




Impact of creative ambiguous cue strategies on consumer purchase decisions


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Abstract

We conducted a study to investigate whether the perceived ambiguity of billboard cues has an impact on evaluation and purchase decisions. In today's era of information overload, brands face difficulties in gaining recognition, and viewers often feel rushed and no longer find displayed advertisements appealing. In order to examine the effect of ambiguous cue advertisements on consumers' purchasing decisions, we designed an experiment as an additional measure. Participants ($N = 262$) in four experiments: arguments 64 (32 high and 32 low), images 62 (31 high and 31 low), typefaces 64 (32 high and 32 low), and combined 72 (36 high and 36 low). The first, second, third, and fourth experiments revealed a significant effect of ambiguous cues on purchase decisions. Participants exposed to highly ambiguous arguments, images, typeface, and combined ads elicited more favourable purchase decisions. Our study test some of the key predictions of Elaboration Likelihood Model and Strategic ambiguity models with the cues, we discovered that individuals are persuaded by central or peripheral routes based on their capacity and perceptions to elaborate and process the information. Theoretical and practical implications for ambiguous cues in fast food advertisements are discussed.

Keywords: Ambiguous cues, artful deviation, billboard advertisement, elaboration likelihood model, rhetorical devices, strategic ambiguity, visual features.

Introduction

There has been progressive regulation of advertising content regarding ambiguity worldwide. Nevertheless, these regulators consistently communicate ambiguously through their agencies and subsidiaries, such as logos, slogans, colours, and images. The regulators and companies ignore the regulations because ambiguity facilitates harmonising and achieving organisational goals and unified diversity. We are in the era of information overload, where brands struggle for recognition, and the viewers are in a hurry not to pay attention to the displayed advertisements because they are no longer appealing to them (Yassin, 2023). A

wide variety of businesses need quality persuasive appeals and innovative strategies for utilising rhetorical devices and linguistic and visual features to catch attention and generate meaning across different facets of consumers.

Moreover, consumers' sophistication and demand structure require rhetorical creativity to facilitate encoding stimuli that resonate with the consumers, which facilitates capturing the attention of consumers and more favourable patronage than simple, unpersuasive words. Accordingly, pursuing several goals while encoding numerous meanings into a phrase or campaign is advantageous. It is an aspect that has been ignored from a practical point of view (Puntoni et al., 2011). Persuasive advertising is based on rhetorical situations that drive or empower accomplishing the ad's aims without much difficulty.

Evidence suggests that based on the widely used advertising media indicator, 78% of the advertisements from 10 notable countries, such as the USA, UK, France, Canada, Australia, Brazil, Germany, India, Spain, and Italy, were rated or acclaimed to be ambiguous and creative (Statista, 2023). Therefore, ambiguous cues have been a promising and creative strategy for attracting attention and fostering ad recognition for quite some time. Past studies have investigated the creative impact of billboard advertising. For example, Reddy & Ghose (2023), Bukhari et al. (2023), and Matiti (2023) perceived that advertising creativity influenced audience favourable brand message evaluation. The essence of creative manipulation of cues is to create liking and patronage for the brand in question. However, visual rhetoric is an implicit and expressive utilisation and transformation of symbols into images in an artful deviation with an identifiable template towards meaning, dilation, reputation, and cultural creation and transmission of persuasive communication across different facets of the audience to gain favourable behaviour (Campelo et al., 2011; Phillips & McQuarrie, 2004). The billboard advertisement should stop consumers and grab their attention, but achieving this has become increasingly thought-provoking for companies to attain this goal (Pieters et al., 2010). Meanwhile, visual structure, meaning operations, and personification are the key strategies that the study will focus on (Peterson, 2019).

Recent reviews have highlighted the need to expand research on billboard advertising content beyond the present scope. It would help us to understand the strategies, usage, and impact of insufficient information and imagery in drawing attention to brand messages. However, there still needs to be more knowledge about how ambiguous cues in advertisements create meaning, dilation, and different interpretations from one individual to another towards achieving unified diversity and organisational goals. In order to address this information gap, our study investigates the impact of ambiguous cues and uses a novel technique to integrate strategic ambiguity and an elaboration likelihood model. Specifically, our goal is to predict whether the perceived ambiguity of advertisements affects evaluation and purchase decisions.

This article is organised as follows: We started with a literature review to establish the connection between ambiguous advertisements and consumers' purchase decisions. Furthermore, we outline the methodological perspective to address the research aims. Additionally, we present the study outcomes and establish objectives underpinning the theory of strategic ambiguity that enhances the ability to achieve goals and promotes unified diversity, preserving privileged and deniable positions and facilitating organisational change. Also, the elaboration likelihood model categorises how individuals process persuasive communication.

Literature review/Theoretical background

Impact of billboard advertising on consumers purchase decisions

The influence of outdoor advertisements on consumer purchase decisions is contingent upon a range of factors, including gender, billboard size, content, and celebrity endorsement, according to studies by Patel & Bhatt (2018), Zekiri (2019), and Akhtar (2019). The study emphasised that billboard advertising is a cost-effective and widely accessible method, making it an efficient tool for sellers and promoters. Mustafa & Al-Abdallah (2020) underscored the significance of comprehending the impact of commercials on customer purchasing behaviour. Prior research has yielded significant insights into the influence of billboard advertising on customer purchasing choices. Nevertheless, this research did not detect strategic ambiguity mechanisms that could impact purchasing choices, such as unorthodox strategies, linguistic tools, and ambiguous signals. In order to fill this vacuum in the existing research, this study will employ a novel strategy by strategically incorporating instances of strategic ambiguity and theories of likelihood models. The study will use ambiguous cues from visual structures, meaning operations, rhetorical devices, and typefaces as discursive resources to look into how billboard advertising affects people's decisions to buy things.

Visuals Elements

Billboard advertising is designed to stand out and attract attention with enticing language, captivating images, and a bold layout. Each element is carefully crafted to differentiate the brand and its message from competitors and create a positive response from potential customers (Vlasenko et al., 2021; Fortenberry & McGoldrick, 2019; Yassin, 2023). The ultimate aim of billboard advertising is to grab the audience's attention, influence their buying decisions, and encourage them to keep coming back for more. It is achieved using various visual and rhetorical elements in the advertising campaign.

Several studies have highlighted the importance of the visual impact in billboard advertising on brand messages and consumers. Peterson et al. (2016), Myers & Jung (2016), Gopnik & Rosati (2001), and Meurs Aristoff (2009) these studies emphasized the significance of visual impact in billboard advertising. Advertising images that contain more visual elements are visually complex and convey the brand or context in various ways. Visual metaphors also impact cognitive resource allocation and memory. They culminate that visual representations play a vital role in bridging the gap between the system dynamics modelling approach and the process of socially generating shared meaning. Billboard advertising uses ambiguous images that apply metaphorical techniques, prompting consumers to decipher the underlying meaning and engage in deeper cognitive processing, leaving a lasting impression of the advertisement. Consumers derive enjoyment from processing complicated advertisements and deciphering the visual messages they provide (Zhao & Lin, 2019; Chang et al., 2016; Sakr, 2016; Koeck & Warnaby, 2014; Sopory & Dillard, 2002; McQuairre, 1996). This research examines the prevailing application of visuals, writing style, and reasoning in billboard advertisements (Hutter, 2014).

