

Impact of Advertising Context with Reference to Print Advertising

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Abstract

Advertising context refers to the surrounding or the environment within which an advertisement is found. Context in the case of print advertisement includes other advertisement of related or similar products, or of unrelated products, news contents, articles and editorial content etc. A consumer or the reader do not assess the advertisement alone but assesses it along with its context. Thus, it is important that the advertiser take into consideration the role of context and design and place the advertisement in such a way that there are no chances of misinterpretation of the advertisement. Paper tries to find out what influences can a context have on the interpretation of a accompanying advertisements and how can the context be favorably used to ensure that desired result is achieved from the advertisement.

Key Words: Advertising context, perception, effectiveness, priming, recognition and recall.

I. Advertising: An Introduction

Advertising, a paid form of non-personal communication, is the most pervasive element of the integrated marketing communication. Organisations depend heavily on advertising to increase their product awareness, providing information about new product or changes in existing product to prospects, customers and consumers, differentiating its product

from that of competitors etc. Dorthy Cohen (1988) presented a comprehensive definition of advertising that successfully highlights the creative, persuasive, functional and aspirational aspect of advertising. She proposed, 'advertising is a business activity, employing creative techniques to design creative communication in mass media that promotes ideas, goods and services in a manner consistent with the achievement of advertiser's objectives, the delivery of consumer satisfaction and development of social and economic welfare'. An individual is exposed to advertisements all through the day when he is reading newspaper or magazine, watching television, listening to radio, surfing internet or when travelling. The extent of involvement of advertisement in our life have made advertisement or advertising an important topic of research in recent times. Business organization and advertising firms are continuously undertaking research to find out ways that can make advertising more effective.

II. Advertising and Perception

The success of a print advertisement, like advertisement in other media, also depends on how target audience perceives the advertisement. Business firms and the advertising agencies realize that perception is one aspect that can have immense impact on the outcome of advertising campaign. Continuous efforts are being made by the advertising agencies to ensure that the target audience perceives advertisement in desired way so that advertisement is successful and ad gives desired result. Thus working on the customer's perception has become a challenging task for the advertising agencies.

Perception is a process by which an individual organise and interpret sensory stimulus, sensation or information to derive a meaning of the world around. Here, in the case of print advertising a target audience on his/her exposure to an advertisement, organises various information content in it and interpret it in respect to the surrounding (context) to

derive a meaning of advertisement and make an impression about the product and brand. Impression about the product and the brand is very much dependent on how the consumer perceives the advertisement of the target product. A very good advertisement can be a failure if the target audience perceives it in a way different from the desires of business firm and ad maker or advertising agency. Advertising agency continuously makes an effort that copy of the advertisement is such that there are no chances of misinterpretation.

The main elements of perception that makes an advertisement effective are exposure, selection and attention, interest and relevance, awareness and recognition and recall.

Exposure is concerned with making contact with the target audience. Exposure ensures that advertisement is seen, heard by the target and the process of perception starts. Selection and attention creates a stopping power. The ability to draw attention or to bring in visibility is one of the most difficult tasks because of the presence of various distractions (like other advt., news, articles etc.). Interest and relevance create a pulling power. Interest ensures that the target audience is mentally engaged with the advertisement while relevance means that the message content is of use to the audience. Another element of perception that helps making an advertisement effective is awareness, which ensures that the consumers are aware about the advertisement, the product and the brand. Last elements related with perception are recognition and recall that helps in making an impact on the memory. Advertisers not only try to ensure that the target audience remembers what they saw in the advertisement but also remember what the advertisement said.

Process of perception is influenced by various factors that may be present in the perceiver (here the consumer/reader), or the object (the advertisement itself) or in the context (the environment or the surrounding). Advertisement can be interpreted in varied ways because of these influences. People tend to selectively interpret the information on the basis of their interest, experience, background and attitude. Same thing occurs with the advertisement when a person sees many ads in a particular day, but pays attention to only few of them and processes information of even lesser advertisements. Elements in a same advertisement can sometime get unnoticed and thereby changing the meaning derived from it.

III. Print Advertisement and Context

Context is the surrounding or the environment within which an advertisement is embedded. For print advertisement context includes other advertisements, news, articles and also the editorial content. It is the context that makes the task of advertisers even more challenging. A reader can derive different meaning from the same advertisement if the context changes. The context in which the advertisement is embedded can be of three types, (i) competitive context (ii) non-competitive and (iii) supportive context.

A competitive context is one that has advertisement, news or article about same product of other brand or, of supplementary products, and can therefore distract the attention of reader. Confusion in recognition is high in such case and a reader may find it difficult to recall product attributes or even the brand name. A non competitive context has news, articles or advertisement of some different product that is totally unrelated to the target advertisement's product and their presence does not harm the prospect of target advertisement. Third type of context i.e. the supporting context is one that has some news, article, editorial write-up or advertisement that possesses the capability to make

readers more receptive to the target advertisement. Amna Kirmani and Kevin Keller (1990) proposed that people or the target audience do not judge an advertisement in vacuum, rather they evaluate an advertisement in respect of some standard or context. They also proposed the existence of two type of context; explicit and implicit. The target advertisement may be taken, being in continuation with or different from competing advertisement depending on adjacency, valence of competing advertisement and position.

