

## WITH SAMSUNG AND APPLE STARTING IT AGAIN, DOES COMPARATIVE ADVERTISING HELP INCREASE BUSINESS?



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Comparative advertising is an extension of competitive based positioning strategy that helps a company compare the benefits and value it offers to a customer compared to its rivals. Often used in politics to project wrongdoings of opposition parties, this technique has spread out to the

marketing arena where competition is at its peak today. What Samsung and Apple are involved now is a similar campaign to gain individual mileage and supremacy over the smart phones and tablet computer market which they wish to control and dominate in the future.

Comparative advertising would work only if the comparisons portrayed are factual, accurate and capable of substantiation. Any incorrect representation or denigrating experience portrayed could lead to serious damage to the advertiser and back-fire the advertising brand, as clearly evident in the Reebok Pump ad case of early 1990's. In a few countries, comparisons are still seen as inappropriate, and therefore should be avoided. Several surveys have proven that comparative ads also work when the competitor's name is not directly disclosed. These ads are easier for the consumers to understand and are more persuasive for viewers.

Comparative advertising could be effectively used in categories where benefits are rational and there is no direct effect on the emotional state of the consumer. As witnessed in the recent The Hindu vs Times of India case, the results of comparative advertising were positive as both The Hindu and Times of India registered impressive increase for this year in the Indian Readership Survey results released earlier this month. Comparative advertising has evolved to stay and presents an effective option for brands such as Apple and Samsung to create a distinctive image to its consumers in today's competitive market.

Human beings are born while crying for attention, and the same holds true for advertising. Often the cut throat competition between businesses manifests into comparative advertising. But the question is, at what cost are the companies indulging into it?

Comparative advertising is like walking a thin line between ethical and unethical practices. It's easier to poke holes into competitor's product than bringing your product up to the market expectation level. Calling names to competitor's product might give a temporary fillip to a brand at start but it might also end up degrading the company's goodwill and status in the market. This may lead to grave consequences for any business in terms of embarrassment and reputation loss, apart from the likely damages paid to the disgruntled competitor.

If the loyalty of rival's consumers is questioned, comparative advertising might even bomb. Within hours of Samsung's ad being featured, Apple fans mocked it and listed all the features that Samsung had (intentionally!) forgotten. In the Rin Vs Tide ad, the targeted brand -Tide was visible for almost 75% of the ad time. Does it make sense to expose users to your brand rivals even if has been done in an attempt to prove your products superiority? It's not prudent to wake up a strong competitor and challenge it openly; the targeted company might get the benefit of being the poor victim of blatant advertising.

Competitive advertising might seem pragmatic, but trying desperately to shoot a competitor from a point blank range by comparing to it directly might not be a good decision for any company to increase business.



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*“Often the cut throat competition between businesses manifests into comparative advertising.”*

**Topic for the next issue's Eye to Eye: “Should Tatas have used the name Tata Starbucks instead of Starbucks in order to leverage the Tata coffee brand?”**

**Your opinion (view/counterview) is invited. Word limit is 250-300. Last date of sending entries is 18<sup>th</sup> November, 2012. Include your picture (JPEG format) with the entry.**