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**IMPACT OF AMBIGUOUS CUES IN BILLBOARD ADVERTISING ON
CONSUMERS' PURCHASING DECISIONS**

By

NWANKWO OJIONU CHIMEZIEM ELIJAH

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia,
in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

March 2024

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment
of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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Despite the exceptional influence of ambiguous cues in billboard advertisements as discursive resources, ambiguous cues still need to be better conceptualised. This study examines whether high ambiguous (vs low ambiguous) cues increase consumers' predisposition to a more favourable purchase decision. However, to extend this scholarly investigation into the effects of ambiguous cues on consumers' purchase decisions. A sample of 64 postgraduate students and academic staff was drawn for a post-test-only control group with between-subject designs in 2x2x2 ensued into eight conditions. The study revealed several noteworthy findings; first, most respondents had seen a billboard advertisement before, and a significant number had seen billboard advertisements more than 4 to 5 times a week. Second, this study discovered that high ambiguous arguments ad1 significantly influence consumers' purchase decisions more than low ambiguous arguments ad5. Third, high ambiguous images ad2 favourably influenced consumers' purchase decisions more than low ambiguous images ad6. Fourth, the high ambiguous typefaces ad3 favourably influenced consumers' purchase decisions more than low ambiguous typefaces ad7. Fifth, the high ambiguous ad4

influenced more favourable consumers' purchase decisions than the low ambiguous ad

8. Finally, the study showed that high-ambiguous ads influence consumers' purchase decisions more favourably than low-ambiguous ads. Moreover, the motivation was not significant across four experimental conditions. The study tested some of the key predictions of the Elaboration Likelihood Model, Social judgment theory, and Strategic ambiguity models with the cues. It discovered that people are persuaded by central or peripheral routes based on their capacity and perceptions to elaborate and judge. Therefore, it is recommended that managers and practitioners utilize ambiguous cues in billboard advertising to align with the multicultural and multiracial ideology. This will enable them to effectively communicate with various segments of consumers and achieve unity amidst diversity. By doing so, they can capture consumer attention, encourage multiple interpretations, drive favourable behaviours, and ultimately influence purchasing decisions and brand perception. The theoretical framework and future studies pertaining to this topic are thoroughly discussed.

Keyword: Ambiguous cues, ambiguity situation, billboard advertising, consumer purchase decision, digital billboard, out of home advertising

SDG: GOAL 8: Decent work and economic growth, GOAL 9: Industry, innovation and infrastructure

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**IMPAK KETAKSAAN PETUNJUK DALAM PAPAN IKLAN TERHADAP
KEPUTUSAN PEMBELIAN PENGGUNA**

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Walaupun terdapat pengaruh luar biasa petunjuk taksa (samar- samar) dalam iklan papan sebagai iklan sumber wacana, petunjuk taksa masih perlu dikonsepskan dengan lebih baik. Kajian ini mengkaji sama ada petunjuk taksa tinggi (lawan taksa rendah) meningkatkan kecenderungan pengguna kepada keputusan pembelian yang lebih menguntungkan. Dalam pada masa yang sama, kajian ilmiah yang lebih mendalam mengenai kesan petunjuk yang taksa terhadap keputusan pembelian pengguna telah dilakukan. Sampel daripada 64 pelajar pasca siswazah dan kakitangan akademik telah diambil untuk kumpulan kawalan pasca ujian dengan reka bentuk antara subjek dalam 2x2x2 diikuti dengan lapan keadaan. Kajian itu mendedahkan beberapa penemuan penting; pertama, kebanyakan responden menyatakan bahawa mereka pernah melihat iklan papan iklan sebelum ini, dan sebilangan besar telah melihat iklan papan iklan lebih daripada 4 hingga 5 kali seminggu. Kedua, kajian ini mendapati bahawa hujah taksa tinggi ad1 secara signifikan mempengaruhi keputusan pembelian pengguna lebih daripada hujah taksa rendah ad5. Ketiga, imej taksa tinggi ad2 lebih mempengaruhi keputusan pembelian pengguna berbanding iklan imej taksa rendah. Keempat, muka