Very often advertisers use context to make their advertisement more appealing and effective. Anand Kumar (2000) examined the impact of similar contextual or background stimuli on consumer's memory on different elements of advertisements. He proposed that ads with similar contextual elements reduced individual's ability to recall, not only contextual or background elements but also brand name from the target advertisements. The complexity of the context, results in the reduction of ability to recall the brand name thus, adversely affecting the prospects of product. It is seen that appropriateness of context is also necessary for ad effectiveness. Alex Wang (2006) engagement have crucial role in information processing, higher engagement initiated by contextual relevance increase advertising recall, message involvement, message believability, attitude towards the message and attitude towards the advertisement. Norris Claire E., Colman Andrew M. (1992) suggested that the depth of involvement in a magazine article is inversely proportional to the subsequent recall and recognition of the accompanying advertisement. It can thus be assessed that the higher involvement with the context will reduce the effectiveness of advertisement and reader will show reduced accuracy in recall and recognition.

An important aspect while dealing with the context is that of priming. Priming refers to putting a supporting advertisement, news or article before the target advertisement so that

the reader is put in a more receptive frame and perceives the target advertisement as desired. Certain attributes can be primed before the target advertisement, so as to ensure that the attribute is used in evaluation of the advertisement. However according to Youjae Yi (1993) priming of attribute is successful only when the reader's prior knowledge about the product and the brand is average, in case where the knowledge level is very high or very low the priming effect is seen to sharply decline.

Mood of the reader, along with the context influences the recall and evaluation of the advertisement Sela Sar, Xiaoli Nan and Jung Rong Myers (2010). The mood and the context together can put a reader in a receptive or non receptive frame of mind and also influence the process of interpretation of information retrieved from advertisement. Janssens and Pelsmacker (2005) studied the effects of advertisement and context type on the responses to advertisements for different brands of new and existing products. They found that a positive emotional context had favorable impact on the assessment of well known and established brands while in the case of new brand non emotional context is seen to have more favorable influence. It is thus important that the context is capable of generating positive or no emotions within a reader, depending upon the type of product advertised, so that the reader is able to interpret information accordingly.

Tuhin Chattopadhyay (2010) emphasized on the appropriate use of context to make the message more rational. According to him the rationality of message is important for making an effective appeal, especially when the readers are of middle aged women.

It is not only the advertisement that can be interpreted in different ways but the context itself can be interpreted differently by the reader. Brend H. Schmitt (1994) in a study related to contextual priming of visual information in advertisement suggested that the

consumer or subject assigned has different interpretation to same picture depending on the context, and interpretation and evaluation of visual component is determined by the prime. Therefore different understanding of the context will result in deriving different understanding from the advertisement. According to Micael Dahlen (2005) creative media enhances perception of the target brand association, ad credibility and ad and brand attitude. Micael proposed that through proper choice of creative media the ad context will be processed intentionally rather than incidentally.

Another important aspect related to the print advertisement is the placement of advertisement in the context. Ad placement is very important and lots of efforts have to be undertaken to ensure proper ad placement so that the desired visibility is achieved and advertisement has proper impact on readers. Starch Advertising Research undertook an analysis in 2010, on the effect of print magazine ad placement has on reader attention. Starch's analysis found that magazine advertisements placed next to Table of Contents (TOC) has a strong impact on readership—on average, there was an 8% difference between readership of ads next to TOC versus ads next to any form of editorial cover story, or any article. Ads placed next to editorial, on average, are read by more consumers than ads next to other ads. Specifically, ads next to editorial content are on an average read by 51% of the magazine readers as compared to the 46% of readers who noted ads which were adjacent to other ads.

Myungwoo Nam and Brian Sternthal (2008) had also explained the important role of editorial content on the fate of target advertisement. They proposed that, contextual information can activate such association that can be used to interpret the meaning of subsequently presented target. Thus, an advertisement or editorial column can create such

effect that is transferred further and is used in interpretation of information present in the next advertisement.

IV. Conclusion

Context can have tremendous influence on the interpretation and perception of the advertisement. Advertisement with similar contextual element can confuse the target audience and in turn reduce the advertisement recall and brand identification by the target consumers. Greater a person is involved in or engaged with the context less is the chance that he/she would be able to recall or recognize the accompanying advertisement. The context however influences different person in different ways. This is mainly because they have different level of sensitivity towards the same context. Context elements are capable of changing the perception of target audience. They can activate product attribute in consumer's mind that is used in the interpretation of the information that is incomplete and unclear. The impact of context elements is so strong that they can be transferred to next target advertisement and can influence the interpretation of the information. Thus contexts on a particular page, in a newspaper or magazine have capability to influence the interpretations of advertisements on further pages.

The editorial content too is a part of context and has a strong influencing capacity; it can put the readers in a specific mind-set and can influence perception of advertisement by the readers. It may be favorable or unfavorable for specific advertisement.

Contextual background of the consumers, their mental state and mental makeup also influence the understanding of context and thereby influences the processing of information in the advertisement. The quality of media context is also seen to influence the effectiveness of advertisement. While deriving the meaning under the influence of

context, the consumer also takes into consideration the quality of media context. Good quality of the context results in the favorable interpretation of advertisement information.

The context is also capable of generating positive or negative emotions and even in perceiving the element of offense, in any, present in the context. Advertising engagement have crucial role in information processing, which is influenced by the context of advertisement. As the advertisement engagement increases advertisement recall, message involvement and believability also increases.

Thus, advertisers must ensure that they have a proper understanding of the functioning of context and the placement of advertisement in a context, so that the visibility and interpretation of advertisement is favourable or else the advertising objective cannot be achieved.

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