

Comparative Advertising as a Competitive Tool

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Comparative advertising can be an effective way for new brands to break into markets and for established or tired brands to reposition and regain lost market share. Over one-third of advertising is comparative in nature, while approximately one-quarter of advertising directly identifies or names the competitive brand. (Freeman, 1987) Given that comparative advertising is so prevalent, the focal point of this paper is how to improve the use of comparative advertising. The topics in this paper include: definition and use of comparative advertising, history and background of comparative ads, the pros and cons of using comparative ads, how comparative advertising functions, and guidelines for the improved use of comparative ads.

DEFINITION AND USE OF COMPARATIVE ADVERTISING

Comparative advertising identifies the competition for the purpose of claiming superiority or enhancing perceptions of the sponsoring and usually lesser-known brand (James & Hensel, 1991). As such, comparative advertising is a persuasive advertising strategy meant to communicate verbally and visually the competitive advantage of superior brands in the marketplace. Comparative ads also have been termed contrast ads, negative ads, attack ads, or knocking copy (Moore, 1999).

Comparative advertising can involve the direct or indirect comparison of a sponsored brand in an advertisement or commercial. Specifically, a direct comparison advertisement explicitly names the competing brand and compares on two or more attributes, benefits, or market positions. An indirect comparison advertisement is comprised of an overall subtler comparison such as the "leading brand" or "Brand X" approach that does not name the competing brand. (Barry, 1993; Beard & Nye, 2011) Simply discerning whether or not an advertisement conveys a comparative message is insufficient. That is, the level of comparative intensity must be considered in the use of comparative ads. The term comparative advertising intensity refers to the scaling of comparisons or the degree to which the competitor is identified. Advertisements may compare across competing brands wherein broad, general product comparisons are made against members of a product class or the vast majority of competitors. These may make comparisons on more than one attribute. Other comparative ads use a "leading brand" approach without naming the compared brand, i.e., fictitious brand or famed brand "X" of old. Or, comparative ads may attempt to engender perceived similarity between brands through associative rather than differentiative techniques. Varying research results have occurred due simply to which level of

comparative intensity was used in the study. (Donthu, 1992; James & Hensel, 1991; Lamb, Pride, & Pletcher, 1978)

The use of comparative ads or "attack ads" is commonplace in the U.S. For example, comparative ads have been used for food storage bags, paper towels, paper plates, disinfectant sprays, batteries, antacids, soft drinks, burgers, detergents, toothpastes, yellow pages, shampoos, drugs, motor oils, pet foods, computers, razor blades, cigarettes, and spaghetti sauce. In particular, explicit advertising campaigns have been used for "Subaru against Volvo; Toshiba against Compaq; Lufthansa against American, Delta, and United; Diet Pepsi against Diet Coke; Maxwell House against Folgers; Healthy Choice against Stouffers', Weight Watchers', and Lean Cuisine; American Express against Visa; and Audi against BMW, Lexus, Mazda, Volvo, Acura, and Mercedes!" (Barry, 1993, p. 20)

Some specific examples of comparative advertising are listed below (Anderson & Renault, 2009; Morrison, 1989; Bordwin, 1995; Lippert, 2009; Cebrzynski, 2007; York, 2008):

- A Pepsi ad portrayed young people in the distant future finding a relic (a Coke bottle) so ancient they could not identify it.
- Wendy's, a fast-food restaurant, jibed McDonald's hamburgers by asking, "Where's the beef?"
- General Mills successfully launched its breakfast cereal "Total" by saying it was the same as Kellogg's corn flakes but with more vitamins. A later comparison used number of bowls of cereal a person would need to eat to get nutritional equivalency.
- The Duracell bunny kept going while Eveready cannot keep up.
- Beef ads touted that the saturated content of several leaner beef cuts is comparable to chicken breasts, and beef exceeds chicken in some vitamins and minerals.
- Subway claimed its sandwiches were healthier than McDonalds.
- Advil claimed it is faster and stronger than Tylenol.
- Quizno's compared its generous quantities of meat and cheese on their sandwiches to Subway's skimpy amount, hence, Subway being called low-fat and low calorie.
- A television ad for Bristol-Myers' Body on Tap shampoo featured model Christina Ferrare saying: "In shampoo tests with 900 women like me, Body on Tap got higher ratings than Sassoon."
- Jovan's Second Debut Moisture Retention products claimed to maintain higher levels of moisture in the skin than "the leading beauty fluid."
- Motrin IB pain reliever started with a direct comparative claim that Motrin is "more effective than Extra-Strength Tylenol." This was immediately followed with a noncomparative claim that Motrin offers "long lasting pain relief."
- A small Vermont detergent maker emphasized its "green" environmentally safe products by mentioning Proctor & Gamble's Tide detergent with the message "our 'green' product is as good as the major product, costs the same and also is environmentally safe."