taip taksa tinggi ad3 lebih mempengaruhi keputusan pembelian pengguna berbanding muka taip taksa rendah ad7. Kelima, iklan taksa tinggi mempengaruhi keputusan pembelian pengguna yang lebih baik daripada iklan taksa rendah ad8. Akhir sekali, kajian menunjukkan bahawa iklan taksa tinggi mempengaruhi keputusan pembelian pengguna dengan lebih baik berbanding iklan taksa rendah. Selain itu, motivasi tidak signifikan dalam empat keadaan eksperimen tersebut. Kajian ini menguji beberapa ramalan utama Model Kemungkinan Penghuraian (Elaboration Likelihood Model), teori Pertimbangan Sosial (Social Judgement) dan model Kekaburan Strategik dengan petunjuk (Strategic ambiguity models with the cues), dan kami mendapati bahawa orang ramai terpujuk di laluan pusat atau laluan pinggiran dengan berdasarkan kapasiti dan persepsi mereka untuk menghurai dan menilai. Oleh itu, disyorkan bahawa pengurus dan pengamal menggunakan petunjuk yang taksa dalam pengiklanan papan iklan untuk menyelaraskan dengan ideologi berbilang budaya dan kaum. Ini akan membolehkan komunikasi secara berkesan dengan pelbagai segmen pengguna dan mencapai perpaduan dalam kepelbagaian. Dengan berbuat demikian, mereka boleh menarik perhatian pengguna, menggalakkan tafsiran yang pelbagai, mendorong tingkah laku yang menggalakkan, dan akhirnya mempengaruhi keputusan pembelian dan persepsi jenama. Rangka kerja teori dan kajian masa depan yang berkaitan dengan topik ini telah dibincangkan dengan teliti.

Kata kunci: Kesamaran petunjuk, situasi kabur, pengiklanan papan iklan, keputusan pembelian penguin, pengiklanan papan iklan digital, pengiklanan luar

SDG: MATLAMAT 8: Pekerjaan yang sesuai dan Pembangunan ekonomi, MATLAMAT 9: Industri, inovasi dan infrastruktur

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

a	(Cronbach's) Alpha
AIDA	Attention Interest Desire Action
AIDAR	Attention Interest Desire Action Retention
AVOVA	Analysis of Variance
DOOH	Digital Out of Home
ELM	Elaboration Likelihood Model
E-WOM	Electronic Word of Mouth
M	Means
MCLP	Maximal Covering Location Problem
N	Number of participant
OAAA	Out of home Advertising Association of America
SD	Standard Deviation
SE	Standard Error
SMIs	Social Media Influencers
SPSS	Statistical Package for Social Sciences

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Overview of study

The ultimate aim of billboard advertising is to grab the attention of the audience, influence their buying decisions, and encourage them to keep coming back for more. This is achieved by using various visual and rhetorical elements in the advertising campaign. Billboard advertising is highly effective in creating brand awareness, targeting mobile consumers, conveying concise messages, and engaging with consumers across different locations (Fortenberry & McGoldrick, 2019). In addition, billboard advertising is designed to stand out among competitors and attract positive attention to a brand. This is accomplished through carefully crafted language, appealing imagery, and a distinctive design that sets the brand apart from others (Manian, 2021; Eisenberg, 1984; Simonovic & Taber, 2023). However, it has become a trusted and credible form of advertising, as consumers associate it with large, well-known companies. This perception has led to a shift in consumer behaviour, with more people preferring to buy products and services advertised on billboards (Vlasenko et al., 2021; Yassin, 2023).

According to Urban et al. (2020), a billboard is a large format advertising display designed for viewing from more than 50 feet and is frequently seen in high-traffic locations where it may be viewed and accessed by the public regularly. The billboard capacity to be noticed and make a powerful impression is its visibility and consistency;

24 hours in the public space is one of the exceptional features of a billboard advertisement. The billboard-advertising tendency to reach out to diverse motorists and pedestrians with the most eye-catching large visuals and readable messages, which guarantees market segmentation, penetration, product differentiation and creation of a communicative setting among consumers (Wibowo & Ardianto, 2020). Accordingly, Wang et al. (2022), Lichtenthal, Yadav & Donthu (2005) averred that billboard advertising explicitly provides exposure within the public space and landscape. It is noteworthy that billboard advertising has drawn considerable consumers' attention to a brand and successfully influenced favourable behaviour towards the brand. This type of advertising is in various forms, pictures, written or spoken messages, billboards, street furniture, and transit. Billboard advertising favourably promotes promotional messaging on a large scale to crucial and congested regions (Batubara, 2021).

