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Paige Scro

University of North Texas, pscro81@gmail.com

Tammy R. Kinley

University of North Texas, tkinley@unt.edu

Lynn Brandon

University of North Texas, Lynn.Brandon@unt.edu

Sanjukta Pookulangara

University of North Texas, sanjukta.pookulangara@unt.edu

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Slogan Word Count and Cosmetics Purchase Behavior

Paige Scro, Tammy R. Kinley, Lynn Brandon & Sanjukta Pookulangara
University of North Texas

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Product branding is the start of the connection to a consumer; the promise indicating a differentiation from competing brands. Part of this communication is the use of a slogan, defined as a phrase “singled out for emphasis in advertisements” (Strutton & Roswinanto, 2014, p. 282). In short, a slogan is a short statement that communicates information about the brand, used to help with brand identification. Ideally, slogans inspire lasting impressions and favorable memories about specific attributes or values delivered by the associated brand (Brierley, 2002).

We sought to determine whether the length of a slogan was an influential factor on the participant’s motivation to purchase a cosmetic or skincare product (hereinafter “cosmetics”). The cosmetics industry in the United States is a \$42 billion dollar business on a stable growth trend (“Cosmetic &...,” 2017), comprised of several thousands of brands; making the competition for the customer’s attention fierce.

Methodology. To generate a list of slogans currently used in cosmetics advertising, we created a master list compiled from current magazines and websites, resulting in 24 slogans, which were classified as precise (≤ 4 words) or vague (≥ 5 words), consistent with the methodology of Strutton and Roswinanto (2014). A Qualtrics survey using a snowball technique (TenHouten, 2017) was deployed. Each section of the survey featured six slogans: three vague and three precise, varied in order of presentation. No special fonts, graphics, or color were incorporated, per Strutton and Roswinanto, and no slogans were used more than once in the survey.

Results. There were 208 usable surveys (84.90%). Participants had a mean age of 34 (range= 19–85), most were female (90.9%) and Caucasian (77.9%). Participants indicated they spend an average of \$53.77 on cosmetics each month (range= \$0-\$500).

Slogan Recall. Respondents were first asked to recall six slogans to which they had previously been exposed in a quiz format. Most respondents (77.23%) correctly identified the precise slogans (468 correct responses) and the vague slogans (77.86%) (472 correct responses). The recall rate was virtually the same for both categories, with the vague brand slogans eliciting a slightly higher correct slogan recall rate. To address the confounder of familiarity, correct responses by Frequent (purchase weekly or monthly, $n=97$), and Infrequent Purchasers (purchase < 12 times per year, $n=105$) were compared. Participants were given a vague and a precise score, reflecting the number of slogans they correctly identified. ANOVA did not compute any significant differences between the groups for either the vague ($F=.019, p=.892$) or precise ($F=1.40, p=.239$) slogan categories.

In an attempt to understand underlying factors affecting recall of precise and vague slogans, ANOVA was computed to compare scores for slogan recall by slogan memorability aspects (length, meaning, emotion, and creativity). A significant result was computed for precise brand slogans ($F=6.717, p<.0001$). Scheffe post-hoc analysis indicated the respondents who felt

“creativity” was the element that made slogans memorable indicated the least number of correct answers when identifying precise brand slogans.

Brand Awareness. 53% of the participants indicated that they were “moderately/very/extremely familiar” with cosmetic brands in general. Analysis of the means indicates that participants were more aware of precise ($M^1=3.74$) over vague slogans ($M^1=4.34$). Did the general familiarity with cosmetics affect the awareness of brands? Participants were divided into two groups: Familiar (66.8% - those indicating “extremely/very/moderately” familiar with cosmetic brands), and Unfamiliar (31.9% - “slightly/not familiar at all”). ANOVA indicated general familiarity was found to affect awareness in both vague ($F=4.935, p<.05$) and precise slogan categories ($F=18.617, p<.05$). Those who were more familiar with cosmetic brands were more aware of slogans in both categories.

Brand Recall. The responses to the six brand recall questions were averaged, creating a single variable for each of the six brands tested. Simple analysis of the means indicates that vague brands were more easily recalled ($M^1=2.65$ vs. $M^1=2.70$). Did the general familiarity with cosmetics brands affect the recall of brands, based on slogan construction? The brand recall scales were collapsed into two variables in which all of the responses to the precise (vague) slogans were averaged resulting in two new variables: Recall-Vague and Recall-Precise. ANOVA computed significant results for recall of both vague ($F=7.415, p<.01$) and precise brand slogans ($F=7.214, p<.01$). Comparison of the mean scores indicated that general familiarity was found to affect awareness in both slogan categories.

Purchase Intention. The participants were asked to answer two questions for each brand that addressed their purchase interest and purchase intention of the brand based on the slogan. Comparison of the mean scores indicated that general purchase interest was greater in vague brand slogans ($M^1=2.86$ vs. $M^1=3.00$) as was purchase intent ($M^1=3.38$ vs. $M^1=3.63$).

Discussion. About half of the sample indicated they are frequent cosmetic purchasers and about two-thirds indicated familiarity with cosmetic brands. This familiarity with the product category was indicated in the findings of the study. Generally, there was not a strong effect of slogan length on participants’ recall or awareness regarding cosmetics. Participants were more aware of shorter slogans, but could recall longer ones more easily. An explanation for the ability to recall the longer slogans could be the large marketing budgets for some of the brands, creating greater exposure. While the literature on brand recall suggests that shorter slogans are easier to recall (Kohli et al., 2013), prior research also indicated that there was a positive correlation between advertising exposure and ability to recall a correct brand slogan (Dahlén & Rosengren, 2005).

Participants indicated they were more interested in and intended to purchase products from brands with longer and more complex slogans, perhaps because brand recall was also easier when the slogans were longer. In the context of the present study, slogan length may not be a significant factor in getting and keeping the attention of the target cosmetics customer. These findings indicate that consumers are more aware of brands with shorter slogans, but slogans that are more complex slogans may ultimately be more enticing for purchase.

¹ A lower mean indicates higher awareness.

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