995). In these cases, motives might not be to sell something. Just as many consumers believe that advertisers sometimes use inappropriate tactics to try to manipulate consumers (Campbell 1995), the same should hold for journalists and editorial content (Hallahan 1999b). Given that it is not quite clear what the journalist is trying to achieve, this skepticism should manifest itself in a more general suspicion of manipulative intentions (i.e., aim to persuade by inappropriate, unfair or manipulative means, cf. Campbell 1995; Cotte, Coulter, and Moore 2005).

Perceptions of motives have, indeed, been found to influence how news stories are evaluated (Callison 2004). Although consumers might not expect a selling intention, they seem to be aware of potential biases in editorial content (Geary 2005; Hallahan 1999b). As advertising pressure on editors

becomes more common (An and Bergen 2007), one could expect consumers to become more aware of the influence marketers have. The increasing popularity of hybrid messages such as product placements (e.g., Balasubramanian, Karrh, and Patwardhan 2006) and branded contents (e.g., Sheehan and Guo 2005) should add further to consumers' knowledge and suspiciousness of the persuasive intent of different editorial contents.

Given this development, it should be interesting to investigate what role persuasion knowledge plays for message credibility of publicity and advertising, respectively. Although perceived selling intent should be higher for advertising, it is not clear what the difference will be in terms of manipulative intent. To further explore this issue we therefore ask:

RQ: How does perceived selling intent and manipulative intent differ between publicity and advertising?

Communication effects of message credibility

Hypothesis one speaks in favor of the third-party effect. Still, it is important to remember that message credibility is not an end in itself, but rather a means to increase persuasion. Marketers are interested in credibility as it is expected to have a positive effect on brand attitudes and purchase intentions.

Although the lack of control over publicity adds to message credibility, it should also lower the effects of message credibility on brand perceptions. This paradox could be understood in terms of the level of brand-message connection in the two formats. Whereas a news story about a brand might be considered credible, it is not certain that this credibility will be relevant for brand perceptions the same way as a credible ad would be. This is, in part, due to marketers' lack of control over publicity. Ads can be carefully crafted to communicate a *brand* message, whereas publicity will be about communicating a *news* message (Lord and Putrevu 1993). Another reason is that consumers expect advertising to be about brands (Dahlén and Edenius 2007), but news stories to cover news (Hallahan 1999b). Thus we hypothesize:

H2: The effect of message credibility on a) brand attitude and b) brand purchase intention is greater for advertising than for publicity

We thus propose that in order for message credibility to affect brand attitudes and brand purchase intentions, consumers must notice the brand and connect the news story to it. If the news story is not perceived as connected to the brand, neither will message credibility be. This is analogous to source credibility findings by Goldsmith, Lafferty, and Newell (2000) showing that endorser credibility mainly affects ad perceptions (for which there is a clear connection), but not brand perceptions (for which the connection is generally lower), whereas corporate credibility (which is closely linked with both the ad and brand) affects both. The lower brand-message connection in publicity should thus attenuate the effects of message credibility for publicity. A similar effect has been proposed for product placements (cf. Balasubramanian, Karrh, and Patwardhan 2006). For advertising, however, the strong brand-message connection would make message credibility a relevant factor in forming brand perceptions (Cotte, Coulter, and Moore 2005; MacKenzie and Lutz 1993). We therefore hypothesize:

H3: The effect of message credibility on a) brand attitude and b) brand purchase intention is mediated by brand-message connection for publicity but not for advertising

METHOD

Four hundred and twenty five business undergraduates (48% females) participated in the study. The hypotheses were tested in an experiment using a two conditions between-subjects design (communication format: publicity, $n = 213$ / ad, $n = 212$). To increase the generalizability of the study, two levels of brand familiarity and media source credibility were included.

Stimulus development

A series of pre-tests with participants from the same subject pool as (but not included in) the main experiment were used to develop the stimulus materials. The materials were constructed to ensure a realistic exposure setting. Our main objective was to make sure that the publicity and advertising stimuli were comparable to each other at the same time as they included specific features for each communication format (e.g., branded content and execution in ads but not publicity, complex information in publicity but not ads). We also wanted to keep the viewing experience as open as possible to allow for different levels of processing and interest.