As one might suspect, the use of comparative ads has grown rapidly. However, the numbers vary (7-80%) due mainly to differences in the definition of a comparative ad, research design, media used, and complete ad/copy only ad. In 1964, comparative ads in *Advertising Age* accounted for about 15% of all the media firm's ads. Shimp (1975) found that 7% of advertising in national print and broadcast media was comparative. Crask & Laskey (1990) have estimated that about 20-30% of manufacturer advertising is comparative. Brown & Jackson (1997) found that 19% of TV spots on the three major networks were comparative in nature. Most of these ads focused on quality attributes of low involvement products. Harman, Razzouk, & Stern (1983) found that 32% of the full-page ads in four popular consumer magazines were comparative in nature, which had grown from 9.8% in 1975. In 1985, Swayne & Stevenson (1987) analyzed full-page ads in 3 magazines and found that 23.8% of ads were comparative while 12.4% had been comparative in 1975. In 1990, Pechmann and Stewart found that 80% of content analyzed TV commercials contained a direct or indirect comparative claim.

Across all media, advertisers feel that 15 out of every 100 advertisements may involve a comparative format. Comparative ads are more likely to be used on consumer goods rather than industrial goods. (Barry, 1993) It also should be noted that this percentage varies depending on ad directness, size, color,

media, product involvement, and source. However, more recent studies have found that approximately 50% of ads on the three television networks (Levy, 1987) and 50% of magazine ads (Carson & Rice, 1990) were comparative in format. Also, a 1997 study found that direct-comparison ads for established products scored higher in consumer tests than ads without any comparisons and slightly higher than ads using indirect comparisons. In new-product ads, indirect-comparison ads scored best. In the database on which the 1997 study was based, only 12% of the ads had direct comparisons and 16% used indirect comparisons. (Neff, 1999) In addition, comparative ads are less prevalent internationally as it may be viewed as culturally inappropriate or even legally prohibited in some countries.

While the use of comparative ads has been increasing, approximately 62% of consumers believe it is unacceptable for brands to criticize each other in their ads while 34% of consumers believe it is acceptable for advertisers to criticize each other. More specifically, 70% of women and 54% of men are opposed to ads that criticize while 27% of women and 42% of men think it is fine to make criticism in ads. Some 42% of 16-24 year olds think that critical ads are acceptable. Some 68% of 35-44 year olds think that critical ads are unacceptable. (Brabbs, 2001)

HISTORY AND BACKGROUND OF COMPARATIVE ADVERTISING

The use of comparative ads may have started as early as 18th century England. However, comparative advertisements can be found in early twentieth-century advertising, and they typically portrayed competitors' products as unhealthy or harmful. Throughout the twentieth century, many U.S. advertisers fought comparative advertising wars which grew increasingly hostile over time, created problems for the media delivering the advertisements, and raised concerns about potentially misleading advertising. Eventually, disparagement and the validity of comparative claims seem to have driven media advertising self-regulation policies. One of the first U.S. comparative ads dates to the 1930s wherein prospective automobile buyers were encouraged to "Look at all three" major automobiles before making a decision. Industry-wide self-regulation was mentioned rarely beginning in the 1930s. In the 1960s, comparative ads started to identify competitors by name and comparisons to "Brand X" almost disappeared. Prior to the 1970s, comparative ads identified competitive brands as "brand X" or the "leading brand." (Barry, 1993)

