

# IDENTIFYING AND ANALYSING THE IMPACT OF KEY FACTORS LEADING TO BRAND CONFUSION IN ADVERTISING

## A MICRO ANALYSIS

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**I**N the modern era of globalisation where world has become flat, almost every field is exposed to the challenging environment of today. Advertising and marketing is also witnessing the turnaround with the cataclysmic upheaval in competition. In the wake of highly westernized culture where use of jargons to communicate have become an order of the day, many times we find that a manager provides instruction and then discovers that employees still don't understand. Errors in communication can cost the "deal" or prolong the decision.

Different researches in the field of Advertising have endorsed that communicating in a multi-cultural environment has led to brand confusion. Keeping in mind these trends present paper makes an attempt to analyse the impact of key factors leading to Brand Confusion in Advertising.

**Key Words: Brand Confusion, Advertising, Customer's Related factors.**

**Advertising** is a form of communication whose purpose is to inform and persuade potential customers about products and services and how to obtain and use them. Many advertisements are also designed to generate increased consumption of those products and services through the creation and reinforcement of brand image and brand loyalty. For these purposes advertisements often contain both factual information and persuasive messages. Different mediums are used to deliver these messages, including: television, radio, movies, magazines, newspapers, video games, the Internet etc. In the modern era of globalisation where world has become flat, almost every field is exposed to the challenging environment of today. Advertising and marketing is also witnessing the turnaround with the cataclysmic upheaval in competition. Different researches in the field of Advertising have endorsed that communicating in a multi-cultural environment has led to brand confusion.

### Review of Literature

When consumers perceive an advertisement for a certain brand as promoting another, it is not only ineffective, but even counterproductive (Kamen, 1987; Poiesz and Verhallen, 1989): it produces an effect that the advertiser specially wants to avoid. Therefore, brand confusion, although seldomly studied, is a phenomenon that should receive the advertisers' and researchers' unremitting attention, and measures of brand confusion should be added to the more conventional advertisement effectiveness measures (Poiesz and Verhallen, 1989). *Brand confusion* takes place when a recipient views a commercial communication for brand X as a communication about a different brand Y (Poiesz and Verhallen, 1989).

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Not only the brand name, but on a more general level also the product or service displayed in the advertising message may be the subject of confusion, e.g. an advertisement by an insurance company might be interpreted by the consumer as an advertisement for a bank (*product confusion*). At the lowest level, confusion can take place with regard to particular message components, for example between slogans (*message confusion*) (Poiesz and Verhallen, 1989). This study is limited to brand confusion. Correct identification and confusion are not perfectly related. It is possible that the recipient of the message cannot attribute any particular brand to an advertising message, in which case he/she is not really confused, but simply does not have any idea. A consumer confusing brands thinks he/she recognises the brand. Depending upon whose position is taken, brand confusion can be 'positive' or 'negative' (Häcker and Verhallen, 1988; Poiesz and Verhallen, 1989). 'Negative' brand confusion refers to the extent to which the reference brand is confused with other brands; i.e. the degree to which the reference brand advertises for its competitors. 'Positive' brand confusion refers to the degree to which other brand advertisements are confused with the brand at issue; i.e. the degree to which competitors advertise for the brand at issue. 'Positive' brand confusion is not necessarily an advantage for a brand. It may be a threat to a clear positioning and image building strategy if a company's brand name is incorrectly attributed to a competitor's advertising message.

Brengman et al. (2001) found that Consumers most vulnerable to brand confusion generally have lower levels of product category involvement, brand awareness and brand loyalty. They have a more negative general attitude towards advertising, meaning that they are more easily irritated by it. If they do not like a particular advertisement, or they think it is not distinctive enough, they are more likely to be confused by it. Information overload and information dense advertisements tend to lead to more brand confusion.