Our decision to use a newspaper context was mainly based on the following reasons. First, newspapers are common targets for PR efforts (Tench and Yomans 2006) and thus a typical medium for publicity and advertising alike. Second, by operationalizing publicity as a news story we align with previous studies of marketing PR (e.g., Jin 2003; Stammerjohan et al. 2005). Third, the internally paced viewing situation of print media allows for natural variation in attention and processing even in an experimental setting (Lee 2000; Muehling, Laczniak, and Stoltman 1991). A pre-test showed that participants read newspapers on average five times a week ($n = 47$).

Shampoo was selected as the target product category as it is commonly communicated through both PR activities and advertising (Bashford 2005; Williamson 2003). Furthermore, a pre-test showed participants to be frequent consumers of shampoo (average usage per week = 4 times, $n = 47$). To ensure that the stimuli were representative of “real” publicity and advertising, the stimuli were built around a PR campaign focusing on a name sponsorship of a public indoor swimming hall. Name sponsorships are commonly used by marketers as a focal point of integrated marketing communications (Clark, Cornwell, and Pruitt 2002), meaning that they are likely to lead to publicity and to be used in ads. Sponsoring an indoor swimming hall was also deemed appropriate for the product category.

Publicity was operationalized as a news story written by a fictional journalist. The news story consisted of text and a picture of the actual swimming pool (including a brand signature). The story covered the opening of the new sponsored swimming hall. The ad included a picture, a few copy points connecting the shampoo to the swimming hall, and a clear brand signature. Ad claims were about the ability of the shampoo to keep your hair shiny after swimming. The news story and the ad were of equal size.

Our way to operationalize publicity and advertising differed from those used in previous studies. Previous studies have predominantly used the same stimuli – labeled as either editorial content or advertising (e.g., Putrevu 2005; Wang 2006, for an exception see Loda and Coleman 2005 who use the same claims but different formats). We decided not to use the same-stimuli approach as it would lead to an atypical news story or ad (or possibly both). Not allowing for differences in the experimental stimuli would reduce the realism of the stimuli (Lord and Putrevu 1993) and we would risk learning little about the actual effects of using the two communication formats in a

real-world setting. Getting results with more ecologically valid stimuli would also provide stronger test of our hypotheses.

A pre-test of the final stimuli ($n = 56$) showed that they were both deemed to be positive for the brand (publicity = 6.6, ad = 5.2, scale: 1 = negative for the brand, 9 = positive for the brand, both different from 4.5 at $p < .02$). The pre-test also showed that both news story and ad were typical representatives of each communication format (publicity = 6.6, ad = 6.1, scale: 1 = does not include typical elements of articles/ads, 9 = includes typical elements of articles/ads, both different from 4.5 at $p < .01$). That both stimuli were perceived as typical also indicates that our choice of shampoo and name sponsorship was not seen as uncommon or unrealistic in either format.

Brand familiarity and media source credibility

Although not in the hypotheses, brand familiarity and media source credibility were included as covariates in the study. This was done to increase the generalizability of the findings. Two brands with different levels of familiarity were selected based on a pre-test of shampoo brands (familiar brand = 6.2, unfamiliar brand = 1.2, scale: 1 = unfamiliar, 7 = familiar, $n = 30$). Furthermore, the stimulus materials were embedded in the most (5.9) and the least (2.1) credible of four major newspapers in the region of study (scale: 1 = not credible, 7 = credible, $n = 30$). Students were familiar with both newspapers (6.2 and 5.9, respectively, scale: 1 = unfamiliar and 7 = familiar).

The actual experimental design used in the study was thus a 2 (publicity, ad) x 2 (familiar brand, unfamiliar brand) x 2 (more credible media source, less credible media source) between-subjects design, with the first factor being used to test the hypotheses and the latter two functioning as covariates (coded as brand: 1 = unfamiliar, 2 = familiar, media source: 1 = less credible, 2 = more credible).