The Federal Trade Commission (FTC) in 1971 began advocating and legitimizing the use of comparative advertising in national print and broadcast media (Wilkie & Farris, 1975). The FTC felt that direct comparisons would enhance the quality and quantity of information presented in messages for consumers, advertisers, competitors, and the advertising industry. In particular, comparative advertising would provide useful price and performance information to consumers, would help businesses carve better market positions, would help consumers evaluate competitive alternatives, and would be an incentive to producing better products and services. (Marks & Soo-Young, 1995) The FTC's (1979) position is clear: "Comparative advertising, when truthful and nondeceptive, is a source of important information to consumers and assists them in making rational purchase decisions" (Soscia, Girolamo, & Busacca, 2010). By the 1990s, even though networks reduced their clearance staff, comparative ads grew substantially especially in telecommunications, beverages, and automobiles. During the twentieth century, the main problems with comparative advertising were simple disparagement, leading to advertisers' charges of unfairness, and the validity of comparative claims. (Beard & Nye, 2011; Beard, 2012)

"In the United States, comparison advertising is controlled through regulation by the federal government and by private law suits brought by named competitors under the Lanham Act. In addition to these two sources of federal control, each state may also have legislation to control comparative advertisements on a state by state basis. Direct or explicit comparison advertising, where a specific competitor is named in the advertisement, has been permitted since 1971 when the Federal Trade Commission officially sanctioned its use. The FTC's position is based on the belief that comparison advertising provides an important source of information to consumers that assists them when making decisions. The current regulatory efforts are based on probable results. An advertisement is deceptive if it is 'likely' to mislead...In the United States, the focus seems to be more on the consequences of the

comparison message...Under this approach, an act is considered morally right or wrong based on the result produced.” (Wright, Morgan, & Stoltman, 1999, p. 171)

In terms of comparative ads for professionals, a series of landmark court rulings in the mid to late 70s permitted professional advertising. However, professionals still had negative attitudes toward the use of comparative advertising. By the 1990s, professionals accepted advertising as a normal means of communication. But, the use of comparative ads for professionals is still rare. (Marks & Soo-Young, 1995)

The American Association of Advertising Agencies (AAAA) recognizes that when comparative advertising is used truthfully and fairly, the consumer will be provided with needed and useful information. However, extreme caution is needed as comparative advertising can distort facts and misrepresent the truth. Therefore, the Board of the AAAA has stated certain guidelines for comparative advertising (Belch & Belch, 2001, p. 732):

- "1. The intent and connotation of the ad should be to inform and never to discredit or unfairly attack competitors, competing products, or services.
- "2. When a competitive product is named, it should be one that exists in the marketplace as significant competition.
- "3. The competition should be fairly and properly identified but never in a manner or tone of voice that degrades the competitive product or service.
- "4. The advertising should compare related or similar properties or ingredients of the product, dimension, feature to feature.
- "5. The identification should be for honest comparison purposes and not simply to upgrade by association.
- "6. If a competitive test is conducted, it should be done by an objective testing source, preferably an independent one, so that there will be no doubt as to the veracity of the test.
- "7. In all cases the test should be supportive of all claims made in the advertising that are based on the test.
- "8. The advertising should never use partial results or stress insignificant differences to cause the consumer to draw an improper conclusion.
- "9. The property being compared should be significant in terms of value or usefulness of the product to the consumer.
- "10. Comparatives delivered through the use of testimonials should not imply that the testimonial is more than one individual's thought unless that individual represents a sample of the majority viewpoint."

If there is trouble, a company's commercial general liability policy should cover both legal defense costs and verdicts rendered against the company for most tort claims. Coverage can be expanded with add-on endorsements, covering "Advertising Injury," e.g., "Injury arising out of an offense committed during the policy period occurring in the course of the named insured's advertising activities, if such injury arises out of libel, slander, defamation, violation of right of privacy, piracy, unfair competition or infringement of copyright, title or slogan" (Bordwin, 1995, p. 47). (Villafranco, 2010)

THE PROS AND CONS OF USING COMPARATIVE ADS

A fundamental objective of comparative ads is to change consumers' impressions of the advertised brand relative to the competitive brand. In so doing, comparative ads have been found to elicit higher levels of message involvement and processing activity than noncomparative ads. However, it should be noted that comparative ads tend to contain more information than noncomparative ads (Harmon, Razzouk, & Stern, 1983). Also, comparative ads are used to convey information about brands to the marketplace, i.e., product position. Muehling, Stoltman, & Grossbart (1990) found that subjects processing a comparative ad format paid greater attention to the ad, recalled more information about the

ad, elaborated on the ad more, and considered the ad to be more relevant to their needs. However, there are mixed reviews whether or not comparative ads reduce perceived differences between a new product and the market leader as well as whether or not perceptions of that brand are enhanced (Sciulli & Taiani, 2001). These mixed results are most likely due to the use of direct versus indirect comparative ads and the use of comparisons based on the product category versus the brand name. A thorough examination of the pros and cons of comparative advertising are provided below.