H1: People exposed to highly ambiguous arguments advertisement elicits more favourable purchase decisions than consumers exposed to low ambiguous arguments.

Arguments

So many previous studies have shown that novel arguments elicit both positive and negative emotions. For instance, Jacobs et al. (2021), Luttrell & Petty (2021), Barrera et al. (2020), Blair (2020), Loewenstein (1994), Nye et al. (2008), Sujan (1985), Cox & Locander (1987), and Oliver, Robertson, and Mitchell (1993) as well as cognitive processes that create uncertainty in processing stimuli. Individuals are eager to learn and evaluate novel cues to ensure accurate interpretation. The affective response of consumers plays a significant role in attitude formation when encountering and processing unconventional ideas or information. Messages related to public health directives are more persuasive when participants perceive them as concerning the safety of others. Therefore, for a new argument to be compelling, it must resonate with consumers' values and evoke their affective reactions. The novel categorization theory suggests that events are perceived as new when they do not fit into existing categories, making them more engaging and creative. Familiarity with information can sometimes lead to a delayed or unexpected response. These studies indicate that consumers enjoy seeing novel or unfamiliar situations in advertising messages.

H2: People exposed to highly ambiguous images advertisement elicit more favourable purchase decisions than consumers exposed to low ambiguous images ad.

Images

Previous research has explored the way that images and pictures are used in persuasive communication, including works by Kjeldsen (2012), Philipps and McQuarrie (2004), Olayemi (2017), and Schmitt (1994). Their findings suggest that images can help clarify possibilities by stimulating expected effects. In addition, placing images and facial expressions on billboards is crucial because it enhances other emotional symbols that appeal to consumers and grab their attention. Visual figures play a unique role in persuasive communication by facilitating interpretive opportunities and active participation while providing clear directions that guide the audience towards the presented arguments.

In advertising, facial expressions, images, gestures, and displays enhance brand identity (Olayemi, 2017). Previous research by Small & Verrochi (2009), Semaan et al. (2018), and Guido et al. (2019) explores the impact of faces in advertisements. Faces in charity advertising elicit empathy through sad expressions (study observed). Faces are crucial in billboard ads as they capture attention and convey information about social interaction (Ellis & Young, 1998; Birulés et al., 2023). Visual information in advertisements is complex and subject to individual interpretation (Schmitt, 1994; Dall'Olio & Vakratsas, 2023). Despite this complexity, close-up visuals create mild anxiety and increase receptiveness to logical appeals, while long-shot visuals promote understanding and increase receptiveness to emotional appeals (Kim et al., 2019). These studies offer insights into the spatial arrangement of images in print advertisements.

H3: People exposed to highly ambiguous typefaces advertisement elicit more favourable purchase decisions than consumers exposed to low ambiguous typefaces ad.

Typefaces

The choice of typography in outdoor advertising is crucial for connecting with consumers. Typography relates text to visual elements, establishes interpretation, and invites reader interaction. It should convey information. Visual typefaces capture consumers and evoke emotions, making outdoor advertising effective in reaching a large audience. Literature should adhere to market philosophies and be error-free. Grammatical mistakes can harm a brand. The typeface should be eye-catching, aesthetically pleasing, reassuring, and conspicuous. The selection should consider intended meaning and impact, with distinct characteristics setting it apart from other letterforms (Turgut, 2017; Meyer et al., 2018; Siddiqui et al., 2016; Amar et al., 2017; Siddiqui et al., 2016; Puškarević et al., 2018).

Prior research has demonstrated that typefaces can affect the attention and perception of consumers. The research conducted by Kim et al. (2020), Puškarević et al. (2018), Song and Luximon (2019), Schroll et al. (2018) these studies suggests that consumers see sans-serif typefaces as more persuasive than handwriting, yet handwriting is more captivating when used. Intricate fonts can influence attention and, combined with high-quality images, can diminish visual disorder. Taglines consisting entirely of uppercase letters generate a more pronounced perception of dread and environmental threat than taglines beginning with lowercase letters. There was no discernible distinction between taglines beginning with uppercase letters and those that began entirely with uppercase letters. On the other hand, handwritten typefaces evoke human presence and enhance the emotional connection between consumers and companies. Overall, these studies highlight the importance of typeface in advertising, as it influences how consumers evaluate messages and make decisions.

H4: People exposed to highly ambiguous cues advertisement elicits more favourable purchase decisions than consumers exposed to low ambiguous cues ad.

Strategic Ambiguity

Strategic ambiguity is known to play a significant role in shaping how consumers perceive advertising messages. Research has shown that purposely introducing ambiguity into messages can capture consumer attention, encourage critical thinking, and enhance brand recall and recognition (Zaki et al., 2022). In addition, strategically ambiguous messages can generate diverse interpretations among different audience segments, which ultimately contributes to cultivating a positive corporate image (Paweł & Wojciech, 2021). However, the impact of ambiguity on consumer perception can vary depending on the context. While ambiguous arguments may help in avoiding objections, they can also have negative consequences on the evaluation of the sender's credibility and voters' intentions (Sohn & Heidi, 2018; Vibhanshu et al., 2014). Overall, strategic ambiguity in advertising messages can be a powerful tool for marketers to engage consumers, spark curiosity, and effectively influence perceptions (Nwankwo-Ojionu et al., 2021).

Previous research has shown that individuals vary in their tolerance for ambiguity. For example, by Fitts (2010) and Atkin & Roznowski (2006), Atkin et al. (2008) and Oryila and Umar (2016) these studies discovered that older men tend to have higher tolerance levels, while those with lower tolerance levels

experience higher stress levels. Students with a higher tolerance for ambiguity are more likely to express a desire to work in disadvantaged areas. Research has also indicated that when ambiguous facial expressions are presented unpredictably, they are perceived as reasonable, whereas predictable presentations lead to increased amygdala reactivity. Understanding ambiguity is essential for predicting behavior, as individuals differ in their tolerance levels. Strategic ambiguity can result in multiple interpretations and goals for an organization. Using strategic ambiguity may have a negative impact on an organization's reputation. It is important to note that vagueness and ambiguity can be intentionally used in advertisements to misinform, complicate, entertain, evade truth, persuade, or make specific ideas, products, and services appear more plausible than they are. This goes against the prevailing ideology of clarity and openness in the public sphere.

Elaboration Likelihood Model

The Elaboration Likelihood Model, discussed by Cyr et al. (2018), Allison et al. (2017), Zhou et al. (2014), and Gu et al. (2017), classifies two methods of influence in persuasive communication: the peripheral route and the central route. The critical cognitive abilities of individuals who effectively comprehend relevant information in advertising involve examining specific details provided in an advertisement, such as the car's speedometer, fuel efficiency, engine displacement, and other relevant factors, which fall under the central route. On the other hand, the peripheral route consists of individuals who do not engage in cognitive processes or reasoning, instead relying on cues presented in an advertisement, such as the color, shape, and entertainment value of a car.