Procedure

The stimuli materials were embedded in two-page color excerpts of real newspapers using desktop publishing software. The materials were placed in the space originally occupied by advertising. As a real excerpt was used, the natural editorial-to-advertising ratio was kept.

The excerpts were randomly distributed to participants. Participants were instructed to read through the excerpt the same way they normally read a newspaper. The instructions clearly stated that participants were free to skip over parts of little or no interest to them. They were thus allowed to use as much (or little) time as they wanted. After looking through the newspaper excerpts, the participants answered questions regarding the dependent measures (and some additional questions not used in the current study).

Measures

Message credibility was measured by asking: “What is your judgment of the article/ad?” with answers given on a three-item semantic differential scale (1-7): convincing/unconvincing, believable/unbelievable, and biased/unbiased (MacKenzie and Lutz 1989). An index was produced by averaging the responses to the items (Cronbach’s alpha = .70).

As there is no established way to measure perceived persuasive intent our measures of selling and manipulative intent were created for this study specifically. To measure *selling intent* we asked: “The aim of the article/ad was to get me to buy the brand” (scale: 1 = disagree, 7 = agree). A similar measure has been used to assess persuasion intent by Dahlén and Edenius (2007). *Manipulative intent* was measured by: “The aim of the article/ad was to manipulate me as a consumer” answered on the same scale. This measure was inspired by Campbell’s (1995) manipulative intent scale. However, as her scale applies to advertising only, a new, simplified item applicable to both publicity and advertising was created.

Brand-message connection was operationalized using perceived fit (cf. Balasubramanian, Karrh, and Patwardhan 2006). More specifically, participants were asked “How well do the article/ad and brand fit?” (scale: 1 = do not fit, 7 = fit and 1 = do not match, 7 = match). The responses to the two items were averaged to create an index of brand-message connection (Cronbach’s alpha = .97).

Brand attitude was measured on a seven-point semantic differential scale consisting of three items: good/bad, pleasant/unpleasant, favorable / unfavorable (MacKenzie and Lutz 1989). Again, an index was produced by averaging the responses to the items (Cronbach’s alpha = .95).

Brand purchase intention was assessed by a single-item measure: “I want to buy the brand” (scale: 1 = disagree, 7 = agree).

To avoid inflated results brand attitude was measured first followed by questions regarding message credibility, persuasive intent, and brand-

message connection. The two measures of persuasive intent appeared after the credibility assessment to make sure that the questions as such did not cue different responses in terms of credibility (Campbell and Kirmani 2000).

RESULTS

To test the hypotheses we first ran a MANOVA on all the dependent variables using brand and media source as covariates. Planned comparisons and regression analyses were then used to test the hypotheses.

The MANOVA showed a significant main effect of communication format: $F(6, 416) = 37.78, p < .01$, Hotelling's Trace = .55, partial eta squared = .35. Our two covariates were either significant (Brand: $F(6,416) = 6.00, p < .01$, partial eta squared = .08) or marginally significant (Media source: $F(6,416) = 2.03, p = .06$, partial eta squared = .03). Brand familiarity had significant effects on message credibility ($F = 4.30, p < .05$), selling intent ($F = 5.68, p < .05$), brand attitude ($F = 26.84, p < .01$), and brand purchase intention ($F = 22.69, p < .01$) whereas media source credibility affected manipulative intent ($F = 4.02, p < .05$) and brand-message connection ($F = 4.62, p < .05$).¹

Before moving on to the hypotheses it should also be noted that there were some violations of assumptions present in the model. A significant Box's test ($p < .01$) showed that the covariance differed between groups. Furthermore, Levene's test indicated unequal variances for two of the dependent variables (selling intent: $p = <.01$, variance greater in the advertising condition, brand-message connection: $p < .05$, variance greater in the publicity condition). As the groups are of equal size these violations should have minimal impact on our results (Hair et al. 1998). Furthermore, given our theoretical discussion the differences seem reasonable (cf. Friestad and Wright 1995; Hallahan 1999b). Whether or not the purpose of a specific ad is to sell the product could be debated and subject to different interpretations depending on consumers' level of persuasion knowledge. There should, however, be more agreement that the purpose of a news story is *not* to sell a brand. Similarly, a high connection between the message and brand is expected in advertising

¹ An alternative model, where brand and media source were analyzed as factors, showed similar results. Furthermore, in this model there were no significant interactions between factors ($F_s < 1.75$ for all interactions). Similar results were also found when conducting the same analysis without covariates (which would mean seeing our brand and newspaper manipulation as a form of stimulus sampling).

and we would therefore expect higher consensus regarding the fit of an ad and a brand than for that of a news story and a brand.

