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Brand Confusion in Advertising

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The question of advertising effectiveness (i.e., to what extent is advertising effective or ineffective?) is possibly the most important question asked of or by advertisers. In this article, the authors provide evidence that advertising may also be counter-effective, that is, produce results that an advertiser specifically wants to avoid. Brand confusion is one such undesired result: the advertisement for brand A is taken by consumers as promoting brand B. In other words, the advertiser finances an advertisement for his competitor. In the second part of the article, several possible causes of brand confusion are presented, and practical advertising implications are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

One of the most intriguing questions in present-day advertising theory and practice concerns the co-existence of product information overload on the one hand and product miscommunication on the other. In the consumers' environment there is a large variety and a large quantity of high quality product information. Yet, often the consumers do not receive, perceive, understand, accept and remember (commercial) information in the way and to the extent intended by the communicator. For the communicator, this question may be accompanied by the illusion of communication. The advertiser and advertising agency produce a message which they feel communicates the critical information. For the consumer, the message is no more than a single communication attempt in an environment that presents him with a multitude of other communication attempts. To this another effect may be added, which even aggravates the situation. The other effect is that brands in many product categories tend to become more and more similar with respect to their functionality and product presentation. The reduced inter-brand differences necessitate the use of advertising to create a unique and recognizable brand image, with the emphasis on the adjectives. Smaller objective differences between product brands call for larger subjective or psychological differences as perceived by the consumer. For the identification of an individual brand, advertising becomes more important, yet the volume of advertising seems to make unique advertising more difficult. Thus, the key word is uniqueness, to be contrasted with ambiguity or confusion.

This implies that in advertising effectiveness measures, the level of uniqueness, ambiguity or confusion should be taken into account. From the advertiser's viewpoint, a brand communication that is recognizable and associated with one unique brand in the viewer's mind is preferable to a brand communication that is not easily associated with a specific brand, even though the message itself may be positively evaluated by consumers.

Then, the critical question is whether the advertisement for a particular brand is not being confused with advertisements for other brands. It is obvious that the degree to which an advertisement is mixed up with advertisements emitted by the competition is a highly relevant aspect of a campaign's or single advertisement's effectiveness. Therefore, if brand confusion turns out to be a real possibility, measures of brand confusion should be added to the more conventional advertisement effectiveness measures,

Brand confusion takes place if a commercial communication regarding a particular brand X is viewed by a recipient as a communication about a different brand Y. Brand confusion is a phenomenon that occurs at the individual level, and may be viewed as being predominantly non-conscious in nature. It cannot be directly inferred from market data, from the characteristics of the communication campaign, nor from the physical characteristics of either the product or the communication itself. Yet, specific product, campaign and communication aspects that increase the risk of brand confusion may be identified. With the help of consumer behaviour research the degree to which brand confusion actually does take place may be determined.

Several types of brand confusion may be distinguished on the basis of the nature of the causes of the confusion. First, we describe the various possible types that may be identified, and provide empirical evidence regarding each of these types. Then we address the issue of the explanation of brand confusion. Finally, we discuss implications for communication.

Brand name confusion is the type of confusion that advertisers and advertising agencies should be most concerned with, although other types or levels of confusion may be identified in communication. At the most general level, products or services may be confused. An advertisement by an insurance company might be interpreted by the consumer as an advertisement for a bank. At the second level we may speak of 'brand confusion' — brand X is confused with brand Y, while the third level refers to the confusion of elements within the communications. For example, the advertising slogan of brand X may be viewed as the slogan pertaining to brand Y, even though the advertising messages themselves may not be confused.

Basically, a variety of communication failures may take place while the recipient is confronted with the communication. The product may not be recognized, the brand may not be correctly identified, the product or the brand may be confused with a different product or brand, and the specific message components may not be recognized, be misunderstood or attributed to the wrong product or brand. Identification and confusion are not perfectly related: if correct identification takes place, there is no confusion. On the other hand, if identification does not take place, confusion may or may not be the effect. In

this article we want to limit ourselves to brand and slogan confusion, although extrapolations to other types of confusion may be possible.

Brand confusion may have an effect in two possible directions: it may have a detrimental effect on the brand at issue, and it may have a positive effect. In the first case, we are referring to the negative consequences with which brand confusion is usually associated. Brand X advertises and brand Y experiences a positive effect. In this case, brand confusion is a negative effect for brand X and a positive one for brand Y. Therefore, depending upon whose position is taken, brand confusion can have a positive or a negative effect.