The recent downward trend affecting traditional media expenditure because of social media advancement; has yet to impact billboard advertisements, given the competitive nature and lack of substitute for billboard advertising among emerging media advertisements. Out of home advertising has increasingly occupied primary public space, traffics, enhancing mobility, providing coverage and capturing the attention of passers-by (Thomas, 2015; Roux and Wald, 2014). Remarkably, the global contribution of outdoors advertising has constantly increased, irrespective of the setbacks experienced by other traditional media segments in recent years. The Out of Home Association of America (OOAA) special issues on OOH and the global ads economy, August 2019, reported that OOH revenue has been increasing for the past nine-years (2010-2018), an annual 4.1 per cent increase per year amounting to the sum of \$31 billion in 2018. The reason for this revenue increase is because (1) consumers

are mobile and OOH remains the most vital means of attracting their attention in heavy traffic all over the world and (2) immersed technological adaptation of OOH with its displays, which has utilized available public space (OAAA, 2022).

In a similar report, Magna advertising reported an incremental growth in the global advertisement spending based on Magna advertising forecast winter 2019 update, and the topmost countries reported significant growth. For example, US 5 per cent, China 9 per cent, Russia 7 per cent, India 13 per cent, UK 7 per cent, Germany 2 per cent. Some countries witnessed a downward trend in 2019 due to political uncertainty and fiscal effects (Asia and Latam), Peru, Chile, Malaysia, Vietnam, and Lebanon (Magna, 2021). However, Wang & Yao (2020) stated that billboards are the most resourceful outdoor advertisements because of their efficiency, eye-catching, and creativity compared to other out of home ads.



Figure 1.1: Electronic Billboard ads
(Source: Ledtronic.com.my)

Social judgement theory plays a crucial role in shaping the effectiveness of advertising campaigns by influencing consumer perceptions and behaviours (Asemah & Nwammuo, 2017; Tripathi & Chaturvedi, 2024; Glassman, 2015). Understanding this

theory helps advertisers tailor persuasive strategies that resonate with consumers, leading to increased brand loyalty and positive responses to advertisements (Han et al., 2020). By utilizing social judgement theory, advertisers can design campaigns that align with consumers' attitudes and beliefs, ultimately impacting their buying decisions (Yu & Noh, 2024). Research suggests that campaigns based on norms falling within the latitude of noncommitment, as predicted by social judgement theory, are likely to be more effective in bridging the gap between perceived and actual behaviours. Therefore, incorporating social judgement theory principles into advertising campaigns can enhance their impact by appealing to consumers' cognitive and emotional responses.

Mainly, advertisers and companies intentionally use ambiguous cues such as polysemy, tropes and unconventional wording arrangements to differentiate their brand from others, which is communicated through rhetorical devices, such as phrases, gestures, images, digital effects and colours that differ in meaning from one individual to another. For example, “hot spicy burger, the best candy, big, strong and reliable (Kokemuller, 2021). The ambiguous cues are imagery over arguments and the nonappearance of sufficient information, thereby invoking multiple interpretations across various individuals (Han & Hong-Lim, 2015; Gordon & Wu, 2015; Eisenberg, 1984).

Conversely, Csonka-Peeren & Cozzarin (2021) established that ambiguity extends the idea of uncertainty by expressing settings in which outcomes and their likelihoods are unknown and uncertain, and it has been widely defined as perceived missing information or insufficiency of information over a context. Besides, Sumelius et al.

(2020) indicated that strategic ambiguity obscures the clarification of the message for the recipient. It is regarded as purposeful or strategic utilisation of messages with extraordinary levels of abstraction while achieving multiple and often conflicting organisational goals. In that view, the message initiator can prompt diverse interpretations from various recipients and make the audience have a variety of interpretations, enabling the sender's goal to be achieved. Ambiguity typically comprises the use of vaguely-words, good words for behavioural change (Fitts, 2010).