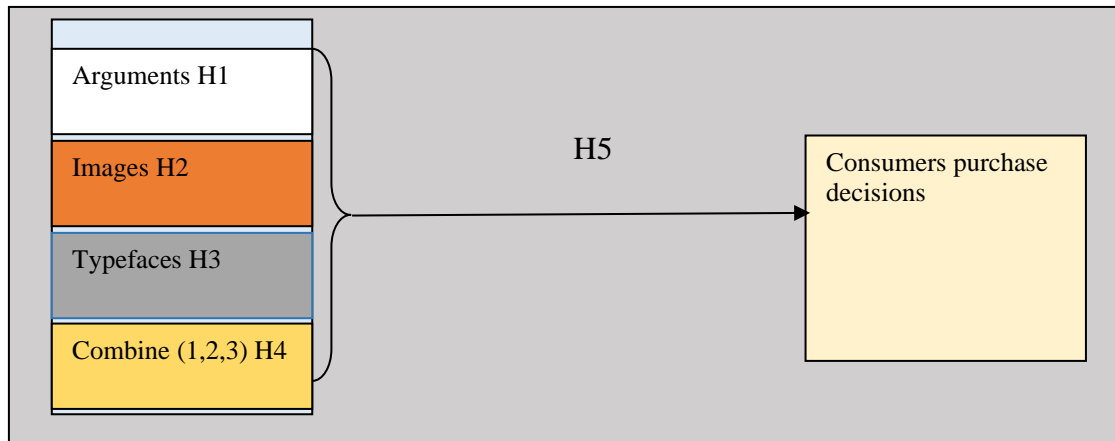
The Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM) accurately predicts consumer behavior in advertising. Central cues, such as advertising persuasiveness, impact consumer engagement with advertising. Peripheral cues, such as the social climate, also shape consumer attitudes towards advertising (Nilesh et al., 2017; Elvira et al., 2021; Nwankwo-Ojionu et al., 2022). The ELM is also applied to understand how consumers process information online, particularly in electronic word of mouth (eWOM). This application distinguishes between central and peripheral routes of information processing (Masoud & Fereshteh, 2022). Moreover, studies on advertising effectiveness show that ELM-guided analysis reveals differences in consumer responses based on factors like involvement levels and the type of spokes-characters used in ads (Piao & Hao, 2023). Overall, the ELM framework provides valuable insights into consumer behavior in advertising by considering both central and peripheral cues.

While these theories have provided valuable insights for the current study, they have not addressed the role of ambiguous cues as discursive resources in previous research. For example, the elaboration likelihood model suggests that persuasive communication involves two routes of information processing: peripheral, which requires effortless processing, and central route, which involves scrutinizing the details and relevance of the message and requires effort and cognitive ability (Teofilus et al., 2023; Chou et al., 2021; Norhabiba, 2019; Kim et al., 2020; Shahab et al., 2021). Strategic ambiguity refers to how organizations use ambiguity to set the stage for communication and create multiple interpretations among individuals to achieve their goals. It is also important to note that individual prior knowledge of the context, subjective beliefs, and other factors influence how people interpret insufficient and ambiguous information, particularly in terms of behavioral change (Herz et al., 2023; Singh et al., 2023; Szubielska et al., 2021; Neta et al., 2021; Li &

Wagner, 2020). Therefore, the present study aims to integrate these theories and examine the impact of creative ambiguous cue strategies on consumer purchase decisions as a discursive resource after conducting a thorough examination of the relevant literature.

H5: people exposed to high ambiguous advertisement differ from people unexposed to ambiguous advertisement.

Figure 1: Research Framework



Source: own elaboration

Methodology

Experiment 1

Methods and Materials

Stimuli, Participants and Procedure

We manipulated ambiguous arguments into (high vs. low) using a post-test only between subject design experiments in order to (a) determine the impact of ambiguous billboard advertisements on consumers' purchase decisions and (b) ascertain how individuals exposed to ambiguous advertisements differ in their purchase choices. The post-test between-subject design experiment examines the impact of ambiguous ads on customers' purchase decisions, which are characterised by uncertain arguments (high and low). At three levels, the ambiguous cue serves as the independent variable, while consumers' purchase decisions constitute the dependent variable.

In order to replicate conditions where participants are typically exposed to restaurant billboard advertisements, we devised two iterations of fictitious advertisement stimuli. The action was taken as a precautionary measure to prevent any potential bias or prior knowledge that could arise from the presence of pre-existing restaurant billboards. The food advertising possesses distinctive and appealing characteristics that are appropriate and comparable to our research. Nevertheless, the experimental stimulus was developed using the principles of visual structure and meaning operations outlined by Philipps & McQuarrie (2004). According to the authors, visual structures refer to the arrangement of elements within a layout, contingent upon their intricacy level. The cognitive processing required focuses on meaning operations,

which facilitate the interpretation of arguments, polysemy, and richness of reference (Madupu et al., 2013; Chakroun, 2020).

The highly ambiguous advertisement billboards (Ad1) were designed using polysemy, weasel words, and grammatical deviation that are intended to increase participants' processing, elicit multiple interpretations, and influence the participants' decision based on relevance, actuality, accuracy, and comprehensible arguments that will engage participants' cognitive processing: "BBQ Chickin, less Cholesterol, Taste Great, Healthier." Besides, the (Ad5) low ambiguous billboard stimulus was designed with a simple layout and irrelevant, bogus, inaccurate, and incomprehensive arguments that would not make the participants think about the product on the billboard advertisement; thus, BBQ Chicken, Barbeque chicken is cooked directly on the fire and most times burnt.

Figure 2: High ambiguous arguments (Ad1)



Low ambiguous arguments (Ad5)



Source: own elaboration

In order to ensure the accuracy of the measure of arguments, images, typefaces, and consumer purchase decisions in this study, three advertising experts were invited to evaluate and assess the four ambiguous and unambiguous stimuli. The stimulus was validated across eight experimental conditions - four high and four low ambiguous advertisements - that accounted for four significant variables of the study. Therefore, argumentation, images, and typeface are the primary factors that influence consumer buying decisions.

Procedure

The Urn randomization procedure was employed to allocate participants to two treatment conditions, ensuring that all participants have an equal chance of being selected (Van der Pas, 2019). The marbles were dyed using their corresponding experimental conditions and placed in a container. The participants inserted their hands into the urn and selected a marble that determined their allocation to a particular treatment condition. They selected a single marble without reintroducing it once it was shown to prevent another participant from selecting the same marble again. Randomization eliminates the possibility of selection bias, which may arise when the researcher or the participant selects the treatment. Randomization eliminates confounding by known and unknown factors, as it prevents any relationship between the therapy and any other known or unknown factor (Misra, 2012; Ashina et al., 2020). Moreover, the participant and the investigator must be made aware of each participant's assigned test group or therapy. A double-masked approach will enhance the likelihood of obtaining a dependable outcome after the study (Ashina et al., 2020).