In the following, the degree to which brand and slogan confusion takes place will be established empirically with regard to three product categories: laundry detergents, disposable nappies and cosmetics. Advertisements for the brands of these products were shown to research participants. Several measures were used:

1. Positive brand confusion: the degree to which *other* brand advertisements are confused with the brand at issue. For example: advertisements for brands B, C, and D are seen as advertisements for brand A, the reference brand.
2. Negative brand confusion: the extent to which the *reference* brand is confused with other brands; for example, an advertisement for brand A is incorrectly identified as being an advertisement for brand B, C or D.
3. Total brand confusion: the sum of positive and negative brand confusion.
4. Net brand confusion: the difference between positive and negative brand confusion.

These four measures can be expressed in percentages, and can be applied to slogan confusion as well with the appropriate change of stimulus. There are no specific hypotheses to be tested in the study. Its goal is merely to assess the possible occurrence of brand and slogan confusion, and to correlate confusion with some market- and campaign-related data.

THE STUDY

To realize a fast, correct, and unique brand recognition in an advertisement for a brand, a number of instruments may be used such as colour, form, attributes, layout, typography and style. Recognition of an advertisement should involve more than the recognition of either the brand name or the advertising message. The critical recognition involves the combination of the brand name and the advertising message. The more unique this combination is, the less likely is brand confusion to occur. This implies that, ideally, advertisements should be recognized even when the obvious unique characteristic — the brand name — is absent.

This study deals with the question how distinguishable a print advertisement is when brand name and pay-off are removed. If an advertisement can be recognized as an advertisement for brand A only when this is explicitly

mentioned, then the uniqueness or distinctiveness of the advertisement and its message is zero. If, however, an advertisement is still correctly recognized even when the brand name and the slogan are removed we may infer that the advertisement has its own unique 'face', identity or personality. In this case, brand confusion is not likely to take place. The two aspects: recognition, and confusion with other advertisements have been studied here within three product categories and for 17 advertisements.

METHOD

Research participants

The sample consists of 108 women under 50 years of age. The participants all came to the research laboratory of Research International in Rotterdam, The Netherlands.

Materials

The brands used within the three product categories were:

nappies: Peaudouce, Billies, Libero and Pampers.

washing powders: Dobbelman, Dixan, All, Klok, Biotex and Robijn.

facial cosmetics: Nivea, Ellen Betrix, Aapri, Sporex, Biotherm, Lancome and Dr. v.d. Hoog.

These brands are all of the brands in these three markets that used print advertisements at the time of the study.

Procedure

The advertisements, all in A4 format, were shown to the respondents for two seconds each. Brand names and pay-off were removed from each advertisement. The advertisements were presented in 12 different orders, each order to 9 respondents to counterbalance possible order effects, making up a total sample of 108.

Each respondent was then asked:

1. to identify the brand for each advertisement;
2. if possible, to indicate how sure she was about the positive identification;
3. to indicate why she thought an advertisement was for a certain brand;
4. (finally) to identify the correct slogan or pay-off for each brand.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the recognition and confusion scores for the six brands of detergent. Advertising recognition for a specific brand ranges from 13 per cent (Klok) to 89 per cent (Robijn). Respondents who recognize a brand advertisement are in general quite certain of their recognition; certain recognitions

Table 1 Advertising recognition: washing powders

Brand of washing powder	Advertisement recognition (per cent)		Advertisement confusion (positive: per cent)		Advertisement confusion (negative: per cent)		Total advertisement confusion (per cent)			
	Tot.	Certain	Tot.	From	Tot.	To	Abs.	Net		
Dobbelman	25	85	5	Dixan	2	13	Dixan	3	18	-8
				All	3	All	3			
				Klok	1	Biotex	2			
				Biotex	1	Others	5			
Dixan	55	98	7	Dobbelman	3	29	Dobbelman	2	36	-22
				All	3	All	5			
				Biotex	1	Biotex	1			
						Others	21			
All	61	88	9	Dobbelman	3	18	Dobbelman	1	27	-9
				Dixan	5	Dixan	3			
				Biotex	1	Others	14			
Klok	13	86	—	—	13	Dobbelman	1	13	-13	
						Robijn	1			
						Others	11			
Biotex	55	81	3	Dobbelman	2	7	Dobbelman	1	10	-4
				Dixan	1	Dixan	1			
						All	1			
						Others	4			
Robijn	89	100	1	Klok	1	8	Others	8	9	-7

Tot. = total; Abs. = absolute

ranged from 81 per cent (Biotex) to 100 per cent (Robijn). Confusion with advertisements was found to occur: some advertisements are mistaken for another.