Hypothesis testing

Hypotheses one was tested based on planned comparisons between the two groups. Message credibility was significantly higher for publicity ($M = 3.92$) than for advertising ($M = 3.32$, $F = 23.30$, $p < .01$, partial eta squared = .05), thus supporting hypothesis one.

Planned comparisons were also used to explore our research question regarding perceptions of persuasive intent. As expected, selling intent was perceived as higher for advertising ($M = 3.14$) than for publicity ($M = 2.53$, $F = 10.97$, $p < .01$, partial eta squared = .03). Perceived manipulative intent was, however, higher for publicity ($M = 3.71$) than for advertising ($M = 3.35$, $F = 4.44$, $p < .05$, partial eta squared = .01). The effect size is admittedly small, but it is interesting to note that advertising does not seem to be worse off than editorial content when it comes to this more general type of persuasive intent. To shed additional light on the relation between credibility and persuasion knowledge, we also looked at the intercorrelations between credibility and our two measures of persuasive intent for publicity and advertising, respectively. For publicity, there was no correlation between selling intent and credibility ($r = .01$, NS) and a negative correlation between manipulative intent and credibility ($r = -.28$, $p < .01$). For advertising, both correlations were significant (selling intent: $r = .37$, $p < .01$, manipulative intent: $r = -.24$, $p < .01$). It thus seems that the more general suspicion of being manipulated has a similar relationship with credibility for both communication formats. In addition to this, perceived selling intent is related to credibility for advertising. Interestingly, the relationship between selling intent and credibility is positive; suggesting that consumers expect advertising to be “selling” and if it is not they may become suspicious.

Initial support for hypothesis two and three is given by the fact that there was no main effect of communication format on brand attitude ($M_{\text{Publicity}} = 4.00$, $M_{\text{Advertising}} = 3.82$, $F = 2.17$, NS) or brand purchase intention ($M_{\text{Publicity}} = 2.32$, $M_{\text{Advertising}} = 2.26$, $F = 0.11$, NS). If the credibility advantage was directly translated into brand-related outcomes these two should have been affected by our manipulation. A planned comparison also showed that there was a significant difference in perceived brand-message connection between publicity ($M = 3.23$) and advertising ($M = 4.71$, $F = 110.39$, $p < .01$, partial

eta squared = .21) suggesting that the lack of influence of message credibility could, indeed, be due to differences in perceived brand-message connection.

To assess hypothesis two in detail we must, however, compare the effects of credibility on the dependent variables in our two conditions. This is done using Chow's test of equality between sets in two linear regressions (Chow 1960; for marketing applications see Fang, Evans, and Zou 2005; Jaworski and Kohli 1993). Chow's test compares beta scores between our two conditions by testing if our regression model is improved when betas are allowed to vary between groups. Regressing brand attitude on credibility showed that the effect was indeed stronger for advertising (std. beta = .40, $p < .01$) than for publicity (std. beta = .15, $p < .05$). This difference was significant (Chow's test: $F(2,421) = 5.06$, $p < .01$). When using brand purchase intention as the dependent variable the results were similar. The effect of credibility was significantly stronger for advertising (std. beta = .49, $p < .01$) than publicity (std. beta = .23, $p < .01$, Chow's test: $F(2,421) = 5.39$, $p < .01$). The results support hypothesis two by showing that the effect of message credibility is stronger for advertising than for publicity.