Pros

In a thorough review of the literature and of surveys of advertising executives, the following pros are offered for using comparative ads (Barry, 1993; Freeman, 1987; Chang, 2007; Grewal, Kavanoor, Fern, Costly, & Barnes, 1997; Barrio-Garcia & Luque-Martinez, 2003; Myers, Sen, & Alexandrov, 2010; Anderson & Renault, 2009; Hill & King, 2001; Chang, et al., 2007; Gnepa, 1993):

- Provides more information about brands, available products, and prices to the marketplace, i.e., provides consumer education
- Helps a challenger who may have an unknown position in the marketplace to "grab a niche" close to a well-known and respected brand
- Reduces the confusion among audiences about what attributes are important
- Higher recall scores may (or did) occur through this format
- Forces marketers to improve the quality of their products and is also an effective strategy to reduce market entry barriers
- Creates confidence for the challenger
- Promotes competition and manufacturer opportunity
- Stimulates comparison shopping
- Takes advantage of the novelty factor
- Aids in product/brand differentiation
- Is a viable strategy for "underdogs" and slow-growth industries
- Draws attention to message content
- Elicits high levels of message involvement
- Encourages extensive message elaboration and central-route processing
- Generates cognitive responses
- Motivates consumers to allocate more resources to process comparative ads because they believe it may be useful and prescriptive
- Is more effective in positioning a product
- Generates dissociative mental representations of two competing brands
- Polarizes consumers' attitudes toward the competing brands
- Generates message and brand awareness
- Increases purchase intentions and purchase behavior
- Generates favorable sponsored brand attitudes

Cons

In a thorough review of the literature and of surveys of advertising executives, the following cons are offered for using comparative ads (Barry, 1993; Freeman, 1987; Chang, 2007; Grewal, et al., 1997; Barrio-Garcia & Luque-Martinez, 2003; Myers, et al., 2010; Anderson & Renault, 2009; Hill & King, 2001; Chang, et al., 2007):

- Open media warfare may boomerang and escalate
- Generates too much information, i.e., irrelevant noise and misinformation to the consumer
- May create brand name confusion on the part of the audience
- May decrease rather than enhance believability and credibility for the sponsor brand
- Consumers may view the ad as bad manners
- May lead to cut-throat competition

- Less well-known brands may benefit most from this strategy, that is, weaker firms targeting market leaders
- May misidentify the actual sponsor
- May decrease advertising credibility in general
- Consumer skepticism and anger can be heightened
- May be viewed as spending money to publicize your competition
- Increased advertising intensity lowers the consumer's perception of believability and increases the number of counter arguments
- Benefits accrue to the weak firm, and to the consumer, with so much damage to the large firm that total surplus goes down
- May relax price competition and lead to higher prices because it increases product differentiation
- May generate more negative attitudes in the consumer than the more traditional ads

HOW COMPARATIVE ADVERTISING FUNCTIONS

In general, research has found that perceived similarity between the advertised brand and a particular competitor is enhanced by comparative advertising. This occurs whether or not the ad emphasizes the brands similarities or differences. (Manning, Miniard, & Barone, 2001) However, comparative ads tend to be more effective for new, less-established brands (Gnepa, 1993; Grewel, et al., 1997; Schaffer & Zettelmeyer, 2009).

