

# **In-Store Advertising Competes for Consumer Attention**

By Margot Myers and Maria Szczech

Many marketers view in-store advertising as a promising means to influence consumers' brand decisions. The increase in in-store advertising expenditures by brands is evidence of the emerging emphasis of this medium. Retailers and marketers understand that advertising in-store, at the time many purchase decisions are made, serves as an impactful method of reaching shoppers. While there is no definite consensus among researchers regarding the percentage of purchase decisions that are made in-store, PRI has asserted that based on available research, 50-60 percent of in-store purchases are spontaneous. Even if the industry can't agree on a percentage, there is consensus that in-store media advertising helps to trigger memory recall, effectively introduces new products, promotes sale items and educates consumers.

Accepting that in-store media advertising is advantageous for marketers and retailers, an emerging concern is the effect of in-store competitive advertising interference on consumer behavior. Consumers are exposed to an increasing amount of advertising messages – on average, 3,000 marketing messages each day. Yet it appears that marketers' intended solution to advertising avoidance is simply increasing the number of ads. However, this results in a high degree of advertising clutter. And, as detailed here, excessive, uncoordinated advertising may, in fact, dilute a brand's image.

## **Advertising Clutter**

"Advertising clutter" is characterized as an excessive quantity of ads, with "excessive" meaning an amount that surpasses what is reasonable, acceptable or wanted by consumers. Clutter has separate dimensions: quantity, competitiveness and intrusiveness. Quantity is the number of ads, as well as the percentage of space taken by the ad(s) compared to non-advertising content in a particular media vehicle. Competitiveness refers to the extent to which the advertised products are alike and the proximity between ads for competing brands. Intrusiveness is defined as "the degree to which advertisements in a media vehicle interrupt the flow of editorial unit." Perhaps the simplest example of this would be a 30-minute television program interrupted by 10 minutes of ads.

In-store advertising, particularly when perceived as excessive, may result in diminishing returns to both the retailer and the brand due to five factors, which are detailed below. Advertising clutter can cause negative attitudes in consumers, such as skepticism or decreased likability. In addition, since individuals are unable to pay attention to all messages to which they are exposed, clutter can result in avoidance of all advertising messages in a given vehicle or venue. High levels of clutter have been demonstrated to decrease brand recognition, as well as decrease consumers' attention. Finally, research suggests high clutter generates confusion. These factors can lead to an overall decline of advertising effectiveness:

### **1. Clutter can result in negative attitudes.**

Brand attitude is an important factor tied to a consumer's motivation to purchase. Clutter affects attitudes by increasing the perceptions of intrusiveness. High levels of advertising

are also likely to interrupt the consumer's cognitive process and subsequently lead to feelings of irritation. High levels of clutter can also be perceived as invasive. A common response to invasive advertising is frustration, which may lead a consumer to avoid the ad altogether. Brands hope that in-store advertising will convince a shopper to purchase a particular brand. However, shoppers are exposed to dozens or even hundreds of ads each time they step into a store. Instead of persuading consumers to purchase a particular brand, excessive advertising in stores may have the opposite effect.

## **2. Ad avoidance.**

Research has shown that increased advertising causes consumers to avoid ads. If consumers are avoiding ads entirely, that clearly will have an impact on both their perception of the brand and their intent to purchase. Avoidance behaviors increase when clutter disrupts the consumer or impedes search behavior. Avoidance can also stem from the consumer's perception of being overwhelmed due to a high quantity of clutter. As a result, consumers may be unable to correctly process the content of each message. When confronted by various types of store advertising, shoppers may choose to direct their attention elsewhere or pass right by a store advertisement without paying attention to the content.

## **3. Decreased brand recognition and recall.**

Other research has found that high levels of competitive advertising can lead to a decrease in both brand recognition and the consumer's ability to recall the conveyed messages. Advertising interference makes it more difficult for consumers to recall specific elements of each message. Therefore, when there are more ads in a media vehicle or venue, the consumer's ability to recall claims made by an ad decreases. More importantly, increasing advertising levels decreases the recall of all advertisements in a media vehicle or venue. Marketers aim to create brand recognition, or help establish a link between the brand names, logos, slogans and certain claims made by advertisements.

Yet in a highly cluttered retail environment, it may be difficult for a shopper to recognize which advertising message applies to which brand.

## **4. Reduced attention.**

In addition to initial attention, continual engagement is required for a purchasing decision to occur. There is a good deal of research proposing that competitive advertising interference results in both decreased attention and memory for the focal brand. This happens because individuals spend less time gathering information about the focal brand when there is significant competition for attention. In a competitive environment, viewing time is divided among many brands. Additionally, advertising clutter is likely to decrease consumers' attention to all ads in general. When there are more messages to consider, the significance of all messages decreases. When a shopper walks through a store filled with advertising messages, he or she may become less interested in what the advertisements are attempting to convey, and thus the effect of each ad is reduced.

## 5. Shopper confusion.

Finally, in a cluttered environment, consumers who are able to pay attention to a particular advertising message and remember its content may become confused about which brand the message is associated with. For example, in a study about brand slogans in an environment where the level of advertising interference is high, people were likely to incorrectly match a slogan to the advertised brand. When the proximity of ads is increased, consumers are likely to confuse one brand with another.

It is evident that in-store advertising plays a crucial role in reinforcing a brand message. However, a high degree of clutter can lessen the effectiveness of in-store advertising. For this reason, retailers and brands need to have an integrated in-store communication strategy to ensure optimal consumer impact. For retailers considering deploying in-store advertising via digital signage, or those that have been running digital ad platforms for several years, it is important to consider whether your advertising is overwhelming customers, or educating and engaging them.

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