

Alliterative product promotions pique purchasers

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New research shows that promotional messages that use alliteration - the phonetic overlap of the beginnings of words - hold a greater appeal for consumers than non-alliterative messages, even accounting for cost differences.

In "Alliteration Alters: Phonetic Overlap in Promotional Messages Influences Evaluations and Choice," to be published in the March 2016 issue of the *Journal of Retailing*, Marketing Professors Derick F. Davis of the University of Miami's School of Business Administration; Rajesh Bagchi of the Pamplin College of Business at Virginia Tech; and Lauren G. Block of the Zicklin School of Business at Baruch College demonstrate that even alliterative promotional messages that are read, rather than heard, prompt purchasers to prefer them.

"The subvocalization of a word while reading a message activates word sounds, which increases the accessibility of other words with sound overlap," the authors write. Such increased accessibility may facilitate message processing and lead to quicker and more efficient processing.

To investigate their hypothesis, the authors designed several experiments testing the effect of alliteration on such consumer purchasing processes as choice, deal evaluation, and processing speed, independent of price differentials. For instance, in one experiment, a promotion using the alliterative phrase "4 flapjacks \$4.13" was judged "a good deal" more often than promotions for both "4 flapjacks \$3.87" and "4 pancakes \$4.13," a result the authors attributed to the greater processing efficiency

facilitated by phonetic overlap.

In addition, in a small field demonstration at an ice cream shop, the professors promoted an ice cream sundae on successive Saturdays, initially advertising it as a "mega sundae \$5.99" and the next week as a "super sundae \$6.00." The super sundae outsold the mega sundae as a proportion of total sales, by a factor of almost 2.

One key implication for managers, the authors point out, is that to increase sales it is not always necessary to lower prices. "Merely changing the components of the other elements in the message can increase sales," they write. Additionally, the alliterative promotions were successfully pitted against prices ending in \$.99, undercutting the utility of that common marketing strategy.

Provided by Journal of Retailing

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