Turning to hypothesis three, the potential mediation of brand-message connection was assessed based on the recommendations by Baron and Kenny (1986). Regressions were made separately for each condition. As seen in table 1 the analyses supported mediation for publicity, but not for advertising. For publicity, credibility had a significant effect on brand-message connection (regression 1_{Publicity}) as well as on brand attitude (regression 2_{Publicity}). When brand attitude was regressed on both these variables, however, the effect of credibility was no longer significant (regression 3_{Publicity}). When using brand purchase intention as dependent variables, the results followed the same pattern (regression 4_{Publicity} and 5_{Publicity}). For advertising, the first two regressions showed similar results (regression 1_{Advertising} and regression 2_{Advertising} / regression 4_{Advertising}), but when brand-message connection and credibility were included together, the effects of credibility remained strong (regression 3_{Advertising} / regression 5_{Advertising}). The results suggest that brand-message connection (fit) mediates the effects of credibility on brand attitude and purchase intention for publicity, but not for advertising. Hypothesis three is thus supported.

Table 1. Regression Coefficients, Test of Mediation

Variable	Publicity		Advertising	
	Std. beta	Statistics	Std. beta	Statistics
<i>Brand-message connection</i>				
(1) Credibility	.424	$t = 6.81, p < .01$	.278	$t = 4.20, p < .01$
<i>Brand attitude</i>				
(2) Credibility	.152	$t = 2.24, p < .05$	.395	$t = 6.24, p < .01$
(3) Credibility	.089	NS	.384	$t = 5.81, p < .01$
Brand-message connection	.149	$t = 2.00, p < .05$	.042	NS
<i>Brand purchase intention</i>				
(4) Credibility	.231	$t = 3.45, p < .01$	.486	$t = 8.06, p < .01$
(5) Credibility	.087	NS	.428	$t = 6.99, p < .01$
Brand-message connection	.339	$t = 4.83, p < .01$	.208	$t = 3.39, p < .01$

Note: *Dependent variable*, independent variable

DISCUSSION

The main objective of the current study was to take a closer look at the claimed credibility advantage of publicity over advertising. The results showed that even if credibility is, indeed, higher for messages communicated through publicity, consumers are not completely oblivious to the persuasive intent of editorial content. Whereas advertising is perceived to have a clear intention to sell, there is a general suspicion that attempts of manipulation occur in editorial content as well. In fact, in this study, perceptions of manipulative intent were higher for publicity than advertising. Furthermore, although publicity was perceived as more credible, the effects of credibility on brand attitude and brand purchase intention were stronger for advertising than for publicity. For publicity, the effects were found to be mediated by how connected the message was to the brand; in order for credibility to carry over to brand attitudes and purchase intentions consumers had to make an explicit connection between the message and the brand. For advertising, no such mediation was found.

Answering the question posed in the title of this paper it thus seems as if credibility has a lot to do with it in advertising, but less so in publicity – at least when persuasion is of interest. Although the findings support the

received view that publicity is more credible they do not support interpreting this advantage as an indicator of higher communication effectiveness of publicity compared to advertising. Consequently, the current study does not discount the third-party effect, but rather qualifies it. In doing so it makes several contributions to the growing literature on marketing PR.

By explicitly considering the chain of effects following exposure to publicity and advertising, the current study provides a potential explanation for the contrasting findings on the third-party effect in previous research (cf. Loda and Coleman 2005). The previously inconclusive findings could, in part, be due to different levels of brand-message connection. Whereas most researchers seem to have focused on news coverage (e.g., Hallahan 1999a) others have looked at more specific product publicity (e.g., Loda and Coleman 2005). The brand-message connection, and consequently the credibility effect, should be stronger in the latter type of publicity. The results could also be a consequence of processing instructions given to participants. When explicitly asked to form evaluations based on stimuli materials (e.g., Loda and Coleman 2005) participants should be likely to perceive a strong brand-message connection. Some research has also been based on fictional brands (e.g., Putrevu 2005) meaning that participants are forced to make judgments based on the stimuli materials. This should forge a brand-message connection even for messages that would not be perceived as very connected to more familiar brands and/or in more realistic settings.