Although, individuals are in the pursuit of searching for meanings whenever ambiguity is highlighted, which presents newness, complexity, insoluble, subject to questioning and multiple interpretations of the stimuli used (Onifer & Swinney, 1981; Rodd, 2020). Accordingly, McLain (1993), Hancock & Mattick (2020) and Hitsuwari & Nomura (2022) described ambiguity as to the phrase we use to label a perceived information insufficiency on stimulus or environment. Ambiguity is an unconventional gesture with numerous meanings, and in a context is subject to multiple interpretations or categories, that may be ambiguous (Manian, 2021).

The billboard advertisement has been widely used to influence consumers through its messages, images, vast visuals, and location. Therefore, the study examines billboard advertisements' persuasive use of ambiguous cues to influence consumers' purchase decisions. The persuasive use of ambiguous cues offers beneficial consequences regarding theoretical perspectives and research frameworks related to the elaboration likelihood model, heuristic systematic theory and strategic ambiguity situation. Firstly, ambiguous cues are devices or elements used to reinforce or alter behaviour and to drive meanings across different consumers and audiences, which is subject to multiple

interpretations, such as messages (polysemy), imagery, typefaces (fonts and wording arrangements) or excess of imagery over information (Puntoni et al., 2012). The essence of creative manipulation of cues is to create liking and patronage of the brand in question. Secondly, we have identified several elements from extant literature on billboard advertising, thus arguments, images, and typeface, which are essential for examining the effects of ambiguous cues on consumer purchase decisions. Lastly, to conceptualize ambiguous cues theoretically, it is essential to examine the mediating effects of motivation as essential variables that will enable the effects and determination of the relationship between independent variables and the dependent variable. However, ambiguous cues (arguments, images, and typefaces) partially influence consumer purchase decisions through motivation and artful deviation.

Despite the dimensions and space occupied by billboard advertisements, their strategy of concise messages, consisting of nine words alongside striking visuals, presents significant ambiguity. This is primarily because most billboard brand communications need more detailed information regarding the associated products and services. As a result, a comprehensive examination of this approach to ambiguity is warranted. Therefore, the present study aims to understand better the influence of ambiguous cues on consumers' purchase decisions and how consumers exposed to high ambiguous cues differ from those exposed to low ambiguous cues in their purchase decisions. What is expected from ambiguous cues, and what impact do they offer to companies and practitioners? The study will identify consumers' desirability and tolerance of ambiguous cues about their purchase decisions in billboard advertisements.

1.2 Statement of the Research Problem

Billboard advertising is a function of resourcefulness that attracts and engages the general public towards disseminating information, creating ideas and demands, and educating the general public and ultimate consumers with diverse messages and visuals built on good words and mostly ambiguous but irresistible (Idowu et al., 2022). To a certain extent, advertising has caused unprecedented challenges, competition among advertising media, loss of advertising revenue, criticism on the ineffectiveness of executed advertisement and media fragmentation (Pettigrew et al., 2020; Steppat et al., 2022). Moreover, the exponential growth of advertising media worldwide is challenging and causes media clutter.

In particular, the digital media platform penetration and the aggressiveness associated with their emergence in advertising has increased competition and threatened the existence of traditional media. Nevertheless, as the clutter of billboards and other advertising media increases daily, attention-getting is becoming extremely difficult on an executed advertisement. As a result, there is fierce rivalry among advertising media in general. At the same time, ambiguous cues have provided many opportunities for companies to strategically communicate across the different facets of consumers in creative and distinctive marketing communication tactics to facilitate achieving multiple goals for the firms (Chan et al., 2021). Therefore, it is important to study the effects of ambiguous cues on consumers' purchase decisions.

Many studies have utilized the elaboration likelihood model, social judgement theory, and strategic ambiguity theoretical perspective in the context of billboard

advertisements. Examples of these studies include Palmer (2022), Norhabiba (2019), Kim et al. (2018), Petty et al. (2020), and Kuo (2024). These studies have explored various aspects such as print advertisements, ambiguous taglines, electronic word-of-mouth, politics, brand information, attitude and behaviour change, perceived interpretation, and contextual ambiguity.

However, these studies did not incorporate the elaboration likelihood model, social judgement theory, and strategic ambiguity together in their research. In the present study, we aim to integrate the elaboration likelihood model, social judgement theory, and strategic ambiguity to examine the impact of ambiguous cues in billboard advertising on consumers' purchase decisions. Additionally, the Elaboration Likelihood Model investigates the central and peripheral pathways of information processing, which influence consumer behaviour based on different levels of motivation (Ismagilova et al., 2021; Hasan et al., 2022).