The two billboard advertisements were displayed on the projection screen in the following sequence at the respective halls: on October 12, 2022, Ads 1 and 5 were initially presented in halls 1 and 2. The participants

observed a still image inserted into the projector alongside a traffic backdrop sound (SFX: city traffic) in order to simulate the appearance of billboard advertisements on the highway. After exposing each participant to a 10-minute viewing segment, they were administered a questionnaire. They completed the questionnaire in around 15 minutes. After finishing, the participants were given a detailed explanation of the task and allowed to go.

Participants

In eight treatment conditions, 64 postgraduate students and academic staff participants (32 high and 32 low) were presented with ambiguous stimuli. We recruited postgraduate and academic staff from four public universities using convenience sampling. We identified potential participants for this study by utilizing social media platforms within the university. To gather participants, we placed an advertisement for an upcoming experiment, clearly stating the type of experiment and the eligibility requirements for this study. Meanwhile, all participants were mandated to complete a series of personal information inquiries to ascertain their suitability for the project. Considering the stipulation that participants must (1) be academic personnel or postgraduate students in order to partake in the experiment. Because involving postgraduate students and academic staff in research studies offers numerous benefits despite the validity of the study. However, research enables personal and professional growth, allowing students to discover new information, solve problems, and develop critical thinking skills (Yusuff et al., 2022; Louella et al., 2022).

Measures

Four sets of questionnaires were prepared for the experiment according to the treatment condition: Ad1 and 5 questions focused on the argument, Ad2 and 6 focused on images, Ad3 and 7 were on typefaces, and Ad4 and 8 questions were a combination of arguments, images, and typefaces. The constructs depict elements used in billboard advertising (Hussain & Nizamani, 2011; Khan et al., 2016). The argument construct was assessed with 16 subclass items derived from Bhattacharjee and Sanford (2006), Wixom and Todd (2005), Nwankwo-Ojionu et al., 2024 and Larasati and Yasa (2017). These items portrayed a standard message found on a restaurant billboard commercial. The variable to determine customers' buying decisions was evaluated using four subclass scales derived from goods (Karimi et al., 2015). The items were assessed using a 7-point extreme adjectival bipolar scale, ranging from likely to unlikely. Cronbach's alpha was employed to assess the reliability of scales and evaluate the internal consistency of items, such as those used to gauge ambiguous advertisements and customers' purchasing decisions. All the items shown have a sufficient coefficient alpha, as indicated in Table 2 in the Appendix.

Data Analysis

Manipulation Check

Of the participants to verify if the manipulation was successful, 90% rated that the billboard advertisement was creative and drew attention. In order to confirm whether there is a significant difference between people exposed to highly ambiguous arguments advertisements and consumers exposed to low ambiguous arguments advertisements in their purchase decisions, an independent sample t-test was conducted to

compare high and low ambiguous arguments. The result revealed that there was a significant difference in the score for high ambiguous arguments ads ($M = 194.25$, $SD = 2.38$) compared to low ambiguous arguments ads ($M = 140.13$, $SD = 23.75$), demonstrating that statistical significance was evident between high ambiguous arguments and low ambiguous arguments $t(62) = 6.41$, $p < .001$. The result suggests that highly ambiguous arguments affect consumers' purchase decisions. Specifically, our result showed that the likelihood of an increased purchase decision is evident when consumers have been exposed to ambiguous arguments. Thus, it supports H1. In their study, Murwonugroho & Yudarwati (2020) revealed that the newness of the advertisement's new visual element structure by reversing outdoor media design principles and the intentional convention of reversed messages evoked a more interactive public response. (See Table 1 below).

Table 1: Independent sample t-test for Ambiguous Arguments (ad1 and 5) (n=64)

Groups	N	Mean	SD	T	P value
High Amb. Arg (ad1)	32	194.25	2.38	6.41	.001
Low Amb. Arg (ad5)	32	140.13	23.75		

Source: own elaboration

Experiment 2

Methods and Materials

Stimuli, Participants and Procedure

We investigated (a) the impact of ambiguous billboard advertisements on consumers' purchase decisions and (b) how individuals exposed to ambiguous image advertisements differ in their purchase decisions. We manipulated ambiguous image advertisements into (ambiguous vs. unambiguous) for our posttest only between subject design experiments. The advertisement image was intentionally ambiguous in its message and appeals to high and unambiguous to low participants depending on their treatment condition, and serves as the experimental stimulus in a posttest between-subject design to measure the impact on purchase decisions. The advertisement, which is open to interpretation, serves as the independent variable across three different levels, while the purchase decisions made by consumers are the dependent variable. The second experimental stimulus was developed using the principles of meaning operations and visual structure postulated by Philipps and McQuarrie (2004). According to the authors, visual structures refer to the arrangement of elements within a layout, contingent upon their intricacy level. The cognitive processing required focuses on meaning operations, which aid in comprehending the image's level of ambiguity, polysemy, or richness of reference (Madupu et al., 2013; Chakroun, 2020). Facilitating stimulus complexity and allowing participants to interpret the advertisements they encountered, the research will employ fusion as the visual framework and link in the meaning operations (Lagerwerf et al., 2012). We implemented a fusion and connection strategy in the highly ambiguous image advertisement billboard (Ad2), which enabled the combination of two distinct objects. As an illustration, a grilled chicken was placed on the heads of a pair to resemble their heads. Human faces quickly capture attention and generate positive feelings while

effectively communicating information about a person's intentions and emotions related to past, present, and future events (Small & Verrochi, 2009; Guido et al., 2019). In addition, the advertising (Ad 6) used little chicken images with minimal depth and diversity in style. To represent advertisements devoid of ambiguity and fail to elicit emotional attachment to the given context (refer to Figure 3). To verify the stimuli and assign the participants at random, we replicated the methodology employed in Experiment 1.

Figure 3. High ambiguous images (Ad2)

Low ambiguous images (Ad6)



Source: own elaboration

Procedure

In order to ensure that all participants had an equal chance of being selected, we determined the two treatment conditions using the Urn randomization procedure (Van der Pas, 2019; Wei & Lachin, 1988). To expose participants to the test stimuli and capture data, we followed the same methodology as in Experiment one.

Due to their treatment, the two billboard advertisements were presented in the following sequence on the projector screen in the appropriate halls: on November 14, 2022, Ads 2 and 6 were presented in halls 1 and 2 with separate attendees. In order to simulate the appearance of billboard advertisements on the highway, the participants observed a still image inserted into the projector alongside a traffic backdrop sound (SFX: city traffic). Every participant underwent a 10-minute viewing session, and a questionnaire will be given to them afterwards. They completed the questionnaire in around 15 minutes. After finishing, the participants were given a detailed explanation of the task and allowed to go.

