

A COMPARISON OF THE LISTERINE CORRECTIVE ADVERTISEMENT  
WITH SPECIALLY DESIGNED CORRECTIVE MESSAGES

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Abstract

There are seven empirical research studies on the Listerine corrective advertising campaign, the first such campaign ordered by the courts. Five of these studies were conducted in experimental settings, and the two studied the actual corrective advertising campaign in a real world environment. This paper presents the results of research which attempts to link the "experimental world" to the "real world" by comparing the effectiveness of previously tested hypothetical corrective ads with the "real" corrective ad copied from national TV.

Introduction

Listerine was the first litigated case containing a corrective advertising order (prior corrective orders were issued in consent agreement). The circuit Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia upheld the use of corrective advertising by the FTC. The message "Listerine will not prevent colds or sore throats or lessen their severity" was required in every future advertisement for Listerine until \$10 million worth of advertising had been spent. The U.S. Supreme Court refused to hear the case making this decision final. Warner-Lambert used a previous non-deceptive Listerine ad with the corrective message spliced in according to the court decision: In TV spots, it (corrective message) must appear simultaneously in both audio and visual portions with no background music or sounds. The effectiveness of this message in erasing residual deception was questioned by some researchers. This study is an effort to test the effectiveness of this real TV corrective advertisement versus the "two-sided objective information" corrective messages (see Armstrong, Gurol, and Russ, 1979) tested previously in a laboratory setting.

Methodology

Subjects were divided into three groups. Each group was assembled in a laboratory setting and shown various combinations of filmed ads--deceptive and corrective ads for Listerine and irrelevant ads for other products. Salient Deception Score (SDS) measures were taken at two points ( $M_1$  and  $M_2$ ). The main dependent variable in this experiment was an SDS. An SDS was calculated for every false claim by multiplying the belief score of every subject by that subject's salience score and summing over the three false claims in the questionnaire.

Results

Analysis of the data allows for tentative conclusions on several issues concerning the impact of corrective advertising. 1. The level of deception was reduced significantly in all three groups that received versions of corrective ads. The mean SDS scores and analysis of mean SDS changes are shown in Tables 1 and 2. 2. There appears to be no significant difference between the level of correction produced by the real company ad versus the levels of correction produced by the FTC source ad. (Table 2, row 4). 3. The correction effects of the three different corrective messages were due to the changes in different components of the SDS scores. (Table 2, column 4).

Conclusions and Implications

This study produced more evidence about various aspect of the controversial corrective advertising remedy of the FTC. First, the real corrective ad was found to be as effective as the other corrective ads in eradicating the residual effects of deceptive Listerine advertising. Since the real corrective ad was essentially a previous Listerine commercial about bad breath prevention with the FTC-ordered corrective spliced into it, consumers may not be expected to notice the corrective claims in the ad they had previously seen many times. However, in an experimental setting, subjects had to pay attention to the whole message and, perhaps as a result of this forced exposure, the buried message was equally effective. The real world studies of Armstrong, Gurol, and Russ (1981) and Mazis (1981) give support to this speculation. After an 18-month-long corrective campaign, the first group of researchers found only 21% reduction in salient beliefs and the second survey showed an 11% decrease in beliefs and a 6% reduction in saliences. This indicated that, in the real world, correcting false beliefs is difficult, particularly when the false beliefs are long held or when personal experience may be perceived as supporting false beliefs.

These results suggest the importance of re-examining the relationship between the FTC and advertisers. For the FTC, the alternatives to the current situation would be either to get tougher and more specific (about standards and remedies) or to get out and leave all but the regulation of explicit false advertising to industry self regulation or policing by the affected competitors.

For references write authors.

TABLE 1 -- MEAN SALIENT DECEPTION SCORES

Group	Post-deception measure ( $M_1$ )	Post-correction measure ( $M_2$ )	Changes in SDSs between $M_1$ and $M_2$
1. Real corrective ad	8.125	3.125	5.000
2. Company-source corrective ad	5.333	1.429	3.905
3. FTC-source corrective ad	8.182	2.364	5.818

TABLE 2 -- ANALYSIS OF MEAN SDS CHANGES

Groups	Salient Deception Score	Salience	Belief
Group I	3.71 <sup>b</sup>	3.37 <sup>b</sup>	2.73 <sup>a</sup>
Group II	3.14 <sup>b</sup>	4.69 <sup>c</sup>	2.79 <sup>a</sup>
Group III	3.49 <sup>b</sup>	1.34	3.94 <sup>b</sup>
Group I vs. Group III	.38		
	ap < .05	b <sub>p</sub> < .01	c <sub>p</sub> < .001