The Social judgment theory emphasizes that individuals evaluate and interpret information based on their existing attitudes and beliefs, leading to either acceptance or rejection of the message (Asemah & Nwammuo, 2017). This process of social judgment is influenced by cognitive functions and decision-making processes in the brain, particularly involving the limbic system and frontal lobes (Suddaby et al. 2023).

Additionally, social judgment theory highlights the importance of persuasive strategies in advertising campaigns to influence consumer behavior positively (Li et al., 2024).

Moreover, the use of strategic ambiguity in advertising, such as through ambiguous taglines, stimulates cognitive reflection, brand recognition, and recall. This grants companies the flexibility to modify value propositions and positively influence

consumer attention and behavior. Each framework offers unique perspectives on consumer behavior, with the Elaboration Likelihood Model focusing on processing pathways, the social judgement theory on judgement, perception and cognitive styles, and strategic ambiguity on attention and recall effects. By examining how these theories have been applied in previous studies concerning billboard advertisements, we gain valuable insight into the development of our study and the use of ambiguous cues in billboard content.

On the other hand, advertisers and companies face new challenges and opportunities in effectively communicating with actual consumers and capturing the attention of potential consumers for their brand. As a result, marketing practitioners are under increasing pressure to appeal to consumers in recent times. If an advertisement fails to attract even the slightest amount of attention, it is considered unsuccessful. This is concerning because commerce relies on appeals that can change consumer behavior towards a brand (Fortenberry & McGoldrick, 2020; Labenz et al., 2018). An advertisement that fails to creatively attract consumers' attention is considered a failure (Grigaliunaite & Pileliene, 2016; Campbell, 1995; Shen et al., 2020). Therefore, it is important to investigate unconventional and ambiguous content or elements used in billboard advertisements that can influence consumers' decision-making process towards a brand.



Figure 1.2: Bata company's negative racial ads
(Source: World Buzz)

Nevertheless, a wide variety of businesses need to utilize linguistic and visual features in a more persuasive, innovative, and rhetorical manner to capture the attention and generate meaning for consumers. The sophistication and demands of consumers require creative rhetorical strategies to capture their attention with more than just simple, unpersuasive words. For instance, Bata Malaysia's recent advertising campaign for their "shoes for Indian school children" received a racist backlash from Malaysians due to the lack of important rhetorical elements that would engage different facets of consumers and lead to a positive outcome (Thiagarajan, 2017). Therefore, it is advantageous to pursue multiple goals and encode various meanings into a phrase or campaign. Unfortunately, this aspect has often been overlooked from a practical standpoint (Puntoni et al., 2011). Persuasive advertising relies on creating effective rhetorical situations that drive and facilitate the achievement of the advertisement's objectives without difficulty.

The values and ideology of Malaysia, which are multiracial and multicultural, are complex and diverse. Multicultural values not only represent the country's various

ethnic groups but also encompass the attitudes and behavior of the Malaysian people (Ramli, 2013; Ahmad & Zulkepli, 2019). However, the racial diversity and values associated with these multicultural settings pose significant challenges for billboard advertising. In order to effectively influence consumer behaviour in Malaysia, advertisements must take into consideration the cultural context. For example, using the English language exclusively in ad messages would not be successful in Malaysia as it disregards the national identity, which is highly offensive. Additionally, the use of color is crucial in advertising execution in Malaysia due to the unique cultural meanings and interpretations associated with colors in this multiracial and multicultural society. Colors must be used appropriately, taking into account the accepted cultural norms in Malaysia, such as the association of white with death and red with good luck for the Chinese community (Yusoff, 2018, p.16). It is essential to study how to effectively harmonize the multiracial and multicultural diversity in order to achieve a sense of purpose and enable advertisers to capitalize on the opportunities available to them in Malaysia.

However, consumers have recently been abandoning ads and refusing to engage with them due to companies' indifferent attitudes towards consumer demands. Many consumers feel fearful and confused when making product choices because of the similarity of names, information, and functions. Consequently, numerous consumers or viewers are giving up on advertisements, marketing promotions, and public relations due to the distractions they cause during important programs (Kim & Kim, 2015; Sameti & Khalili, 2017). As this trend continues to escalate, consumers may ultimately boycott products and services, leading to financial losses, insolvency, and business closures.