While the cognitive impact of comparative advertisements differs from that of noncomparative ads, little progress has been made to empirically understand the mental representations and process engendered by comparative ads. The research has found that comparative ads are more likely to cause mental impressions about the advertised brand relative to competitors than are noncomparative ads. These impressions may be associative or disassociative. A consistent finding in the literature is that comparative ads, even those emphasizing inter-brand differences, enhance the perceived similarity of the advertised and comparison brands. That is, the general effect of comparative advertising is associative. (Miniard, Rose, Barone, & Manning, 1993) Also, comparative ads that differentiate generate dissociative rather than associative mental impressions. Both relative and nonrelative impressions may be formed following exposure to comparative ads. Comparative ad intensity strongly affects the prevalence of relative and nonrelative impressions residing in memory. When noncomparative information in an ad is replaced with comparative information, then the amount of enhanced relative impressions increases while the number of nonrelative impressions decreases. (Manning, et al., 2001; Miniard, Barone, Rose, & Manning, 2006)

GUIDELINES FOR IMPROVING THE USE OF COMPARATIVE ADVERTISING

Eighty percent of complaints to the National Advertising Division of the Council of Better Business Bureaus now come from marketers rather than consumers (Neff, 1999). In order to prevent these complaints and improve the use of comparative advertising, marketers should consider the following guidelines:

1. Compare up - If you are the leader in a field, never start a comparative campaign. If you are not the leader, then compare the product with products identical in every way except for the special differential featured in the ad (sodium vs. no sodium). That is, this strategy works perfectly for the new brand that wants an instant frame of reference with consumers or wants to draw in the bigger brand into a conversation the market leaders do not want to have (Thomaselli, 2003). It is better if the proof that the products are identical is as strong as possible. Additionally, the different features should be important to the consumer. (Russell & Lane, 1999) Small doses of negative comparative ads can be used only if they provide objective information about the competition and acknowledge the customer rather than the competition as the focus. Also, it could be beneficial for the firm to use image-building advertising campaigns after using negative comparative advertising campaigns. Negative advertising should only be used if the firm has

lesser market share, i.e., consumers love underdogs. (Koprowski, 1995) Roggeveen, et al. (2006, 115, p. 120) note that

“Comparative ads simultaneously communicate both positive information about the sponsor and negative information about the competition and, as a consequence, could be framed in either a positive or negative fashion. When a comparative ad is negatively framed, it focuses on the inferiority of the competitor and encourages consumers to think about potential losses they will incur from using the competitor’s brand. In contrast, when a comparative ad is positively framed it focuses on the superiority of the sponsor...when a comparative ad is framed positively (vs. negatively), people are less likely to use price in forming their evaluations of performance risk...consumers exposed to a positively framed message engage in thorough processing of the ad and do not evaluate performance risk based solely on the reputation of the retailer, whereas the reputation of the retailer was a primary driver of performance risk evaluations for those exposed to a negative frame.”

2. Substantiate, verify, and objectify your claims (Deeble, 2001) – The Lanham Act of 1946 can be used to seek damages from any person or entity that represents nature, characteristics, qualities, or geographic origin in comparative advertising. These ads must be scientifically verifiable. That is, companies must consider the facts of research as well as the consumers' impressions and the language of the advertising claims. Under the Lanham Act, five elements must be proved to win a false advertising lawsuit containing a comparative claim (Retsky, 1999, p. 16):

- "False statements have been made about the advertiser's product or your product.
- "The ads actually deceived or had the tendency to deceive a substantial segment of the audience.
- "The deception was 'material' or meaningful. In other words, you need to show that it is likely to influence purchasing decisions.
- "Falsely advertised goods are sold in interstate commerce.
- "You have been or likely will be injured as the result of the false statements, either by loss of sales or loss of goodwill."

Also, the FTC has identified the following factors as dispositive of the propriety of claims made in ads: type of product advertised (e.g., food, drug, or hazardous products require more substantiation), type of claim made (e.g., safety or medical – more substantiation), benefits of a truthful claim (e.g., more beneficial - less substantiation), ease of developing substantiation for the claim (e.g., easier - more substantiation), consequences of a false claim (e.g., more danger – more substantiation), and amount of substantiation that experts in the field agree is reasonable. Also, it is not a defense to a comparative advertising lawsuit that the competitor was not specifically named. (*Brandweek*, 1995) In addition, be careful of international rules regarding comparative advertising. The rules of countries vary and legal advice should be taken in each country where you advertise. (*Marketing*, 1993; Emerson, 2009; Nye, Roth, & Shimp, 2008; *Asialaw*, 2009; Choi & Miracle, 2004; Garrett & Iyer, 2013)

3. Be accurate with your prices, especially when comparing with competitors (Deeble, 2001) – Marketers must get their facts right, and the information relied upon must be independent and objective so that consumers understand the comparison (Stafford, 2003). Retail advertisers often compare prices, such as a "regular price" indicating a price savings. In general, previous research has found that:

- "1. Comparative price claims can increase consumers' estimates of a store's regular price on an advertised item, thereby increasing the perceived value of the deal.
- "2. Comparative price claims also can increase estimates of the lowest price in town for an item, thereby decreasing perceptions of savings to be gained by additional shopping.
- "3. The effects of comparative price claims are moderated by a variety of factors, including variables related to consumers' price knowledge." (Blair, Harris, & Monroe, 2002)

While comparative price advertising has risen over the past few years, so have complaints about these types of ads. Advertisers using price-led comparative ads may be facing a regulatory

crackdown. In fact, the Committee of Advertising Practice has issued guidelines for the retail sector that uses price comparisons in non-broadcast ads. (Bainbridge, 2003) Companies study with magnifying glasses the ads of their competitors and fire off complaints to the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA) if they discover the smallest infraction. Most complaints are not vexatious or making mischief. Typically, those complained against did not set out to break the rules. (Gray, 2003) In general, comparative price advertising is a powerful advertising tool that requires careful management and monitoring so that deception does not occur (Compeau & Grewal, 1998; Compeau, Grewal, & Chandrashekar, 2002).

4. Include all relevant comparisons so that consumers are not misled - Comparative advertising claims are only actionable if consumers are misled, e.g., false on its face or literally false. As a result, much research has focused on identifying types of claims that are likely to cause inaccurate product beliefs. For example, there is some evidence that consumers infer the relative price for the omitted or nonfeatured service from the comparative information provided, i.e., lowest priced in one service may infer inaccurately lowest priced across other services. (Barone & Miniard, 1999) In general, confusion, disparagement, and misrepresentation are used to measure unfair competition (Russell & Lane, 1999). If a computer is more reliable than another computer but also more expensive, then the maker needs to present the first as well as the second point (*The Economist*, 1991). A message of "We're good and they're bad" will probably end up in court while a message of "We're as good as they are, and we give you an extra benefit" may not even get you sued (Bordwin, 1995). Attacking the product of a competitor is less risky than attacking the company itself (Sorescu & Gelb, 2000). Also, it should be noted that even with all relevant comparisons, some consumers may overgeneralize the comparative content claims. Disclosure and more specific comparisons may help to remedy these sorts of misinterpretations. (Andrews, Burton, & Netemeyer, 2000) As a point of interest, product attributes, performance, and quality are the three most common aspects of comparative ads. At the least, these three comparisons need to be accurate and full-bodied. (Chang, 2007; Andrews, et al., 2000)
5. Build your immunity to comparative ads by defining your brand positively and not in opposition to someone else - A market leader would not gain anything from giving its rivals free exposure. Also, brands that knock market leaders are tacitly admitting that they are not number one. An extended slugging match can subtract value from the whole market. In building immunity, consider that a company generally cannot feature a rival's trademark. The right of a trademark owner to exclude others is a function of trademark infringement, false description, false association, false endorsement, and tarnishment and dilution (Simensky, Wood, & Stone, 1995). Additionally, Raju, et al. (2009) found that whether a brand is comparative or not, committed consumers perceive an advertisement for the competitor's brand to be unfavorable. As such, commitment plays a protective role to the favored brand as well as extends negatively to the competitor's brand. Raju, et al. (2009) also suggest that it would be valuable to position the advertised brand as superior to the consumer's current brand, while at the same time, maintaining sufficient flexibility to accommodate different consumers using different brands.
6. Emphasize issues and content in political comparative advertising - Goodman (1995) suggests "seven commandments" for hard hitting campaign ads:
 - "1. Thou shalt impart important information
 - "2. Thou shalt be accurate
 - "3. Thou shalt be fair
 - "4. Thou shalt be relevant
 - "5. Thou shalt be reverent
 - "6. Thou shalt not bore
 - "7. Thou shalt choose the best medium"

Political ads can be distinguished in terms of legitimate criticism, presented in a tempered way, and mudslinging. Those interested in politics go to the polls regardless of the tone of campaigns. However, those with little interest are more likely to vote if useful negative criticism is given. On

the other hand, unsubstantiated and unjustified attacks make them more likely to stay home in disgust. (*The Wilson Quarterly*, 2000) Negative comparative advertising is often seen as an invitation for a quickly turned around counter attack that is based on professional research and polling (Doak, 1995). Kamber (1997, p. 46-7) has summarized the political campaign rules this way:

"1. Advertise early if you have the money. ... 2. Go negative early, often through Election Day, if necessary. 3. Appeal to the heart and the gut, rather than the head. 4. Define your opponent to the voters before he or she can defend him/herself or you. 5. If attacked, hit back even harder. 6. It's easier to give negative impressions of your opponent than it is to improve their image. The best way to win is by bringing the other guy down, not by bringing yourself up."