## Product Related Factors

Products are becoming more and more objectively similar with respect to their functionality and product presentation (Poiesz and Verhallen, 1989). Ha (1996) refers to the degree of similarity and proximity of advertisements as a dimension of the advertising clutter. The *degree of overall similarity of strategy* (DOSS) seems to have increased over time as far as the information content is concerned, although ads tend to become more diverse as to their emotional content (De Pelsmacker and Geuens, 1997a). Successful advertising techniques get imitated and waves of similar advertising arise. It can be expected that a higher DOSS leads to more brand confusion. In parallel, similarity in visual appearance of products has also been found to be a major reason for confusion in advertising (Loken and Ross, 1986; Ward and Loken, 1986). Furthermore, in a study of brand recognition in print advertisements consumers cited 'the product' or 'the packaging' as a primary reason for recognition. However, the results revealed that this was a major reason for confusion as well (De Pelsmacker and Van Den Bergh, 1997b). As advertising content and execution become more and more similar, the more unique the combination of the brand name and the advertising message, the less likely brand confusion is to occur (Poiesz and Verhallen, 1989). Advertisement uniqueness is, therefore, expected to be negatively correlated with the degree of confusion. Brand confusion can also be caused by *willful brand imitation*. In this case consumers may buy the imitator brand thinking it is the original (Loken and Ross, 1986). The aim of the creators of imitator brands is to position the new product next to the better known (often market leader) brand (Foxman and Muehling, 1990). This can be achieved by emulating the package design of the well-known market leader. Package shape and size, label print style and layout, package colour and other distinct marks can be imitated with this goal (see Diamond, 1981 for examples of imitation strategies that have been used). Hence, a whole judicial research literature on consumer brand confusion concerning trademark infringement has focused on brand package similarity (e.g. Miaoulis and D'Armato, 1978; Loken and Ross, 1986; Ward and Loken, 1986). The *degree of competition in the product category* or, in other words, the number of competing brands in a product category and the similarity of their market shares, may also lead to more brand confusion. This hypothesis is to a certain extent confirmed

in the study by De Pelsmacker and Van Den Bergh (1997), in which the overall degree of confusion was higher in product categories such as personal care and insurances, than in beer or food retailer markets. Moreover, brands with small market shares are frequently confused with market leaders or, more generally, brands with large market shares. Indeed, the difference between positive and negative confusion is often larger and/or positive in the case of market leaders and smaller or negative for brands with smaller market shares (De Pelsmacker and Van Den Bergh, 1997).

### **Customer's Characteristics Related Factors**

In a study in which consumers had to judge the similarity of products (decongestants and oriental noodle soup) using pictures of the products as stimuli, Foxman and Muehling (1990) did not find 'attitude towards advertising in general' to be a significant explanatory factor for confusion. However, that study did not specifically focus on brand confusion in advertising. Also, the *attitude towards the advertisement* (Aad) may play an important role. Especially in the case of low involvement products or consumers, a positive attitude towards the advertisement may lead to more interest in the message and the brand, and eventually a more positive attitude towards the brand (Batra and Ray, 1986). De Pelsmacker *et al.* (1998c) concluded that a more positive Aad was related with less brand confusion.

Consumers who have a high personal *involvement* (Zaichkowsky, 1985) in a product category possess a more fully developed knowledge structure with respect to brands in the category, and are therefore less likely to be confused (Foxman and Muehling, 1990). Less involved consumers may not be interested in expending the mental effort needed to discriminate adequately among brands. They are probably less concerned about the consequences of their purchase and less motivated to acquire information about brand offerings in the product class, making it also more difficult for them to discern subtle differences between brands.

The more familiar consumers are with the various brand offerings within a product class, the more likely they can be expected to be able to make distinctions among brands, thereby reducing the likelihood of confusion. *Product category familiarity*, a major component of consumer knowledge, has been defined as the number of product related experiences that have been accumulated by the consumer (Jacoby *et al.*, 1986; Alba and Hutchinson, 1987). Cumulated advertising exposure, information search, salesperson interactions, choice, decision making, purchase and ultimately product usage are capsulated in the consumer's memory and build-up product class and brand experience. 'New triers' and occasional buyers should therefore be especially vulnerable to confusion. Foxman and Muehling (1990) found experience with the product category to be a significant factor for confusion in the noodle soup product category. However, no statistical significance was reached for decongestants. In their study confusion is operationalised as the correct recognition of products from pictures shown previously. *Brand salience*, i.e. brand awareness, brand loyalty, and use of a particular brand, may influence brand confusion. For instance, brand awareness or memory of the original brand has been found to be statistically significant for discriminating between consumers who confuse and consumers who do not confuse brands (Foxman and Muehling, 1990).