In addition, consumers are faced with a wide range of products and services that have different names, information, and prices. This can make it challenging for consumers to identify and select the right product or service. The similarity in names, functions, information, and prices poses a significant risk as consumers require assistance in distinguishing between products and services offered by competitors. If this issue persists, it could impact sales and market share, leading potential consumers to switch to alternative products. Consequently, the intense competition in product marketing and similar services has made it difficult to differentiate between products, leaving consumers with the dilemma of choosing between familiar and unfamiliar options. In most cases, this creates a challenge for consumers when trying to make a decision among the numerous available products (Dimova & Mitchell, 2022; Lin et al., 2021; Krešić et al., 2022; Kolyesnikova et al., 2008; Mueller et al., 2010).

Despite previous research efforts on the influence of billboard advertising (Pavlou et al., 2018; Gebreselassie & Bougie, 2018; Zalesinska, 2018; Wang et al., 2018; Zeqir et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2019; Gitelman et al., 2019; Lowery, 2019; Fortenberry & McGoldrick, 2020; Gomez, 2020; Wasserbauer, 2024), these studies have primarily focused on the role of billboard advertisements in attracting consumers' attention. However, there is still a significant gap in the literature regarding the effects of ambiguous cues as discursive resources in billboard advertisements. To date, only a few empirical investigations have been conducted, limiting our scholarly understanding and assessment of ambiguous cues as a discourse and phenomenon of interest. By studying the effects of ambiguous cues, we can gain valuable insights into how billboard advertisements consistently utilize them to influence consumers' purchasing decisions. Furthermore, this research will explore how motivation

enhances the comprehension and processing of these cues, leading to more favorable behavioural changes.

In conclusion, there has been a shift in research regarding the impact of billboard advertisements. This research focuses on factors such as retention, attention, pollution, and distraction. It also explores how billboard advertisements utilize ambiguous cues, rhetorical approaches, and various devices to convey messages. These devices include visual elements like images and typefaces, as well as the use of minimal wording or incomplete information. The relationship between ambiguous cues and consumers' purchasing decisions is important and requires further empirical investigation. Therefore, it is crucial to conduct a study that examines the influence of ambiguous cues in billboard advertisements on consumers' purchasing decisions. As a result, the following research questions have been proposed:

1.3 Research Questions

This study is designed to answer the following specific questions based on theoretical perspectives and extant literature on billboards advertising perceived to be important to this study.

1. How does consumers exposed to high ambiguous arguments (ad1) differ from consumers exposed to low ambiguous arguments (ad5) in their purchase decisions?
2. How does consumers exposed to high ambiguous images (ad2) differ from consumers exposed to low ambiguous images (ad6) in their purchase decisions?
3. How does consumers exposed to high ambiguous typeface (ad3) differ from consumers exposed to low ambiguous typeface (ad7) in their consumer purchase decisions?

4. How does consumers exposed to high ambiguous (ad4) differ from consumers exposed to low ambiguous (ad8) in their consumer purchase decisions?
5. How does consumers exposed to high ambiguous arguments (ad1), images (ad2), typefaces (ad3) and (ad4) differ from consumers exposed to low ambiguous arguments (ad5), images (ad6), and typefaces (ad7) and (ad8) in their consumer purchase decision?
6. Does motivation mediate the relationship between ambiguous cues (ad1 and 5), (ad2 and 6), (ad3 and 7), and (ad4 and 8) and consumer purchase decisions?

1.4 Research Objectives

The study is designed to achieve the following specific objectives based on the theoretical perspective and extant literature on billboards advertising seen to be essential to this study.

1.4.1 General Objective

To examine the impact of ambiguous cues on consumer purchase decisions.

1.4.2 Specific Objectives

1. To identify whether consumers expose to high ambiguous arguments (ad1) differ from consumers exposed to low ambiguous arguments (ad5) in their purchase decision.
2. To determine whether consumers expose to high ambiguous images (ad2) differ from consumers exposed to low ambiguous images (ad6) in their purchase decision.
3. To determine whether consumers expose to high ambiguous typeface (ad3) differ from consumers exposed to low ambiguous typeface (ad7) in their purchase decision.
4. To determine whether consumers expose to high ambiguous (ad4) differ from consumers exposed to low ambiguous (ad8) in their purchase decision.