Doak (1995) also states that facts must be accurate, the allegations must be a fair representation of the factual occurrences, and the allegations must be about the "public" record of the opponent. As a special note, 70% of Americans are not likely to believe political advertising in which candidates criticize one another. However, only 40% are not likely to believe negative advertising criticizing a competitor's product. (Sorescu & Gelb, 2000; Pinkleton, 1997) According to Pinkleton (1997, p. 25),

"Political campaign strategists apparently can use negative comparative advertising to communicate concrete, demonstrable differences between competing candidates on such key characteristics as issue position, voting records, and past experiences. In addition, comparative advertising, if research based and strategic, has the potential to communicate important information that will enhance voters' memory and affect their behavior while avoiding backlash effects associated with more malicious forms of negative political advertising. Clearly, comparative advertising can play an important role in current political campaigns."

7. Match ad format to a consumer's mode of information processing - Thompson & Hamilton (2006) have examined the effectiveness of matching ad format to a consumer's mode of information. The authors found that the match between the format of the ad and the consumer's processing mode can either improve or reduce the effectiveness of advertising by improving the ease of evaluation. That is, comparative ads are more effective than noncomparative ads when consumers use analytical processing. However, noncomparative ads are more effective when consumers use imagery processing. They suggest that information cues can significantly influence consumer's reaction to a comparative ad whether the cues are external to the ad or embedded within the ad. Thompson & Hamilton (2006, p. 530) state, "...when ad format is compatible with processing mode, information processability is enhanced, making the message more persuasive and ad evaluations, brand evaluations, and purchase intentions more favorable than when ad format and processing mode are incompatible." Soscia, et al. (2010) examined whether comparative ads lead consumers to generate perceived similarity among the two brands or differentiation. They confirmed that "consumers do not perceive the content of a comparison equivalently, but rather the differentiating effect varies according to the level of involvement and the perceived differentiation." (p. 115) That is, the high-involvement consumer will be helped by a comparative ad to differentiate between brands and will be more likely to understand the value of the ad's information. Chang & Chow (2008) note that when advertisers use superiority or positive outcome messages, they should employ promotion-focused cues (e.g., "Style with Mobility" or Making Your Dreams Come True!"). However, when they emphasize the weakness of a competitor, they should use prevention-focused cues (e.g., "What a Nightmare!" or "Choosing the Right Brand for Your Family Is Your Responsibility." In addition, Polyorat & Alden (2005) state that consumers are more likely to process a comparative ad if they are more involved with the media, have ample opportunity, or have in-depth knowledge.
8. Use an appropriate tone in your comparative ads - Most advertisers believe that negative advertising is practiced more in politics and that its practice in business may discourage

consumers (Jaben, 1992). As noted by Neese & Taylor (1994, p. 67), "automobile makers who 'slam' the competition...may find the straightforward hard-hitting approach to be less productive than a finesse-oriented indirect strategy." On the other hand, since most of the information people receive daily is positive, then maybe negative information is more noticeable, interesting, salient, exciting, involving, or memorable. (Kahn & Kenney, 1999) Sorescu & Gelb (2001) found that the most favorably rated message contains negative elements and that negative comparisons are perceived differently by various user and nonuser groups. In using this approach, messages need to simply denigrate product features of a rival brand and not smear the corporation. This is particularly important given that individuals may retain affective impressions or feelings of an object long after they have forgotten the specific features on which those impressions were based (Burnstein & Schul, 1983). Because negative messages/tone can help in some dimensions and harm in others, comparative ads must be thoroughly and specifically tested as well as fine-tuned to be effective. As noted by Sorescu & Gelb (2000, p. 38), "Nothing in these data should discourage moderate negative advertising...and nothing in the data should encourage extreme negativity."