Participants

Eight treatment conditions were applied to 62 postgraduate students and academic staff members (31 high and 31 low) with unclear image advertisements. We employed the identical methodology applied in experiment 1 to recruit postgraduate students and academic staff from four public universities. We identified these individuals as potential participants for our study by leveraging social media sites inside the institution. Meanwhile, all participants must complete a series of personal information inquiries to ascertain their suitability for the project. Participants eligible to participate in the experiment must be postgraduate students or academic personnel.

Measures

The nine subclass items from (Fortenberry & McGoldrick, 2020 Philipps & McQuarrie, 2004; Guido et al., 2019) that comprised (convinced, draw attention, emotional, appealing, persuade, awareness, interest, recall, and complex) on a 7-point extreme adjectival bipolar scale (likely/unlikely) were used to assess the ambiguous image advertisement. For example, do the visuals on the billboard effectively capture your attention and influence your inclination to purchase the product? How would you grade your decision on a scale of 1 to 10? Conversely, the dependent variable for customers' buying decisions (search, evaluation, purchase product, satisfaction) was assessed using four items. This assessment utilised a 7-point extreme adjectival bipolar scale, with 1 indicating "very unlikely" and 7 indicating "very likely" (Karimi et al., 2015). For instance, did the billboard commercial you observed contain pertinent product information? On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate your decision to purchase the product?

We used Cronbach's alpha to authenticate the reliability of scales and measure the internal consistency of a group of items (e.g., the items used to measure ambiguous image advertisements and consumers' purchase decisions). All the items showed an acceptable alpha coefficient (see Table 3, Appendix).

Data Analysis

Manipulation Check

In order to verify the manipulation, the subjects rated 98% when asked if they had ever seen a billboard commercial. The study verified if customers exposed to low ambiguous image advertisements and those exposed to high ambiguous image advertisements differ significantly in their purchasing decisions; the study employed an independent sample t-test to examine images with high and low levels of ambiguity. According to the results, there was a statistically significant difference between the scores for high and low ambiguous images ($t(60) = 10.25, p < .001$), with the scores for high ambiguous images ($M = 144.13, SD = 1.37$) and low ambiguous images ($M = 108.25, SD = 20.07$) differing significantly. The findings implied that highly ambiguous images influence customers' purchasing decisions. Surprisingly, our finding indicates that when customers view extremely unclear visuals, there is a clear chance that their choice to buy will increase. It, therefore, supports H2. Like our findings, Lagerwerf et al. (2012) found that fusion images elicit a higher positive response than juxtaposition. The combination of two images into one is called fusion. Refer to Table 2.

Table 2: Independent sample t-test for Ambiguous Images (ad2 and 6) (n=62)

Groups	N	Mean	SD	T	P value
High Amb. Images (ad2)	31	144.13	1.98	10.25	.001
Low Amb. Images (ad6)	8	108.25	20.07		

Source: own elaboration

Experiment 3

Methods and Materials

Stimuli, Participants and Procedure

To ascertain (a) the impact of ambiguous billboard advertisements on consumers' purchasing decisions and (b) how individuals exposed to such advertisements differ in their purchasing choices, we manipulated

ambiguous typeface advertisements into (high vs. low) conditions using post-tests exclusively between subject design experiments. The experiment utilizing a posttest between-subject design comprises an ambiguous typeface advertisement (high and low) and consumers' purchase decisions. Customers' purchase decisions are the dependent variable, while the ambiguous advertisement is the independent variable on three levels. The third experiment's stimuli were designed based on previous studies' characterizations (Phillips & McQuarrie, 2004; Phillips & McQuarrie, 2009; Nedeljković et al., 2017; Henderson et al., 2004). The highly ambiguous typefaces (Ad3) were developed using a combination of (Lemon and Shrikhand) fonts in a specific style and a variation of increasing the font to facilitate more focus based on their weight, size, and width, such as regular, strong, and bold. For example, (BBQ Chickin= x:894.2px, y:240.9px, W:100% and H:100%, Effects: drop shadow, outer glow) and (less cholesterol= x:892.2px, y:904.4px, W:164.2% and H:153.3%, Effects: inner shadow, outer glow) and applied misspelling typeface deviation "GRreat" to rhetorically create attractiveness, appealing, comforting, and noticeable to invoke connective and affective feelings on the participants. Meanwhile, low ambiguous (Ad7) was designed with Times romance fonts, ordinary and familiar, to create unattractive, unappealing, uncomfortable, and unnoticeable, which does not invoke emotional attachment to the ads (Kim et al., 2020) (see Figure 4). We applied the same procedure in experiment 1 to validate the stimuli of this experiment.



Figure 4: High ambiguous typefaces (Ad3)

Low ambiguous typefaces (Ad7)

Procedure

Participants were assigned to the two treatment conditions using the urn randomization approach because it promotes equal possibility of selection (Van der Pas, 2019; Wei & Lachin, 1988). We replicated the methodology employed in experiment 1 to present the test stimuli to individuals and gather data. Due to their treatment, the two billboard advertisements were presented in the following sequence on the projector screen in the appropriate halls: Ads 3 and 7 were shown on January 18, 2023. The participants observed a still image inserted into the projector alongside a traffic backdrop sound (SFX: city traffic) in order to simulate the appearance of billboard advertisements on the highway. Every participant was subjected to a 10-minute watching session, and a questionnaire would be given to them afterwards. They completed the questionnaire in around 15 minutes. After finishing, the participants were given a detailed explanation of the task and allowed to go.

Participants

Sixty-four postgraduate students and academic staff participated in two treatment conditions with ambiguous image advertisements (32 high and 32 low). We employed the identical methodology applied in experiment 1 to recruit postgraduate students and academic staff from four public universities. We identified these individuals as potential participants for our study by leveraging social media sites inside the institution. Meanwhile, all participants must complete a series of personal information inquiries to ascertain their suitability for the project. In order to participate in the experiment, individuals must be (1) postgraduate students or academic personnel.

Measures

The typeface was assessed using nine subclass items from Burton & Lichtenstein (1988) and Meyer et al. (2018): persuade, informative, brand message, understandable, deliver, comforting, attractive, appealing, and soothing. These items were arranged on a bipolar scale of seven extreme adjectival points (likely/unlikely). For instance, does the choice of typeface effectively captivate your attention towards the brand and influence your purchase of the product? On a scale, what numerical value would you provide to evaluate the typeface? In the study by Karimi et al. (2015), the dependent variable on consumers' purchase decisions was assessed using four items: evaluation, purchase product, satisfaction, and search. A 7-point extreme adjectival bipolar scale was employed, with 1 denoting "very unlikely" and 7 representing "very likely." For instance, "Do you buy products based on the information you have assessed on the billboard advertisement?" On a scale of numbers, how would you evaluate your decision to purchase the product? In order to ascertain the dependability of scales and quantify the internal consistency of a set of items (e.g., items utilised to assess consumers' purchase decisions and ambiguous typeface advertisements), we employed Cronbach's alpha. All the items exhibited a satisfactory coefficient alpha, as indicated in Table 4 of the Appendix.