5. To determine whether consumers exposed to high ambiguous arguments (ad1), images (ad2), typefaces (ad3) and (ad4) differ from consumers exposed to low ambiguous arguments (ad5), images (ad6), typefaces (ad7) and (ad8) in their consumer purchase decision.
6. To determine the mediating effect of motivation on relationship between ambiguous cues (ad1 and 5), (ad2 and 6), (ad3 and 7), and (ad4 and 8) and consumers purchasing decisions.

1.5 Significance of the Study

The study contributes to the existing knowledge of ambiguous cues by facilitating a profound understanding of how it influences a consumer's purchase decision through their creative application in various contexts.

Firstly, the study contributes by providing useful insights to the practitioners on the creative application of ambiguous cues, designed to communicate and capture the attention of consumers of different facets through humour words, which sustains their interest and recall of the brand. The simplicity of ads and their stimuli is not persuasive and discourages consumers. As a result, they are eluding ads because of their non-creative approaches in their presentation. The study will highlight the creative use of ambiguous cues to break the clutter and capture consumers' attention to the brand. The practitioners and companies will understand how to creatively communicate to consumers across different facets, create dilation and meaning to achieve wholistic goals of the organisation. In addition, it will enable practitioners to understand the creative application of ambiguous cues to achieve attention and profitability. The rhetorical manipulation of linguistic and visual properties makes the difference from one ad to another based on consumers' sophistication and demands. Practitioners need to embrace an ambiguous stimulus, increasing their earnings and advertising accounts.

Secondly, the contribution of this study is offering recommendations for managers and companies on how to leverage on the most powerful tool (ambiguous cues) to capture the attention of multi-facet consumers and to create a niche for their brand and sustain them creatively over their products and services. Also, having the essential tools to sustain consumers, achieve loyalty and increase profitability and market share when consumers' attention is intact. The billboard advertisement is one of the most effective means of attracting potential consumers to the product by using unconventional approaches and application of ambiguous stimuli in billboards advertisement.

Thirdly, this study contributes by highlighting strategies on how practitioners and managers can stimulate consumers desire to buy the brand after watching the advertisement by using words, images reasonably and creatively to convey the most convincing advertising message in the shortest time as to achieve efficient brand goals with slogans and visual elements that is memorable.

Fourth, the theoretical contribution of this research is by extending the literature on ambiguous cues in billboard advertising. The existing literature does not focus on ambiguous cues in billboard advertising or the effects of ambiguous cues in billboard advertising on consumers' purchase decisions, somewhat different perspectives of strategic ambiguity and billboards. For example, they revealed that ambiguous advertisement plays a crucial role in alcohol consumption but with minimal exposure, not necessarily behavioural intention (Fitts, 2010).

Fifth, the study contribute by the theoretical integration of strategic ambiguity situation and elaboration likelihood model (ELM) will give more insights, and testing both

theories on the context of ambiguous cues' effect on consumer purchasing decisions will produce valuable results. In addition, how consumers comprehend, process cues and examine the various integrated variables influencing consumer purchase decisions. The link between this study, method and the theories will further strengthen the acquisition of knowledge and valuable insights on billboards advertisement consistent use of ambiguous cues to influence consumers' purchase decisions.

Sixth, this study contributes by examining mediating variable effects (motivation) on the relationship between ambiguous cues and consumer purchase decisions. However, motivation is the wiliness to carry out a task. In addition, the method used in this study will contribute to the body of knowledge which will serve as a reference point for other scholars.

Finally, the study will offer valuable insights to the policymakers, regulatory agencies and companies on how to regulate the use of ambiguous cues; knowing that ambiguity is a discursive resource that can be used to create dilation and meaning to achieve multiple goals for the organisation without any incriminating tendencies as earlier debated that ambiguity hinders effective communication.

1.6 Scope of the Study

The study examines billboards advertisement persuasive use of ambiguous cues on consumers' purchase decisions.

The study focuses on the postgraduate students and academic staff of Universiti Putra Malaysia because the postgraduate student and academic staff have a purchasing power that applies to the entire study population. In addition, purchasing power is considered very important in answering the research questions and achieving the aims of this study.