The *degree of media use* may be a factor of importance, since consumers that read more magazines or newspapers or watch more television, will be more frequently exposed to advertisements.

### **Communication Related Factors**

Advertisers use a large number of techniques to convey their message and to influence the consumer's ability and motivation to process the information offered (De Pelsmacker *et al.*, 1998b). Advertisements may differ in emotional and informational content, as well as in format or creative strategy used. As far as *emotional content* is concerned, advertisers use techniques such as humour, eroticism, warmth, and provocation, to draw the consumer's attention. Very often, though, the capacity of these messages

to draw the attention distracts the consumer, and leads to fewer brands recall (Richmond and Hartman, 1982; Lammers *et al.*, 1983; Gelb and Zinkhan, 1986; Severn *et al.*, 1990).

It could therefore be expected that advertisements with (more pronounced) emotional content lead to more brand confusion. *Information content* refers to characteristics such as the number and type of selling arguments used (Resnik and Stern, 1977; Abernathy and Franke, 1996), the degree of repetition of the arguments, the number of times the brand name is shown or mentioned and, more generally, the type of motivation used, e.g. informational or transformational (Rossiter and Percy, 1997). Although the richness of information may stimulate elaborate processing during exposure, and as a result lead to more attention and less confusion (Poiesz and Verhallen, 1989), information dense advertisements also lead to more irritation (De Pelsmacker and Van Den Bergh, 1998), and consequently may induce more confusion. *Format characteristics* refer to the use of models, pack shots, product-in-use pictures, headlines, baselines, logos, large or small body copy or pictures, colours, typography; for instance, advertisements with pictures and advertisements in which a product in use is shown, result in less confusion. De Pelsmacker and Van den Bergh (1997) also conclude that the headline and the picture of the product were two of the most important determining factors of correct recall and absence of confusion. Since only a fifth of those who note an advertisement in a magazine actually read the copy (Pollay and Mainprize, 1984), advertisement copy may have limited impact on brand confusion.

On the basis of existing literature following three factors has been identified of causing brand confusion in advertising.

**Exhibit 1: Factors Lead to Brand Confusion**

<b>Categories</b>	<b>Factors</b>	<b>Identified Sub-factors</b>
'A'	Product Related Factor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Level of Competition</li> <li>● Brand Imitation</li> <li>● Degree of overall similarity of strategy</li> </ul>
'B'	Costumer Characterstics Related Factor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Frequency of media use</li> <li>● Awareness about brand</li> <li>● Information about product category</li> <li>● Attitude towards the particular advertisement (Favorite/Neutral)</li> </ul>
'C'	Communication Related Factor	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Information content</li> <li>● Media characteristics</li> <li>● Emotional Content/Rational content</li> </ul>

**Relevance of the Study**

Understanding the theme to be topical and fertile for further research relevant literature has been reviewed for identifying the key factors owing to brand confusion in advertising. Literature has identified three broad factors which play an important role in creating brand confusion.

Moreover, the present study has the virtue of offering a framework for the study of brand confusion, which enables marketing manager to identify the key factors that lead to more or less confusion, and try to adapt their advertising strategy in accordance to it.

## Research Design & Methodology

On the basis of the review of literature following three propositions have been formulated:

P<sub>1</sub> Product related factors play a significant role in creating brand confusion with reference to advertising in the select product group.

P<sub>2</sub> Customer's Characteristics related factors play a significant role in creating brand confusion with reference to advertising in the select product group.

P<sub>3</sub> Communication related factors play a significant role in creating brand confusion with reference to advertising in the select product group.

Further, in order to determine the truth and comparative strength of these three propositions, following three null hypotheses have been formulated and were put to test:

Ho<sub>1</sub>: There is no significant impact of Product related factors in creating brand confusion with reference to advertising in the select product group.

Ho<sub>2</sub>: There is no significant impact of Customer's characteristics related factors in creating brand confusion with reference to advertising in the select product group.

Ho<sub>3</sub>: There is no significant impact of Communication related factors in creating brand confusion with reference to advertising in the select product group.

