

Distinctiveness of advertising executional cues as a moderator of the competitive advertising interference

Abstract

The existing of many competing ads which seem the same to consumers decreases the effect of advertising. This paper examines the distinctive aspects of ad contents in highly competitive markets. The results showed that distinctiveness in affectively based cues can moderate the competitive advertising interference rather than cognitively based cues.

Keywords: *Ad, Competitive advertising interference, Distinctiveness, Advertising executional cues*

Track: *Advertising, Promotion and Marketing Communications*

1. Introduction

Nowadays, in every market, there is a tremendous amount of ads which seem the same to consumers. Because it is becoming more difficult for consumers to distinguish an ad from the others, the effect of advertising declines significantly. This negative effect is called the competitive advertising interference and has received much attention from many researchers (e.g., Webb, 1979; Webb and Ray, 1979; Baumgardner, Leippe, Ronis, and Greenwald, 1983; Burke and Srull, 1988). Some researchers have explored factors moderating the competitive advertising interference (e.g., Ray and Sawyer, 1971; Cacioppo and Petty, 1979; Burke and Srull, 1988; Anand and Sternthal, 1990; Nordhielm, 2002; Campbell and Keller, 2003; Malaviya, 2007). However, most of them have focused on quantitative aspects (i.e., ad repetition), not qualitative aspects (i.e., which aspects of ad contents should be distinctive). Moreover, the rare studies which focused on qualitative aspects (Keller, 1991; Unnava and Sirdeshmukh, 1994) have not mentioned the distinctive aspects of ad contents which make an ad more effective. The important area for future research would be to consider the effects of distinctive ad contents (cf., Laroche, Cleveland, and Maravelakis, 2006), but the research question of which ad contents can moderate the interference is still left unsolved. Although these studies are not included in the research stream on the competitive advertising interference, studies on ad contents has been conducted (e.g., Chandy, Tellis, MacInnis, and Thaivanich, 2001; MacInnis, Rao, and Weiss, 2002). By introducing the findings on these studies, this research examines which aspects of ad contents can moderate the competitive advertising interference.

2. Literature review

2.1 Moderators of the competitive advertising interference

Previous studies on moderators of the competitive advertising interference can be classified roughly into quantitative and qualitative aspects. Regarding quantitative aspects, many researchers have focused on ad repetition following Ray and Sawyer (1971) that examined the relationship between ad repetition and recall/purchase intention for the advertised brand, and found that ad repetition increases the level of both recall and purchase intention. Many subsequent studies have identified factors that influence ad repetition effects, including ease of processing the message (Anand and Sternthal, 1990), brand familiarity (Campbell and Keller, 2003), and advertising context (Malaviya, 2007).

Regarding the qualitative aspect, on the other hand, relative few researchers focused on the distinctiveness between an ad and its competing ads in a product category (Keller, 1991; Unnava and Sirdeshmukh, 1994). Keller (1991) investigated consumer memory for an

advertised brand by considering valence, suggesting that consumers perceive goodness toward advertising. The results of ANOVA showed that the level of recall is higher when the distinctiveness between an ad and its competing ads is higher in terms of valence. Unnava and Sirdeshmukh (1994) examined consumer memory for an advertised brand by considering modality, which means the input sense that is activated by advertising information. The results of ANOVA showed that the level of recall for the advertised brand is higher when the ad and its competing ads stimulate a different modality than when they do the same modality.

In short, these two studies implied that it is easier for consumers to process information of the brand if the level of distinctiveness between the ad and its competing ads is higher. However, there is still room for improvement in both studies because advertisers have no idea in terms of which aspects of their ads should be distinctive. This limitation could be solved by considering the distinctive aspects of ad contents.

2. 2 Ad contents

Chandy, Tellis, MacInnis, and Thaivanich (2001) investigated how argument-based and emotional-based appeals of ads affect consumer behavior. Argument-based appeals are those that highlight factual benefits and convey factual information about a product, whereas emotional-based appeals are those that highlight emotional benefits and win consumer's attention and help the retrieval of prior information about a product from memory.

The results of ANOVA showed that argument-based appeals are effective in new markets, whereas emotional-based appeals are effective in old markets. These implied the relationship between market age and consumer motivation to process ads. Consumers perceive risk to be high in new markets because they have not yet gathered and stored product knowledge. As a result, they are motivated to process ads and respond positively to argument-based appeals. In contrast, consumers perceive risk to be low in old markets because they have already gathered and stored product knowledge. As a result, they are not motivated to process ads and respond negatively to argument-based appeals. Rather, they might prefer emotional-based appeals.

MacInnis, Rao, and Weiss (2002) investigated what kinds of advertising executional cues have a positive effect on sales of frequently purchased products. According to them, advertising executional cues are divided into three cues as follow. The first cues are affectively based cues such as dramas, visually appealing pictures, and likable music. The second cues are rational cues such as messages that indicate product superiority. The third cues are heuristic cues such as the advertised brand and someone knowledgeable about the product category as credible sources. Because heuristic cues enable consumers to infer brand benefit or quality, they are more effective than affectively based cues when consumers are motivated to process ads.

The results of logit model showed that only affectively based cues positively affect sales of frequently purchased products. Because consumers who frequently purchase the product

are likely to be familiar with the names of the competing brands and have developed brand schemas for the product category, they perceived risk to be low. Therefore, they are not motivated to process ads to search new information about the product category.

These studies are not included in the research stream on the competitive advertising interference, but they can complement Keller (1991) and Unnava and Sirdeshmukh (1994). This paper examines which aspects of ad contents can moderate the competitive advertising interference by introducing the findings on ad contents.