Data Analysis

Manipulation Check

The respondents' mean score regarding their prior exposure to billboard advertisements was 98%. In order to establish whether there is a statistically significant distinction in the purchase decisions of individuals exposed to highly ambiguous typeface advertisements versus those exposed to low ambiguous typeface advertisements, the following will be done: A t-test was performed to compare typefaces with high ambiguity and typefaces with low ambiguity. The analysis showed a notable disparity in the scores between high ambiguous typefaces ads3 ($M = 139.75$, $SD = .463$) and low ambiguous typefaces ads7 ($M = 107.88$, $SD = 19.11$), indicating a statistically significant difference. The t-test ($t(62) = 4.72$, $p < .001$) confirmed the significance between high ambiguous typefaces ads3 and low ambiguous typefaces ads7. The findings indicate that highly ambiguous typefaces, specifically ad3, significantly impact consumers' choices when making purchases. Our findings indicate that customers are more likely to purchase when they encounter highly ambiguous typefaces. Therefore, it provides assistance or backing. In their study, Schroll et al. (2018) found that using handwritten typefaces as a novel humanization technique creates a sense of human presence. This, in turn, results in more favourable product evaluations and a stronger emotional connection

between consumers and the brand. Nevertheless, it effectively conveys information and messages in a coherent linguistic format. (Refer to Table 3 below).

Table 3: Independent sample t-test for Ambiguous Typefaces (ad3 and 7) (n=64)

Groups	N	Mean	SD	T	P value
High Amb. Typefaces (ad3)	32	139.75	.463	4.72	.001
Low Amb. Typefaces (ad7)	32	107.88	19.11		

Experiment 4

Methods and Materials

Stimuli, Participants and Procedure

In order to investigate and supplement experiments 1, 2, and 3, we used a posttest only between subject design experiments to manipulate ambiguous cues (arguments, images, and typefaces) advertisements into (high vs. low). It will allow the study to determine how (a) ambiguous billboard advertisements influence consumers' purchase decisions and (b) how people exposed to highly ambiguous cue advertisements differ in their purchase decisions. An experiment employing a posttest between-subject design examines the relationship between the ambiguous cues (high and low) of ambiguous advertisements and consumers' purchase decisions. Open to interpretation, the advertisement serves as the independent variable across three dimensions (arguments, visuals, and typefaces), while customers' purchase decisions are the dependent variable. The stimuli for the fourth experiment were intentionally crafted to supplement the findings of experiments 1, 2, and 3. These stimuli synthesised the pre-existing components and depicted a restaurant billboard advertisement. As defined by Philipps & McQuarrie (2004), the visual structure and meaning operations guided the arrangement of elements in a layout, with the degree of complexity influencing the visual structures. The cognitive processing required focuses on meaning operations, which aid in comprehending ambiguity, polysemy, or richness of reference in the visual (Madupu et al., 2013; Chakroun, 2020). By employing fusion as the visual framework and link in the meaning operations, the research will facilitate the interpretations of advertisements by participants in an open-ended and complex manner (Lagerwerf et al., 2012). Ad4 was created by amalgamating ads 1, 2, and 3, utilising arguments, images, and typefaces. As an illustration, a barbecued chicken and the phrase "BBQ Chicken, Less Cholesterol, Taste Great, Healthier" were placed on the skulls of a couple to represent their heads. The misspelling "GRreat" was intentionally used to stimulate cognitive thinking. We employed a fusion and connection technique to merge two disparate entities. As an illustration, a grilled chicken was placed on top of the heads of a pair of individuals to resemble their heads. Ad8 was developed through the fusion of low ambiguous Ads 5, 6, and 7, effectively conveying an individual's intentions and emotions regarding past, present, and future events (Small & Verrochi, 2009; Guido et al., 2019). The objective was to produce low ambiguous advertisements that do not elicit emotional attachments in the absence of intricate variation or complexity. We employed an identical methodology in experiment 1 to authenticate the stimuli used in this experiment.

Figure 5: High ambiguous cues (Ad4)



Low ambiguous cues (Ad8)



Source: own elaboration

Procedure

The two treatment conditions were assigned to participants using the urn randomization procedure, which ensures that all participants have an equal chance of being selected (Van der Pas, 2019; Wei & Lachin, 1988). We employed the same methodology as experiment 1 to present the test stimuli to participants and gather data.

The two billboard commercials were displayed on the projector screen in the relevant halls in the following sequence: first on March 13, 2023. Nevertheless, advertisements 4 and 8 were displayed in halls 1 and 2, respectively. Traffic (sound effect SFX: city traffic) backdrop sound was used to simulate the appearance of billboard advertisements on the highway as the participants in their respective groups viewed a still image inserted into the projector. Every participant was subjected to a 10-minute watching session, and a questionnaire would be given to them afterwards. They completed the questionnaire in around 15 minutes. After finishing, the participants were given a detailed explanation of the task and allowed to go.

Participants

Two treatment conditions were for the 72 postgraduate students and academic staff who responded to equivocal cue advertisements (36 high and 36 low). We employed the identical methodology applied in experiment 1 to recruit postgraduate students and academic staff from four public universities. We identified these individuals as potential participants for this study by leveraging diverse social media channels inside the institution. In addition, all participants were mandated to complete personal information inquiries to ascertain their trial eligibility. Only postgraduate students or academic personnel are eligible to participate in the project.

Measures

The combined items underwent evaluation using twenty-five subclass items obtained from the works of Larasati and Yasa (2017), Fortenberry and McGoldrick (2020), and Meyer et al. (2018), which included arguments, images, and typefaces. For instance, "Based on your familiarity with the compelling message displayed on the billboard advertisement you encountered, what rating would you assign to your decision?" The variable to determine customers' buying decisions was evaluated using four subclass scales derived from goods (Karimi et al., 2015). For instance, "Do you make purchases based on the information you have assessed from billboard advertisements?" The items were assessed using a 7-point extreme adjectival bipolar scale, ranging from likely to unlikely. Cronbach's alpha was employed to assess the reliability of scales and evaluate the internal consistency of items, such as those used to measure ambiguous advertisements and

customers' purchasing decisions. All the items are represented with a suitable coefficient alpha, as indicated in Table 5 of the Appendix.

Data Analysis

Manipulation Checks

To verify the manipulation's effectiveness, the participants reported a 96% recognition rate when asked if they had previously encountered a billboard commercial. A one-way ANOVA was conducted to determine if there is a notable distinction in purchase decisions between individuals exposed to highly ambiguous advertisements and those exposed to low ambiguous advertisements. The mean differences of the independent variables were compared to investigate the impact of ambiguous cues on consumers' purchase decisions. Between the eight advertisement groups, the result demonstrated a significant effect and distinction ($F(7,56) = 55.82, p.001$). As a result, the P value is lower than the alpha value of 0.05. Therefore, we can conclude that the hypothesis (H4) is supported, which states that there is a significant difference in consumer purchase decisions between those exposed to highly ambiguous cues (arguments ad1, images ad2, typefaces ad3, ad4) and those exposed to low ambiguous cues (arguments ad5, images ad6, typefaces ad7, ad8). However, Jakesch & Leder (2009), Muth et al. (2015), Flavell et al. (2020), Szubielska et al. (2021), and Neta et al. (2021) have discovered that ambiguity is valued when an object represents subjective meanings and possesses a high level of ambiguity. They observed that the ambiguous object's aesthetic qualities elicit a stronger sense of preference and admiration. (Refer to Table 4 displayed below).