The purpose of the study is to see the impact of the identified factors in creating brand confusion in advertising specifically for women beauty care products.

The research design and methodology used has been discussed under six subheads: Product Selection, Information Needed, Sample Size, Data Collection, the Questionnaire, and Tools for Data Analysis.

For the purpose of the present study, one product has been selected to validate the hypotheses formulated.

**Product Selection:** Represent the **Beauty care Products**. This product range normally includes personal care products and cosmetics. Some leading brands in this product group are- Lakme, Emami, Ayur, Loreal, Garnier, Johnson and Johnson, Amway, Avon, Shahnaz Hussain, Olay etc.

**Information Needed:** Primary information has been collected from the female segment of the society, as the study is confined to women product only.

**Sample Size:** The sample size was 195 women from all walks of life (Basically three categories were taken for the present study viz. Students, Working women and Housewives). The respondents were selected from Delhi (The city has been divided in four region viz. East West, North, and South for collection of data). For this purpose convenience-based sampling was adopted.

The sample description is given in Table 1.

**Data Collection:** Data has been collected through personally administered questionnaire directed towards the core issues to be taken up in the study over a period of two months, **starting from August 2008 to September 2008**. The questionnaires were personally delivered to the respondents for the collection of the information. In order to avoid biased response from the respondents, due care was taken and it was also ensured that the questionnaires filled in by the respondents were complete in all respects.

**Table 1: Sample Description**

<b>Respondents (Women)</b>	<b>East</b>	<b>West</b>	<b>North</b>	<b>South</b>	<b>Total</b>
Students	21	16	20	13	70
Working Women	18	17	18	17	70
Housewives	12	15	18	10	55
Total	51	48	56	40	195

**Source:** Generated from the Questionnaire.

Personal observations pointed out at the time of the interaction with the respondents on certain other areas (not included in Questionnaire) have also been recorded and used to draw the inferences out of research.

**Questionnaire:** The Questionnaire was composed of 35 questions provides measures of the attitude towards advertising in general, watching advertisement, magazine reading behaviour, involvement with the product categories under investigation, spontaneous brand name recall (top of mind awareness) for both product categories, brand loyalty, and product category familiarity, measured as the extent of product use and the number of brands used regularly. a set of questions containing measures of the attitude towards the advertisement (likable, interesting, convincing, appealing, easy to forget, effective, irritating, believable, clear, informative, distinctive) and recognition of the advertisement.

Participants are also asked to identify the brand the advertisement refers to (*'attribution'*).

**Tools of Data Analysis:** The data has been analyzed with the help of the computerised technique available for this purpose in the form of SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences) package, 2006, version. The tools used to analyze the data included tabulation and frequency distribution, Mean, Percentage Mean, Standard Deviation, Correlation, Paired t-test, and the Multiple Regression Analysis.

### **Limitation of the Study**

The present study is limited to only one product (Beauty care Product) and the respondents are confined to only one city i.e. Delhi hence the results obtained can not be generalized for the entire country.

### **Data Analysis**

The Analysis of data collected depicts the following picture:

In order to determine the weightage of the factors considered to be the reason for brand confusion in advertising in case of beauty care products the mean, % mean and standard deviation were computed and the factors were given Ranks on the basis of their mean value.

Table 2 indicates that maximum weightage is given to Communication related factors by the respondents as compared to Product related factors and Customer's characteristics related factors respectively which reveals that it has a strong influence on brand confusion levels among all the three identified factors. Hence, as far as comparative strength of these factors is concerned, Communication related factors were found to be the most dominant reason for creating brand confusion. Respondents also accepted that out of other two factors Product related factors can be ranked as the second important factor.

**Table 2: Ranking of the Factors Considered Creating Brand Confusion**

Categories& Factors	Mean	Percentage Mean	Standard Deviation	Rank
'A'- Product Related Factors	3.52	70.4	0.47	II
'B'-Customer's Characteristics Related Factor	3.51	70.2	0.53	III
'C'-Communication Related Factors	3.55	71.0	0.64	I

*Source: Generated from the Questionnaire.*

In order to test the hypotheses the three categories of factors were put to paired t-test. The t-value was found to be significant in all the three categories. Results of paired t-test is recorded in table-3, 4, and 5 respectively.

