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TITLE: Missing Information and Consumers' Inferential Processing: Effects of the Visual and the Verbal Content of the Destination Advertisement on Purchase Intentions

ABSTRACT

Studies on destination marketing and promotion frequently assume that available information in an ad completely describes the advertised destination. However, destinations are seldom fully described and therefore consumers frequently make judgments and decisions based on limited information and knowledge. Missing information happens when "values for one or more attributes considered relevant for the decision task are not available for one or more alternatives in the choice set". A survey, for example, has shown that 44% of advertisements contain an omission of important elements from advertisements (e.g., some advertisements omit explicit information and leave the readers to generate conclusion themselves). Even when there may be no actual incompleteness in the ad, prior expectations may lead the viewers to perceive an omission. That is, consumers may often have well-formed ad schemas for highly advertised products, including a knowledge of the important elements they typically expect to see in an ad campaign for particular brand. If one of these elements is left out, consumers are likely to notice the omission, even when it is not overtly brought to their attention.

The extent and the type of missing information are critical since the greater the amount of missing information, the less favorable a product's evaluation. Previous research has identified two ways in which consumers can respond to when they notice missing attributes: They can search for the missing information or infer the value of a missing attribute. While processing advertising messages, consumers often form inferences about product attributes for which no explicit claims are made in addition to beliefs about attributes that are explicitly described in the ad. Inferential beliefs are of growing interest in marketing research for a number of reasons: a) Inferences are of managerial concern since, like beliefs inferences affect consumers' responses (e.g., impression, recall and attitudes) to ads and are therefore an important determinant of advertising effectiveness, b) Inferences are relevant to advertising since they represent meaning that goes beyond what is explicitly given.

Extent of information provided by an ad is important as it eventually determines advertising effectiveness, which is often measured by its ability to impact attitudes and purchase intentions of predisposed consumers toward the brand. While several marketing researchers have examined how consumers treat missing information in an ad and how missing information determines valuation of products, consumers' attitudes toward incomplete information and how incomplete information affects purchase intentions have not been discussed exclusively in the destination advertising literature (exceptions include). Moreover, only a few researchers have explicitly examined beliefs formed via the inferential process and how these inferential beliefs influence other components of cognitive structure (i e., attitudes and behavioral intention) in the case of in/complete information situation. The present research examines whether marketing communications containing complete (incomplete) information will strongly (weakly) affect attitudes and purchase intentions (in)directly via the formation of inferential beliefs - cognitive structures of knowledge - derived from processing the information contained in the promotional material. The results confirm inferential route in information processing and suggest that destination marketers must pay attention not only to what they do say but also what they leave unsaid.

KEYWORDS:

Inference, incomplete information, service marketing, attitude.