In Table 1 it is shown that 5 per cent of the respondents claimed to have recognized Dobbelman while in fact another advertisement was shown. This 'positive' advertisement confusion for a brand is maximally 9 per cent ('All'). Confusion is labelled 'positive' if a competitor's advertisement is taken for the reference brand. To express this effect more dramatically: the competitor is advertising for you! 'Negative' confusion is more dominant than 'positive' confusion. This is because other brands, which were not advertising in print, were mentioned as advertised brands. In this study 'Dixan' loses 29 per cent by wrong recognitions to other brands. Total confusion for the brands (i.e., negative and positive combined) ranges from 9 per cent to 36 per cent. 'Robijn' had a distinct print advertisement, a high level of recognition and little confusion. 'Klok' had a low level of recognition, while the confusion was as high as the recognition. The total net advertisement confusion index (positive minus

Table 2 Pay-off recognition: washing powders

Brand of washing powder	Pay-off recognition (per cent)	Pay-off confusion (positive: per cent)		Pay-off confusion (negative: per cent)		Total pay-off confusion (per cent)			
		Tot.	Tot.	From	Tot.	To	Abs.	Net	
Dobbelman	22	24	Dixan All Klok Biotex Robijn	2 6 1 1 14	48	Dixan All Klok Biotex Robijn Others	4 3 4 2 3 32	72	-24
Dixan	59	25	Dobbelman All Klok Biotex Robijn	4 12 3 3 3	36	Dobbelman All Biotex Others	2 3 10 21	61	-11
All	15	24	Dobbelman Dixan Klok Biotex Robijn	3 3 2 1 15	65	Dobbelman Dixan Klok Biotex Others	6 12 3 30 14	89	-41
Klok	32	9	Dobbelman Dixan Robijn	4 3 2	62	Dobbelman Dixan All Others	1 3 2 56	71	-53
Biotex	85	43	Dobbelman Dixan All Robijn	2 11 30 1	11	Dobbelman Dixan All Others	1 3 1 6	54	32
Robijn	7	3	Dobbelman	3	80	Dobbelman Dixan All Klok Biotex Others	14 3 15 2 1 45	83	-77

Tot. = total; Abs. = absolute

negative confusion) shows, for all brands, a negative effect of advertisement confusion. No single brand benefits in this study from the indistinctness of the detergent advertisements.

By comparing pairs of brands, information is gained about their similarity in appearance. In Table 2 the recognition and confusion scores for the detergents with respect to pay-offs are given. 'Robijn' and 'All' do not seem to have an easy recognizable pay-off. The level of 'positive' confusion is high for 'Biotex' and low for 'Robijn'. Only 'Biotex' with its strong pay-off is benefiting.

The other two product fields, nappies and facial care products, show similar results. The four brands of nappy show total confusion scores ranging from 22

per cent to 35 per cent. In this market one specific brand (Peaudouce) has a net advertising confusion score of -15 per cent, the other score -3 per cent (Libero), +2 per cent (Pampers) and +3 per cent (Billies), showing that one brand is the main 'loser' of the advertising confusion. Here, the familiarity and the confusion with the pay-off are lower than for the brand name itself, with only one brand (Pampers) scoring a positive net confusion result (+6 per cent).

In facial care products we see lower levels of advertising recognition, from only 2 per cent up to 66 per cent. The confusion scores are lower too, from 2 per cent to 19 per cent for total confusion. The net advertising confusion scores are negative, between -2 per cent and -9 per cent for all but one brand (Dr. v.d. Hoog) that benefits from the confusion with a positive, 8 per cent, net advertising confusion score. The pay-off recognition scores are low in this product field in comparison with detergents and nappies and have even higher confusion scores.

The results presented here give some indication of the severity of the problem that advertisements of competitors within the same market are so much alike, that they cause high levels of advertisement and pay-off confusion. Individual companies may learn from this study how unique their campaign is, and from in-depth comparisons with other print campaigns what to do about it. Apart from the advertisement itself, factors such as the campaign budget, the campaign duration, product usage, market share, etc. will influence advertising recognition and, at least partially, advertising confusion as well. Future research may aim at exploring these issues.

