



Slogan recall effects on marketplace behaviors: The roles of external search and brand assessment



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ABSTRACT

This current study investigates the influence of advertising slogan recall on individuals' brand assessment, and relates these brand assessments to actual marketplace behaviors. The authors propose that the effectiveness of slogan recall will depend on whether individuals conduct an external information search or not. We test the hypotheses using a field study based on an actual advertising campaign implemented by a nonprofit organization, and a follow-up controlled experimental study. Findings support the notion that the influence of advertising slogan recall on brand assessment (i.e., the company-intended association and quality) is greater when individuals do not conduct external information search. Further, the research finds that brand perceptions mediate the influence of slogan recall on marketplace behaviors. The results imply that managers will receive greater returns on investments in advertising slogans when selling low involvement products rather than high involvement products.

1. Introduction

A common approach in advertising is to associate a slogan with an advertising campaign. Slogans are generally believed to facilitate learning about some aspect of a brand or company (Dass et al., 2014; Dowling and Kabanoff, 1996). They are employed for a variety of reasons such as, helping to differentiate the company/brand, providing customers with a reason to buy, or stating a distinctive competency (Dowling and Kabanoff, 1996). To achieve these effects, it is important for slogans to first be likeable, and recent research suggests that clear and creative slogans are especially favored by consumers (Dass et al., 2014). However, advertisers indicate that the most important indicator of a slogan's effectiveness is recall (Molian, 1993).

The two most effective advertising slogans based on recall have been recently identified as “Just Do it” [Nike] and “I’m lovin’ it” [McDonald’s] (Kohli et al., 2013). Interestingly, Burger King made headlines in 2014 by altering the third most effective slogan based on recall, “Have it your way” to “Be your way” in order to convey the brand’s acceptance of consumers’ self-expression. The shift predictably led to a great deal of criticism in the media (Crudele, 2014), given that the former slogan had been used for 40 years and was strongly associated with the brand. Other companies change their advertising slogans every few years, which has the effect of limiting recall since a new slogan has to be relearned periodically (Kohli et al., 2013). For

example, Coca-Cola has used advertising slogans such as “Share a Coke”, “Open Happiness”, and “The Coke Side of Life” in just the past ten years.

Presuming that recall accurately reflects the effectiveness of advertising slogans, recent research efforts have been focused on what makes slogans likeable and memorable (Dass et al., 2014; Kohli et al., 2013). While the characteristics of the slogan itself enhance both slogan likeability and recall (Dass et al., 2014; Kohli et al., 2013), the amount of media exposure in terms of the slogan age and advertising spending have the biggest influences on slogan recall (Kohli et al., 2013). The implication is that companies choosing to prioritize the use of advertising slogans must invest heavily over a long period of time in order to generate high levels of recall and reap the benefits.

However, if recall is not a universally appropriate measure of slogan effectiveness, committing the resources necessary to improve slogan recall will not generate the expected returns to these companies. Indeed, the academic research involving slogans is “limited” at best (Dass et al., 2014), and there has been some debate regarding the appropriateness of the recall measure for assessing effectiveness (Briggs, 2006; Mehta and Purvis, 2006). For instance, Briggs (2006) asserts that recall has “little relationship” to the actual influence of an advertisement on brand attitudes or sales. Prior experimental research has examined the effects of different slogan primes on brand perceptions (Boush, 1993; Pryor and Brodie, 1998), but this research does not assess

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slogan recall, which is more relevant in a real marketplace or purchase situation. Given the concerns about the applicability of recall as a measure and the lack of research addressing this issue, there is a need for research that examines the consequences of slogan recall, rather than just the drivers.

To that end, the current study addresses this research gap by considering the outcomes, rather than the antecedents, of advertising slogan recall. Specifically, the authors propose slogan recall will relate to individuals' brand associations and brand attitudes (i.e., brand quality), but that this relationship will depend on whether an individual conducts an external information search. With the prevalence of online search in today's environment, the interplay between promotion and information search has become an important strategic consideration (Mingyu et al., 2014; Ye et al., 2014). To the authors' knowledge, the current study is the first to examine the potential moderating influence of information search on the impact of slogan recall. We contribute a theoretical perspective that merges insights from cue utilization theory (Cox, 1962) and the economics of information (Nelson, 1970). We frame slogan recall and external search as competing sources of information. Our premise is that information from an external information search diminishes the utilization of information from advertising slogans stored in memory when individuals make inferences related to brands.