3. Hypotheses

When there are more numbers of competing ads, consumers are more likely to have knowledge and experience about the product. Such a circumstance is similar to old markets in which consumers have already gathered and stored product knowledge (Chandy et al., 2001). Also, it is similar to the market of frequently purchased products in which consumers are likely to be familiar with the names of competing brands and have developed brand schemas for the product category (MacInnis et al., 2002).

In case of old markets and/or consumers frequently purchasing product, consumers are not motivated to process ads (c.f., Chandy et al., 2001; MacInnis, et al., 2002). When there are more numbers of competing ads, consumers are less motivated. For less motivated consumers, emotion-based appeals (Chandy et al., 2001) and affectively based cues (MacInnis et al., 2002) are effective. Thus, an ad that is distinctive in terms of affectively based cues is more likely to moderate the competitive advertising interference when there are a lot of competing ads. Thus,

H1: In case of an ad that is distinctive in affectively based cues, recall and attitude toward ad is higher when there are more competing ads.

On the other hand, when there are less numbers of competing ads, consumers are less likely to have knowledge and experience about the product. Such a circumstance is similar to new markets in which consumers have not yet gathered and stored product knowledge.

In case of new markets, consumers are motivated to process ads (c.f., MacInnis et al., 2002). When there are less numbers of competing ads, consumers are more likely to be motivated. For motivated consumers, rational cues and heuristic cues (MacInnis et al., 2002) are effective. Thus, an ad that is distinctive in terms of rational cues and/or heuristic cues is more likely to moderate the competitive advertising interference when there are less numbers of competing ads. Thus,

H2: In case of an ad that is distinctive in rational cues, recall and attitude toward ad is higher when there are less competing ads.

H3: In case of an ad that is distinctive in heuristic cues, recall and attitude toward ad is higher when there are less competing ads.

4. Analysis

A laboratory was set based on Keller (1991). Seventy four undergraduate students participated in the experiment. Subjects were divided into two groups, of which group *A* was asked to browse two printed ads (the target ad and its one competing ad), while group *B* was asked to browse four printed ads (the target ad and its three competing ads). Next, they were asked to choose the most distinctive ad contents among the target affectively based cues, rational cues, and heuristic cues. After taking rest in seven minutes, they were asked to answer questions about recall and attitude toward the target ad.

T-test was conducted using the dataset. Regarding the ad that is distinctive in terms of affectively based cues, the mean levels of recall in group *A* and group *B* were 1.86 (SD=1.23) and 3.15 (SD=1.46), respectively. Recall was significantly higher when there were more numbers of competing ads ($t=-2.50$, $p<0.05$). The mean levels of attitude toward the ad in group *A* and group *B* were 3.18 (SD=1.22) and 4.37 (SD=1.29), respectively. Attitude toward the ad was significantly higher when there were more numbers of competing ads ($t=-2.46$, $p<0.05$). These results empirically support H1.

Regarding the ad that is distinctive in terms of rational cues, the mean levels of recall in group *A* and group *B* were 2.85 (SD=0.99) and 1.92 (SD=1.04), respectively. Recall was significantly higher when there were less numbers of competing ads ($t=2.32$, $p<0.05$). The mean levels of attitude toward the ad in group *A* and group *B* were 4.37 (SD=1.29) and 3.18 (SD=1.22), respectively. Attitude toward the ad was significantly higher when there were less numbers of competing ads ($t=3.15$, $p<0.01$). These results empirically support H2.

Regarding the ad that is distinctive in terms of heuristic cues, the mean levels of recall in group *A* and group *B* were 3.50 (SD=0.97) and 2.09 (SD=1.22), respectively. Recall was significantly higher when there were less numbers of competing ads ($t=2.91$, $p<0.01$). The mean levels of attitude toward the ad in group *A* and group *B* were 4.25 (SD=1.39) and 3.23 (SD=1.10), respectively. Attitude toward the ad was significantly higher when there were less numbers of competing ads ($t=1.87$, $p<0.10$). These results empirically support H3.

5. Discussions

5.1 Implications

In today's competitive markets, distinctiveness between an ad and its competing ads declines the competitive advertising interference. However, previous studies have not investigated the distinctive aspects of ad contents which make an ad more effective. This study examined which aspects of ad contents can moderate the competitive advertising interference. First, it is found that ads that are distinctive in affectively based cues (e.g., dramas, pictures, and music) are effective when there are more numbers of competing ads. On the other hand, ads that are distinctive in rational cues (e.g., messages that indicate product superiority) and/or heuristic cues (e.g., the advertised brand and someone knowledgeable about the product category) were found to be effective when there are less numbers of competing ads.

The results of t-test showed that advertisers encourage consumers to remember ad contents and to form positive attitude toward ad by enhancing distinctiveness of affectively based cues when there are more numbers of competing ads. It is practically suggestive that only affectively based cues play a role in moderating the competitive advertising interference. The results of t-test also showed that advertisers encourage consumers to remember what the ad is and to form positive attitude toward ad by enhancing distinctiveness of rational and/or heuristic cues when there are less numbers of competing ads. However, advertisers should pay attention to the point that rational and/or heuristic cues are effective only in case of weak competitive advertising interference.

5.2 Limitations and future research

This study has several limitations. First, advertising executional cues were limited. In this study, pictures and the advertised brand name were selected as affectively based cues and heuristic cues, respectively. It may be more desirable to consider dramas and likable music as affectively based cues, and someone knowledgeable about the product category as heuristic cues. Second, recall and attitude toward ad were selected as dependent variables in this study, it is useful to test the other dependent variables (e.g., purchase intention, attention, attitude toward brand, and recognition). Third, the definition of heuristic cues should be discussed deliberately, for MacInnis et al. (2002) accepted that heuristic cues enable consumers to infer brand benefit or quality, but also promote affective persuasion.

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