However, the study is a quantitative with true experimental research post-test-only control group and between-subject design in a 2x2x2 design (three independent variables in two levels). That will enable the study to test the effects of ambiguous cues treatment (arguments, images and typeface) on consumers' purchase decisions. The participants will be randomised into two groups (experimental and control groups). The process will enable the study to eliminate bias towards examining the effect of ambiguous cues on the consumers' purchase decisions. Additionally, the experimental group and control will view different ads based on their treatment on the screen before completing the test question. Similarly, the study will be carried out in a controlled environment at the faculty of modern languages and communication to enable the study to achieve its validity on the effect of ambiguous cues consumers purchases decisions.

The consideration of the purchasing power held by the population of postgraduate students and academic staff is an essential aspect to be taken into account in this particular study. It is important to highlight that a notable portion of these individuals possess professional expertise, which exerts a significant influence on their patterns of consumption. Additionally, they have also been exposed to a variety of billboard advertisements, which mirrors the wider population that is being investigated. The

Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication possesses a spacious hall or laboratory that is equipped with a convenient pathway, an exceptional projection screen, an audio system, and an admirable air circulation system.

The data that will be produced from the examination will be examined by employing SPSS, descriptive and inferential statistics in order to facilitate the accomplishment of the study's objectives and to provide solutions for the research questions.

1.7 Keywords Definition

The conceptual and operational definitions are:

1.7.1 Ambiguity Tolerance

Ambiguity tolerance is an individual ability to accept or desirability of sets of unclear and insufficient information in a context. It is an individual's disposition towards recognising and reacting to ambiguous situations or inducements considered through an assortment of new, complex, or unpredictable evidence (Xu & Tracey, 2014).

1.7.2 Ambiguous Cues

Ambiguous cues are devices or elements used to reinforce behaviour subject to multiple interpretations or meanings in a special message (Puntoni et al., 2012).

1.7.3 Visual Elements

Visual elements of products play a vital role in influencing product choice by modelling the attributes discernment of consumers, which comes in the form of symbols and logos and have played a role towards passing on the message that is interpreted in various ways (Cavallo & Piqueras-Fiszman, 2017).

1.7.4 Consumer Purchase Decision

Consumer purchase decision is a procedure of taking into account decision making process and evaluative practice, procuring information towards a context or brand presented to enable them to fulfil their needs, which involves five distinctive stages; thus, need recognition, information search, and evaluation of alternatives, purchase, and post-purchase stages (Khuong & Duyen, 2016; Hanaysha et al., 2021; Karimi et al., 2015).

1.7.5 Cues

Cues are designed to distract the real scrutiny of a message or context by using elements that are secondary to the context. It is a deliberate effort to hinder perception or perceived judgement of a product by applying numerous visuals and verbal to make the context truly real or fake in the real sense (Ewing et al., 2012).

1.7.6 Out of Home Advertising

Out-of-home (OOH) advertising is an advertising media that occupies public space to disseminate information of a brand to travelling or mobile consumers outside their homes. Out of home advertisements are an advertising instrument that exposes consumers without additional cost to the consumers with compelling visuals built to influence purchase decisions (Geetha et al., 2020).

1.7.7 Ambiguity Situation

A situation that is unclear because of inadequate information cannot be categorised or structured because of the context's novelty, complexity, and insoluble (Budner, 1962).

1.7.8 Advertising

The advertising originated from the "medieval Latin verb" "adventure", meaning to direct one's attention". Every form of paid none personal communication of products, services, or ideas is conveyed to a targeted audience through mass media with an identified sponsor (Neza & Myftaraj, 2016).

1.7.9 Digital Billboards

Digital billboards use LED (light-emitting diode) technology to deliver vibrant presentations that enable rationalised ads content, images, video and animation through computerised inputs. Digital billboards can engage consumers at a particular

spot through the cameras and display ads content based on their demographic settings to mobile audiences (Sisiopiku et al., 2013).

1.8 Summary

The chapter extensively discusses the necessary background of the study in the introduction. It presents a statement of the problem, focusing on the main issues and research questions. The research objectives are also outlined, highlighting the strategies to be used in investigating the overall study approach. Furthermore, the significance of the study is emphasized, detailing the core contributions it will offer. The scope of the study is clarified, indicating the areas it will cover, and key definitions are provided, forming the foundation of the study.

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