9. Administer negative comparative advertising in small, sporadic doses - In 1967, after Avis scored some short-term improvements in market share, it dropped its comparative campaign against Hertz and resumed more conventional advertising. AT&T has balanced between comparative ads and product innovation ads. That is, it is important to touch all the major bases in advertising – from a brand's reputation to customer service. This also means to not bash for the sake of bashing. Anything approximating a bash must have a succinct message that poses your competitive advantages and exposes your competitor's weaknesses. Once negative advertising has been used, follow it with an image campaign directed specifically to your customer. Consumers do not want to be pawns in the fight. They want to know that companies are interested in them and not just the sale. That is, negative comparative advertising should be used as a tactic and not an ongoing strategy. (Koprowski, 1995) This also is the case with marketing charities and their causes, that is, do not denigrate other charities' work (Parsons, 2010). Additionally, in international markets, it may be important to improve the intensity of comparison gradually from indirect (low) to direct (high) over time (Hwang, 2002). As noted by Shao, Bao, & Gray, (2004, p. 76), "Comparative advertising provides consumers with valuable information about goods and services prior to making a purchase decision. Product comparisons have become a mainstay in most nations throughout the world. However, consumer attitudes toward this type of advertising and its persuasion effect have been murky to researchers who examine cross-culture advertising efficacy."
10. Use reference groups, celebrity endorsers, and independent tests to put forward the comparative message - Reference groups, including celebrity endorsers can raise the believability of the comparative ad. Using a specialist or independent test results in the ad also could reduce the consumer's counter-arguments. Reducing counter-arguments would help to raise believability which, in turn, would result in more positive attitudes toward the ad and brand. This should increase the purchasing probability. (Barrio-Garcia & Luque-Martinez, 2003)
11. Refer implicitly rather than directly to the competition - The greater the comparative advertising intensity, the more negative is the consumer's response, believability, counter-arguments, attitudes, and purchasing intentions. That is, implicit comparisons can be more effective. Also, implicit comparisons can greatly reduce the legal and ethical concerns derived from direct comparison. (Barrio-Garcia & Luque-Martinez, 2003) As noted by Chow & Luk (2006), consumer attitudes are most positive either when there is no brand comparison or the comparison is moderately intense. In general, ads that compare the performance of a new brand to a leading known brand and ads that contain consumer ratings of a brand's performance are more useful or diagnostic than straight product information. Ultimately, marketers need to determine what product information is most useful or diagnostic for consumers to help them distinguish the target product from competing products. Consumers tend to allocate more resources to process

comparative ads because they believe it contains diagnostic information. Diagnostic comparative information helps consumers distinguish the target product from its competitors. (Chang, 2007; Barone, Palan, & Miniard, 2004; Jeon & Suh, 1999)

12. Measure the audience's perception of comparative advertising before it goes public - Advertising pre-tests can be used to prematurely detect negative reactions. The comparative message can then be corrected. For example, if an ad is too direct or intense in its name-calling and upsets the consumers, then that ad could be remedied successfully before doing damage. (Barrio-Garcia & Luque-Martinez, 2003) After all, according to Crowe & Higgins (1997), consumer satisfaction is driven ultimately by two different motives: obtaining positive results and preventing negative results. These two outcomes should be the focus of a comparative ad, not slamming the competition which can turn off the customer. (Shih, 2009) Additionally, Shaffer & Zettelmeyer (2009) found that manufacturers tend to use comparative ads that appeal primarily to their core consumers while noncomparative ads are used to appeal to non-core consumers.

SUMMARY

Comparative advertising draws comparisons between the advertised brand and its competitors either directly or indirectly. While the use of comparative advertising is commonplace and increasing in today's marketplace, advertisers must use comparative advertising cautiously because it has important advantages and disadvantages. The history and functioning of comparative advertisements is presented as well as guidelines for improving its use. Hopefully, these guidelines will help to alleviate the kind of folly presented by Safire (1996, p. 35): "The makers of Advil are now suggesting that Tylenol may ruin your liver. I suspect Tylenol will soon blaze back with a campaign to hint that Advil rips out your stomach lining. That will give the boys at Bayer Aspirin the chance to repeat both competitors' warnings and to call for unity against the common enemy, headaches. Thus does advertising art follow political life."

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