DISCUSSION

We may first conclude that brand and slogan confusion have been established as phenomena that may actually take place and may have a detrimental effect on advertising effectiveness. To ask simply whether advertising is effective or ineffective is insufficient for practical reasons. Apparently, we also need to consider the question whether advertising is *counter-effective*, that is, in conflict with our advertising goals. Because brand confusion is a rather new issue this section will try to deal extensively with the possible causes of brand confusion in advertising, with alternative operationalizations of brand confusion, and with possible directions for future research.

It is obvious that measures to prevent confusion can only be taken if there is an understanding of the conditions under which it takes place. Without an explanation as to why (negative) confusion takes place it is not clear what particular precautionary measures should be taken. Correlations between brand and slogan confusion on the one hand and usage, campaign and market data on the other cannot fully explain why confusion takes place at the level of the individual consumer. We attempt below to make an inventory of possible product, campaign, message and individual consumer factors that may influence the occurrence of brand or slogan confusion.

Product factors

As was indicated earlier, one of the likely causes of brand confusion is the often insignificant difference between brands within the same product category. Of course, small is a relative qualification, but it is not hard to discover that technical and physical appearance distinctions between brands are often marginal, even in an objective sense. Apparently, brands in themselves may not be that unique. To the extent that this is true in an objective sense, it is bound to be even more so in a subjective sense: in the perception of individual consumers. The products used in the study reported earlier provide excellent examples, but many other products such as electronic products (videos, televisions, compact disc players, etc.) often cannot be distinguished easily.

Campaign factors

For the 17 brands under study the last year's print advertising budget was related to brand recognition and brand confusion measures. For the brands of nappy there was no correlation between budget and recognitions scores, for the detergents and the facial-care products some correlation was found (0.40 and 0.35 respectively). These rather low correlations suggest that other factors such as 'total advertising budget' and 'campaign length' may also be relevant. In order to investigate these *campaigns* factors a longitudinal approach is more appropriate than an *ad hoc* measurement as was employed in this study. Conversely, one may argue that what is measured in relation to a specific advertising message is in fact the result of this particular message *and* of preceding advertising campaign activities.

Individual message factors

What about distinctions between advertising messages? In the creative world it is generally assumed that individual messages are unique. On the other hand, there are indications for some common creative culture which may preclude an advertising message from becoming truly distinct from other messages. Even though the specific creative design differs for the various messages, there is often a particular main theme and a general creative approach within a product category. Again, we can refer to the products that were used in our study and to the advertisements that were developed for them. For example, laundry detergents are often advertised in a before and after set-up (dirty spot on favourite clothing — detergent — spot gone); advertisements for babies' nappies tend to show happy babies, and advertisements for cosmetics are likely to refer to a loving partner or social acceptance, using attractive persons as models.

Individual consumer factors

The inventory of individual consumer factors to be presented here is a provisional one. It concerns general psychological effects of advertising, not specifically related to the issue of confusion. However, even though the inventory is hypothetical at this point, it may serve as a starting point for future research specifically aimed at confusion conditions. First, we provide an

overview of some psychological conditions and effects, which are followed by suggestions on possible alternatives for operationalization.

If brand name confusion takes place, it often cannot be taken simply as the result of product, campaign, or message factors. Instead, it is assumed that confusion can be attributed primarily to the interaction of these factors with consumer behaviour characteristics. A characteristic that is of special relevance in this context is the consumer's involvement with the product and message being shown (see Petty and Cacioppo, 1984). A highly involved consumer is motivated to process the information. If she or he has also the ability to do so, then the combination of motivation and ability results in recall of a larg(er) part of the information, including the brand name. A consumer paying attention to the content of the presented message is less likely to identify the brand incorrectly and to confuse brand names. Consumers' motivation to process the information provided may be determined by purchase need or product relevance and perceived risks. The ability to process is influenced by external factors such as environmental distractions, and by permanent and temporary physical and psychological conditions such as fatigue, intelligence, and (lack of) knowledge.

Both format and content of an advertising message can influence the consumer's motivation and ability to process the information. The effects of several specific advertising features on motivation and ability to process have been established empirically and are discussed in the literature. These will be presented here briefly. Some aspects refer to both television and print advertising; other aspects specifically refer to television advertising.