Table 4: One-way Analysis of Variances for Ambiguous Cues (n=72)

Factors	N	Mean	SD	F	P value
Arguments					
High (ad1)	9	194.25	2.38	55.82	.001
Low (ad5)	9	140.13	23.75		
Images					
High (ad2)	9	144.13	1.98	22.74	
Low (ad6)	9	70.63	22.74		
Typefaces					
High (ad3)	9	139.75	.473	19.11	
Low (ad7)	9	107.88	19.11		
Combine					
High (ad4)	9	181.13	1.36	20.07	
Low (ad8)	9	108.25	20.07		

Source: own elaboration

Even though the ANOVA test indicates a significant difference, a Dunnett Post Hoc comparison test was performed to confirm the existence of a significant difference among the treatment levels of the eight advertisement conditions. The results of the comparison test showed the average scores for high ambiguous cues advertisement conditions: ad1 (n = 9, M = 194.25, SD = 2.38), ad2 (n = 9, M = 144.13, SD = 1.98), ad3 (n = 9, M = 139.75, SD = .437), and ad4 (n = 9, M = 181.13, SD = 1.36) compared to low ambiguous cues advertisement conditions: ad5 (n = 9, M = 140.13, SD = 23.75), ad6 (n = 9, M = 70.63, SD = 22.74), ad7 (n = 9, M = 107.88, SD = 19.11), and ad8 (n = 9, M = 108.25, SD = 20.07). The findings indicate that advertisements with highly ambiguous cues significantly influence customers' purchasing decisions due to

humans' inclination towards intricate, inventive, and artistic departure notions, particularly in advertising. It provides evidence for the validity of H5. The findings of this study support the idea that ambiguous advertisements can influence consumers to make more positive purchase decisions. It aligns with previous research conducted by Fitts (2010) and Konovalova & Petrova (2022) on the impact of ambiguous advertisements. These studies found that ambiguous advertisements can influence opinions about alcohol consumption, but they may not have a significant effect on actual behavioural intentions unless there is prolonged exposure. The overall impact of exposure to alcohol promotion influenced attractiveness. Li & Wagner (2020) contend that an individual's prior knowledge of the context, subjective beliefs, and external factors impact their interpretation of insufficient and ambiguous information, affecting their likelihood of behavioural change. (Refer to Table 5 below).

Table 5: Dunnett Post Hoc Comparison for Ambiguous Cues (n=72)

Conditions	I Amb.(H)	J Amb.(L)	Mean Diff (I-J)	Std. Error	P-V	95% Confidence Interval	
						Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Amb. Arg.	Ad1	Ad5	54.12500*	7.626	.001	30.117	78.133
Amb. Imag.	Ad2	Ad6	73.50000*	7.626	.001	49.492	97.508
Amb. Type.	Ad3	Ad7	31.87500*	7.626	.001	7.867	55.883
Amb. Comb.	Ad4	Ad8	72.87500*	7.626	.001	48.867	96.883

Note: * indicated significant difference at .05 *p* value. H-is the high ambiguous and L is the low ambiguous.

Source: own elaboration

Discussion and recommendations

The visual characteristics of billboard advertising primarily determine a brand message's attention-getting effectiveness and long-term success. We devised a research design to examine the impact advertisements' ambiguous cues have on consumers' purchasing decisions. In four experiments, participants were shown eight ambiguous restaurant billboard advertisements to determine the effect of ambiguous advertisements on consumers' purchasing decisions. The results indicated that advertisements with high ambiguous cues (ad1, ad2, ad3, and ad4) exhibited a statistically significant improvement over advertisements with low ambiguity cues (ad5, ad6, ad7, and ad8).

Individuals who were subjected to highly ambiguous arguments made more favourable purchase decisions than those who were exposed to low ambiguous arguments, according to the findings of Experiment 1. It showed the prospect of increased purchase decisions when people are exposed to highly ambiguous arguments and advertisements. The participants perceived the brand message's relevance, actuality, accuracy, and comprehensive nature. One prospect is that complexity encourages adaptive investigative behaviour by awakening curiosity about the relevant presentation in our environment (Sun & Firestone, 2021). Moreover, Breves's (2021) study discovered that individuals experiencing high dimensional or spatial presence assessed the content of messages more positively because of heuristic processing. Therefore, when an argument has an undertone of unconventional or artful deviation embedded while encoding the

message, there is a likelihood for the audience to decode using heuristics to save time and energy and abandon the systematic process of scrutinising a message.

The findings of the second experiment indicated that individuals who were exposed to advertisements featuring highly ambiguous images made more favourable purchase decisions than those who were exposed to advertisements featuring low levels of ambiguity. The results indicate that complex and ambiguous graphics, such as ad2, significantly impact consumers' purchasing choices. It is because the intricacy of the image interacts with individuals, triggering psychological and physiological tendencies related to consumption, which can ultimately lead to positive behaviour. The participants regarded the advertisement as innovative and impactful, influencing their choice to purchase. The current study's findings align with previous research conducted by Keesman et al. (2016), which established that saliva production increases in response to appetising and appealing food signals; two experiments were conducted to support this conclusion. The visual presentation of food images significantly impacts the desire of high-quality consumers to eat. This effect is subtle but can have far-reaching consequences, as it influences the sensory evaluation of the food and encourages consumers to engage with the physical appearance of the advertised images (Keesman et al., 2016).

The third experiment's findings indicated that individuals exposed to advertisements featuring highly ambiguous typefaces made more favourable purchase decisions than those who were exposed to advertisements featuring low ambiguity. The findings indicate that typefaces with high ambiguity (ad3) clearly impact customers' buying decisions. The present results align with previous research conducted by Wagner & Charinsarn (2021), Nedeljković et al. (2017), and Beier et al. (2017). These studies demonstrated that characteristics such as unique letters, deviations from the overall lightness or skeleton structure, emphasis on specific features, and swashed elements significantly influence readability compared to reversed letter strokes or shading. Moreover, a potential outcome is that complexity stimulates adaptive exploratory behaviour by fostering interest regarding the pertinent stimuli in our surroundings (Sun & Firestone, 2021).

Experiment 4 demonstrated that those exposed to highly ambiguous advertisements were more inclined to make favourable purchasing decisions than those exposed to low ambiguous advertisements. The present results build upon the findings of prior research conducted by Fitts (2010) and Konovalova & Petrova (2022), which examined the impacts of ambiguous advertisement exposure. Those studies established that while minimal exposure to ambiguous advertisements may influence attitudes towards alcohol consumption, it does not necessarily affect behavioural intentions. The overall impact of alcohol advertisements on desirability was influenced by exposure to ambiguous posters, which unexpectedly improved desirability and understanding more than clear posters. This finding contradicts the assumption that ambiguity hampers comprehension.