The contingencies highlight the value of using ecologically valid stimuli and procedures. The use of a realistic setting in our experiment allowed us to investigate naturally occurring brand-message connections made by consumers in response to publicity and advertising typically encountered in newspapers. We also included brand familiarity and message source credibility to further increase the generalizability of our findings. Although not using exactly the same message in both conditions is problematic (Lord and Putrevu 1993), it is, in fact, what the options will look like for marketing practitioners. Lack of control is an essential part of publicity. It means that news coverage will not point out the same type of brand benefits as will advertising. It also means that the messages communicated through publicity and advertising will be processed differently (Hallahan 1999a; Lord and Putrevu 1993), and lead to different chains of effects. By forcing the two to be the same in academic studies, we will lose important aspects of each communication option. The current study makes a contribution by highlighting one such aspect, namely the brand-message connection.

The current study also provides an initial contribution to investigations of persuasion knowledge for marketing communication formats other than advertising. By explicitly considering both selling and manipulative intent our study takes consumers rising skepticism to media into account (An and Bergen 2007; Geary 2005). As the popularity of hybrid formats grows, more marketer-controlled editorial content is reaching consumers. It should be important to better understand how consumers react to such contents. Even though selling intent was unrelated to message credibility for publicity in the current study, the development might make selling intent an influential determinant of message credibility in editorial content as well. This is because a “change of meaning” (cf. Friestad and Wright 1994) regarding editorial content might occur.

Managerial implications

The results presented in the current study suggest that well-crafted ads might be just as influential as publicity. Extreme claims regarding the death of advertising thus seem premature. When advertising is used, ensuring high message credibility should be important. Even though creating credible ads will be challenging, the potential pay-off of doing so is great. The positive relationship between perceived selling intent and credibility found for advertising suggests that being honest with the selling intent could be one way to increase ad credibility. Advertising in new, creative media has also been found to have a positive effect on message credibility (Dahlén and Edenius 2007) as have using publicity and advertising together (Loda and Coleman 2005; Wang 2006).

The findings also open up a debate of what to expect from marketing PR. As publicity is more credible, how can marketers make sure to benefit from this? As a high brand-message connection seems to be important, one way to ensure this is to focus on product PR. Product publicity, such as reviews and special features about a brand, has a strong brand-message connection and should enable message credibility to carry over to the brand. Less product-oriented PR might also be valuable, but appropriate evaluation practices are needed in order to understand how. Settling for measurement in terms of media space and advertising equivalents is not enough. Communication effects cannot be expected to be the same as for advertising. To better understand the role of publicity in marketing, evaluations should be based on outcomes (e.g., brand attitudes and purchase intentions) rather than outputs

(media space gained). As a final resort, if sophisticated evaluation schemes are deemed too cumbersome or too expensive, the current study suggests that a qualitative judgment of brand-message connection could be a way to increase the usefulness of output-based assessments.

Limitations and further research

The results presented are limited by the fact that only one product category and one specific form of publicity (a news story) and advertising (an image ad) were used. Furthermore, the use of a student sample and single-point communications rather than an integrated campaign restricts the generalizability of the findings. Although we used ecologically valid stimuli to increase realism, the findings are still limited by the experimental setting used. The study should be considered one effort to better understand the validity of the credibility claim. More studies are, however, needed in order to assess whether the results will hold up for different products and different types of publicity.

As a final note the dependent variables used in the current study (brand attitudes and purchase intentions) might offer a limited view on what publicity can actually achieve. Although they are frequently used in advertising research, it could be that the effects of publicity are better assessed in terms of other variables. For instance, the agenda setting effect of mass media has long been documented and could be a valuable outcome of publicity (Lord and Putrevu 1993). It could be that the strength of publicity lies in its ability to make certain issues and brands more salient rather than in its persuasion. It would therefore be interesting to compare publicity and advertising using variables that are closer to this construct, for instance brand interest (e.g., Machleit, Allen, and Madden 1993) or brand salience (e.g., Ehrenberg et al. 2002). Although we did not focus on such variables in the current study, we actually asked participants about the likelihood of them discussing the news story/ad with others. The estimates were significantly higher in the publicity condition, suggesting that agenda setting effects are, indeed, stronger for publicity than advertising. Future studies should explore this advantage in more detail.

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