It is possible to make the general observation that there is a relatively high incidence of advertising miscomprehension (Gates, 1986; Hoyer *et al.*, 1984; Hoyer and Jacoby, 1982). Miscomprehension and brand confusion are likely to be related phenomena. Elements or statements in a confusing or otherwise unclear advertising message are unlikely to be systematically related to a given brand name. The result is a loose or even absent association between brand name and brand message in memory. Even though this may seem paradoxical in the context of advertising, creativity may hamper advertising comprehension. The use of humour and other attention-getting techniques may not only serve to attract and hold the consumer's attention, it may also result in the distraction of the consumer away from the critical message elements to be remembered (such as the brand name). (See also Madden and Weinberger, 1984.)

The familiarity of a particular advertising message may be hypothesized to have a negative influence upon its potential to hold the consumer's attention. A consumer is less likely to be interested in following the message if the start of this message suggests that its content is already familiar. Message familiarity cannot be equated with the familiarity of the association between the message and the brand name.

Edell and Staelin (1983) showed that picture-text interaction, or the synchronization of picture and text, is important for effective communication. If a picture and the text do not coincide, the consumer has to divide his or her

attention between two message components, thus increasing the risk of miscommunication, miscomprehension, and of brand confusion. It is as if the one message aspect distracts the receiver's attention from the other message aspect. This is also the case if there are inputs from two different senses. If the contents of both types of information do not correspond, the receiver must be more motivated and capable to follow the message. In real life, exposure; circumstances are often such that this condition can not be met.

In a similar way we may consider the interaction or correspondence of product-type and message-type. If the plot of an advertising message is ambiguous about the nature of the particular product, product identification will suffer. This might seem to refer to an exceptional case. However, (particularly in the case of consumers with a low level of involvement) the consumer is not motivated to solve advertising riddles. Then, that part of the message in which no product is identified (which is often the first part in the case of a television commercial) is not integrated in memory.

In television commercials the identification of the brand name often does not occur until the last few (less than 5) seconds. In this limited time, (which may constitute about ten per cent of the total commercial time), the viewer must associate the brand name with the information that was presented earlier in the same commercial. A study by Shepard (1967) shows that this may seriously hamper correct identification of the brand name and the association of the brand name with the other information provided. Shepard allowed research participants to watch (simple) stimuli for as long as they wanted. On average, they looked at a stimulus for 5 seconds. Recognition after one week was 90 per cent. Note that we refer here to recognition (as opposed to recall) and to viewers who are highly motivated and capable of watching the stimuli. Brand name exposure in print and television advertising often occurs for less than 5 seconds. Fleming and Sheikhan (1972) demonstrated that a longer exposure duration is necessary for more complex stimuli (such as combinations of message elements and the brand name? question by the present authors). Sheikhan (1984) suggests that for later recognition to become likely it is necessary that the viewer has the chance to see a picture and then process the extracted information for about 2 seconds. Again, this applies to simple stimuli only. For more complex stimuli processing should take place for a longer time. Batra and Ray (1983) refer to a study showing that information should be reviewed for 5 to 10 seconds after its presentation within 30 seconds after exposure in order to be stored in long-term memory.

In both print and television advertising, different messages tend to follow each other in a close consecutive order. In print advertising, often several messages are presented simultaneously. Television commercials closely follow each other with little distractions between the messages. According to Rossiter and Percy (1983), the viewer should not be distracted by other images shown consecutively if there is to be later recognition of an image (e.g. a logo or brand name image). When interpreting the results of the studies referred to, one should realize that the participants in these studies were probably highly motivated people, and in this respect possibly very much unlike people looking

through magazines or watching television commercials in a relaxed manner. Given these results, brand name exposure in television commercials for only a few seconds may be too limited to guarantee a correct and lasting brand name impression. These factors are likely to increase the chance of brand name confusion.

These possible effects may not occur if the consumer is highly motivated and well capable of processing the information provided. There are many instances, however, where high motivation and ability of consumers or viewers may be questioned. Either the consumer has no interest in the product being presented, or there is too little time available. His or her knowledge may not be adequate to grasp the meaning implied in a report on a product's functional benefits, nor may a complex advertising plot be fully understood.

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Brand confusion exists. It is likely to vary depending on the types of consumers, types of products and types of advertising messages in question, but it should be an issue of permanent concern for both advertisers and advertising agencies. The concern should not only be on the question of whether an advertisement is effective or ineffective. The issue is whether an advertisement is effective, ineffective or counter-effective. Brand confusion does occur at the individual consumer level. Advertisers must have a full understanding of how a consumer from the target group will react to a specific advertisement in the situation in which it is to be seen or heard.