**Table 3: Comparison of Group A Factors with Group B**

Variable	Group A Factor		Group B Factor		T-Value
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	
Preference Rating	4.28	0.64	3.38	0.61	18.25**

*\*\* Significant at 0.01 level of Significance.*

Table 3 indicates that respondents do agree to product related factors being one of the reasons of creating brand confusion. T-value was found to be significant at 0.01 level of significance. Hence, the null hypothesis that there is no significant impact of Product related factors in creating brand confusion with reference to advertising in the select product group is rejected and alternative hypothesis that Product related factors play a significant role to in creating brand confusion with reference to advertising in the select product group is accepted.

**Table 4: Comparison of Category A Factors with Category C**

Variable	Group A		Group C		T-Value
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	
Preference Rating	4.28	0.64	1.99	0.71	29.14**

*\*\* Significant at 0.01 level of Significance.*

Table 4 indicates that respondents do agree to Customer characteristic related factors being one of the reasons of creating brand confusion. T-value was found to be significant at 0.01 level of significance. Hence, the null hypothesis that there is no significant impact of Customer's characteristic related factors in creating brand confusion with reference to advertising in the select product group is rejected and alternative hypothesis that Customer's characteristic related factors play a significant role to in creating brand confusion with reference to advertising in the select product group is accepted.

**Table 5: Comparison of Category B Factors with Category C**

Variable	Group B		Group C		T-Value
	Mean	Standard Deviation	Mean	Standard Deviation	
Preference Rating	3.38	0.61	1.99	0.71	26.09**

\*\* Significant at 0.01 level of Significance.

Table 5 indicates that respondents do agree to Communication related factors being one of the reasons of creating brand confusion. T-value was found to be significant at 0.01 level of significance. Hence, the null hypothesis that there is no significant impact of communication related factors in creating brand confusion with reference to advertising in the select product group is rejected and alternative hypothesis that communication related factors play a significant role to in creating brand confusion with reference to advertising in the select product group is strongly accepted.

Further, in order to determine the variables causing the brand confusion & advertising effectiveness, Multiple Regression analysis was conducted.

**Table 6: Variables Creating the Brand Confusion and its impact on Advertising Effectiveness**

Independent Variable	Dependent Variable: Advertising		
	Beta	Simple r	T-Value
Product & Customer's Related Factors	0.16	0.18*	2.06
Communication related Factors	0.18*	0.20**	2.41

Multiple R=0.25, R Square =0.07 \*Significant at 0.05 level of significance\*\* Significant at 0.01 level of significance

Table 6 indicates higher Beta value for communication related factors as compared to product & customer's related factors. All these factors were found to be significant at 0.01 & 0.05 levels that validate that advertising as a mode of communication creates confusion, if it is not designed after giving due consideration to Product related, customer related and of course communication related factors.

### Findings & Recommendations

- Communication related factors were found to be the most dominant reason for creating brand confusion.
- Product related factors play a significant role to in creating brand confusion with reference to advertising in case of beauty care products.
- Communication related factors also create brand confusion with reference to advertising in case of beauty care products.
- Customers' related factors were also found to be one of the reasons for brand confusion.



- Advertisement found to be less effective if not designed rationally and information-oriented.
- The amount of density of information appears have a significant impact on brand confusion.
- Advertisements loaded with information were found to be less effective and leads to confusion.
- It was also reported that Visual media is one of the most confusing media of advertising which results into brand confusion. On-line ad was reported to be the least confusing media because of the option to ask questions through e-mails where as print media was ranked as the second media after visual media for creating brand confusion..

After analysing the existing literature and findings of the present study it can be concluded that brand confusion being rarely studied, is a phenomenon that should receive the due-cognizance and attention of advertising fraternity. Moreover, the advertisers should not take any assumption on account of all the three factors viz; product related, communication related and customers' related factors. Rather, he should go into the matter of fact for designing Advertising plan including message, media & product to be advertised to avoid any type of confusion in the minds of existing as well as potential customers to ensure effective communication in advertising.

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