The study further examines how slogan recall, brand associations, and brand attitudes relate to marketplace behavior (i.e., transaction likelihood and share of wallet) in a field setting. While a vast amount of research considers behavioral intentions or hypothetical transactions, comparatively fewer studies involve reports of actual behavior. The conceptual model is shown in Fig. 1.

This model follows a typical advertising learning model of brand choice, as illustrated by Shimp (1981). Individuals' recall of the slogan reflects their processing of an advertising message. This recall then affects their beliefs and attitude toward the brand, respectively represented in our model by the company intended brand association and brand quality. These brand assessments then affect behaviors in the marketplace, such as brand choice and loyalty (Vakratsas and Ambler, 1999), respectively represented in our model by transaction likelihood and share-of-wallet. The study conceptual model makes theoretical contributions by examining slogan recall in the context of this advertising learning model. Specifically, we argue that external information search will function as a boundary condition to the effects of slogan recall on brand assessments and behavioral outcomes. The next section discusses the theoretical background, rooted in the literature on external information search and cue utilization.

2. Theoretical background and hypotheses

2.1. External information search

In order to make better decisions in the marketplace, consumers acquire information through internal and external information search (Guo, 2001). Internal information search occurs first and involves information that is available in a person's memory. For instance, they may recall advertising slogans related to brands of which they are aware. When this information does not sufficiently inform decision making, consumers often resort to external information search, where they draw information from outside sources. For example, consumers may seek out knowledgeable friends, evaluate company reports and marketing materials, or search for information from independent third-parties such as the media (Schmidt and Spreng, 1996). Services research suggests that external information search is inversely associated with time availability, and positively associated with perceived risk and purchase involvement (Elliott, 1994). Recent research also supports the notion that information search has an inverted U-shaped relationship with knowledge (Maity et al., 2014). Similarly, Schmidt and Spreng (1996) identify two broad antecedents of a person's external information search activity: perceived ability to search (related to knowledge) and perceived motivation to search (related to time, risk, and involvement).

While there is a large body of research that identifies and examines the antecedents of external information search (Guo, 2001; Schmidt and Spreng, 1996), there has been much less research on the outcomes of search. Of course, the general outcome is simply greater information about particular products and services (Nelson, 1970). Relatedly, research also suggests that external information search results in an increase in the size of consumers' consideration or evoked set of brands (Elliott, 1994; Wu and Rangaswamy, 2003). The present study also focuses on the outcomes of search, and we uniquely contribute to the literature by considering the moderating influence of external information search on the decision making process. Specifically, we expect that external information search will affect the use of other potential sources of information, namely advertising slogans.

2.2. Utilization of information

External information search and advertising are both sources of information that consumers can use to evaluate products and services (Nelson, 1970, 1974). However, sources of information differ in their usage because consumers consider some information to be more valuable than others (Cox, 1962). This value is partly determined by how much the information contributes to making accurate judgments (Purohit and Srivastava, 2001). There is a long stream of research

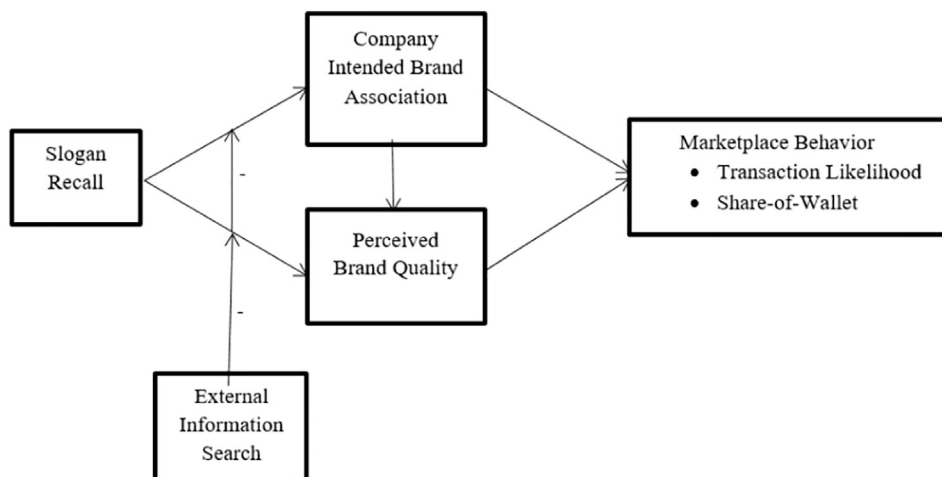


Fig. 1. Conceptual model.

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