Those involved in the production of advertisements should realize that their involvement with the creation of the advertisement is likely to be very different from the consumer's involvement with its processing. In contrast with consumers, producers of advertising *do* know what product and what brand is at issue, even at the start of the commercial. Also, they tend to consider the advertisement and the advertising concepts in isolation. Consumers are confronted with an advertisement in situations in which other persons, objects and events simultaneously compete for their attention. In addition, advertisements are unlikely to be presented in isolation from other advertisements: television commercials tend to follow each other closely and print advertisements often appear together on a newspaper or magazine page.

The examples that were presented earlier to show how advertisements may foster brand confusion can easily be translated into suggestions as to how to avoid brand confusion. They will not be addressed again at this point. It may suffice to indicate that more attention should be given to the individual consumer characteristics in their interaction with the specific circumstances in which the advertisement confronts them. Memory plays an important role here, and the problem of brand confusion is likely to decrease if memory-enhancing techniques are employed. Such techniques should take into account that the consumer may not have the opportunity to think about the content of

the advertisement once it is over. More elaborate processing and reviewing should be stimulated within the time frame of each individual exposure.

The above points also have implications for the way in which advertisements should be pre-tested, and brand confusion should be operationalized. The above arguments make clear that it does not make sense to pre-test an advertisement in isolation from others or in isolation from their context. Ideally, an advertisement is tested under situational and psychological circumstances that are equal to real exposure situations (see Pieters and Poiesz, 1987).

A final point to raise here is the question of how brand confusion should be measured. In the study reported in this paper, brand confusion was operationalized as a consumer's false identification of a brand name when an advertisement was presented with the brand name excluded from the message (taken out). Certainly, this is one possible approach. It may be argued, however, that the elimination of the brand name from the advertisement mutilates it, thus changing its very nature. Following this argument, brand confusion may be seen as the (partial) result of the operationalization employed. Therefore, an alternative approach might be to leave the advertising message intact, and simply measure the level of confusion in connection with the more conventional effectiveness measures such as day-after recall. Of course, the recall measure and the analysis should take into account the extent and nature of brand confusion. At present, this is the exception rather than the rule.

It is evident that the concept of brand name or brand slogan confusion might be elaborated upon in a number of possible ways. Several alternative approaches to operationalizations may be suggested. A general distinction may be made between operationalizations that emphasize the overall campaign, and those that focus upon the individual advertising message or message elements. This distinction is somewhat arbitrary as when we assess confusion related to a single message, the confusion score is likely to be co-determined by previous advertising activities. However, if a campaign is taken as the starting point, there is a greater need for the inclusion of a longitudinal aspect in the study.

If, in a research setting one single message within a campaign is checked for confusion, then no confusion on the part of the consumer may be found to exist. Confusion is not an all-or-nothing phenomenon, however. Therefore, we should allow for different degrees of confusion. For example, we may be interested in the assessment of the potential susceptibility of a message to confusion. In this case, we should maximize the probability of confusion occurring. This can be done by presenting the total array of competing messages (including the message at issue) before asking respondents to go through the procedure as described for the study reported above. Using this method, respondents are confronted with the complete collection of possibly confusing messages, brand names and brand slogans. Under these circumstances, to what extent does a consumer firmly associate a message with a particular brand?

The confusion susceptibility question can also be approached by turning the operationalization adopted here upside down. A brand name is presented to

consumers and they are requested to describe the corresponding advertising message. In this approach we would actually reverse the brand confusion question, so that 'message confusion' would be a more proper term for confusion found with this approach than 'brand confusion'.

Depending upon the advertising goals one may want to find out which particular aspects of the message are most vulnerable to confusion. To do so the researcher may:

1. present consumers with a written description of the total message, including a description of the creative aspects of the message. Of course, specific references to the brand name or brand slogan should be left out to check whether the message itself is uniquely identified with the brand;
2. present consumers with only the text of the advertising message. Consumers are requested to provide the relevant brand name;
3. present consumers with the opposite of the previous alternative: only the visual part of the message is presented and the consumer is asked to indicate what brand the pictures refer to.

One should realize that in these approaches the elimination of particular aspects from the message may result in message distortion to the extent that it does not represent the original message any more. To avoid this, one should preserve the message in its original creative presentation as far as possible.

It is easy to see how this elimination approach might be followed for other message elements as well. An advertiser may be interested in finding out whether a particular celebrity is uniquely associated with his or her brand instead of with the competitor's brands.

To find out whether the different operationalizations of brand confusion do have an effect of their own, the various operational approaches will be empirically compared in the near future.

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