In summary, the findings from four experiments support the notion that ambiguous advertisements elicit specific psychological perceptions. This suggests that when individuals are exposed to highly ambiguous advertisements, it results in more favourable purchase decisions due to the interactions between the crucial visual elements and the brand message displayed on the billboard advertising. The study's findings emphasised that ambiguous cues effectively stimulate perceived power and enhance engagement, ultimately positively impacting individuals' decision-making regarding the brand message. The components of the cue's impacts were once again validated when they were incorporated into billboard commercials in experiment

4, resulting in a notable impact on consumer purchase decisions as participants expressed a greater inclination towards favourable buy choices.

In particular, our research indicates that ambiguous advertisements influence purchase decisions more positively due to their novelty, complexity, and irresolvable cues (such as arguments, images, and typefaces), which generate ambiguity and openness and enable different interpretations and meanings by the individual. The advertisements elicit a provocative perception that engages with the viewer's sensory faculties during the cognitive processing of visual stimuli (Lee & Lim, 2020). Moreover, the results of the current study confirmed Zekiri's earlier findings (2019). The study revealed that billboard advertising is helpful for vendors and promoters due to its extensive coverage and cost efficiency. Furthermore, picture, texture, and position are crucial in billboard advertisements as they significantly influence buyers' attention.

Theoretical implication

Billboard advertising is structured according to two distinct scenarios: the strategic ambiguity situation and the elaboration likelihood model. However, billboards typically contain limited information and rely heavily on images over words. The study utilised the elaboration likelihood model in conjunction with strategic ambiguity as a theoretical framework to investigate the impact of ambiguous cues on consumers' purchase decisions. The efficacy of the elaboration likelihood model in facilitating researchers' comprehension of the various pathways through which consumers are influenced has been consistently demonstrated. Meanwhile, organisations employ strategic ambiguity as a means of communication to achieve various objectives by creating expansion, transparency, and various meanings and interpretations. Put simply, motivation serves as the intermediary factor that elucidates the desire and the individuals' fundamental need to understand and derive meaning from their experiences in the advertisement.

According to the study's findings, consumers who were exposed to highly ambiguous advertisements made more favourable purchase decisions due to the novelty, complexity, insolubility, artistic deviation, and originality. The findings indicated that when consumers saw extremely ambiguous arguments in ad 1, they were more likely to make favourable purchasing decisions. On the other hand, it was likely due to the advertisements' relevancy, correctness, timeliness, and the consumers' understanding of the message. The high ambiguous cue pictures ad2, typefaces ad3, and ad4 exhibited positive mean scores, signifying a notable distinction from the low ambiguous cues ad6, ad7, and ad8. The billboard carefully employs ambiguous clues to foster various perceptions and meanings, serving many organisational objectives. A substantial impact on consumers' purchasing decisions resulted from adding ambiguous cues and particular attributes (images, arguments, and typefaces) to the theories. The occurrence may be attributed to consumers' inclination towards artistic variation, novelty, intricacy, and the inherent indecipherability of confusing signals. The multifaceted signals (arguments, images, and typefaces) embody the fundamental artistic and influential elements of billboard advertising and the efficacy of brand messaging. Hence, the results proved that ambiguous cues favourably impact customers' buying decisions. Furthermore, the utilisation of ambiguous cues such as arguments, images, and typefaces can be categorised into the two routes of the Elaboration Likelihood Model (ELM). This approach has effectively captured customers' attention towards the brand message. It achieves this by strategically employing ambiguity to generate several interpretations and foster a sense of openness.

Practical Implication

The findings of this study could serve as guidelines to facilitate the creation of billboard advertisements that will communicate diversity across the different facets of consumers to achieve unity of purpose in a particular advertisement. Especially in a multiracial environment, advertising has not been an easy adventure given that different ideologies present complex demands, and harmonising this ideology could be possible through artful deviation, creativity, and ambiguous cues that resonate with the audience, which facilitates harmonising the ideology and communication effectively towards the common goal of the organisation.

The empirical evidence of this study provided an opportunity for managers and advertisers to leverage ambiguous cues to differentiate and create a niche for their brand that sustains consumers, achieves loyalty, and increases profitability and market share when consumers' attention is intact. The rhetorical manipulation of linguistic and visual properties makes the difference from one ad to another based on consumers' sophistication and demands. Practitioners must embrace an ambiguous stimulus to increase their earnings and advertising accounts.

The result of this research will facilitate understanding the effects of ambiguous cues on consumers' purchase decisions. It will enable the managers to dive deep into the audience demographics to explore their preferences, lifestyles, and consumption patterns, which form a bicorn of promoting unified diversity and appeals that cut across the entire ideology. As the clutter of advertising media exponentially increases, attention-getting is becoming a frustrating event, given that so much advertising media is creating and executing advertisements. The managers can maximise consumers' attention to the brand by creatively applying ambiguous cues that resonate with the audience in their brand message and advertisement with humorous words, which sustains their interest and recall of the brand and enables them to break through the advertising media clutter.

Limitations and future research

The study encountered some limitations. Firstly, there needs to be more literature because ambiguity is a concept most scholars avoid because of strategic clarity. Second, assembling a large number of respondents over a quiet period was stressful, given the weather conditions and the COVID-19 situation, which affected the planned procedure in a significant way. Third, there are methodological limitations because this study used post-test-only between-subject designs, limiting the possibilities of more advanced data collection and analysis because of its nature. The post-test only between subject designs did not permit pre-test and repeated measures in data analysis, which would have given another perspective in the data collection and analysis. Finally, future studies could employ more sophisticated methods like repeated measures and eye-tracking devices that will guarantee more robust findings and valid data, as the case may be.

Conclusion

Billboard advertisements possess the capability to exert an influence on consumer purchasing decisions through the utilization of ambiguous cues. The function of advertising is exceedingly significant as it permits the differentiation of products and entices consumers. The AIDA advertising theory posits that attention and

interest are pivotal factors that impact consumers' propensity to purchase. By employing critical discourse analysis to scrutinize the linguistic characteristics discovered in billboards, we can unveil how advertising manipulates and modifies consumers' ideologies. Roadside digital billboard advertising aims to allure potential customers and optimize commercial profit. External indications, including ambiguous cues, possess the potential to affect consumers' evaluations of a product initially but can subsequently augment assessments of quality, particularly in the context of repeat purchases. Therefore, equivocal cues in billboard advertising can have immediate and enduring effects on consumer purchasing decisions.

Compliance with Ethics Guideline

This work is part of the ongoing work approved by JKEUPM in February 2022 and does not involve any procedure that will be harmful to human or animal subjects.

Consent to Participate: Participants are given relevant project information, including legal data protection information, in a form they can retain indefinitely. Participants have the right to ask a question on any part of this study that is not clear. Participants can withdraw from any part of the study if he/she wish to withdraw.

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