

## Creating Distinctiveness & Vividness in Ads Using Isolation Effect: A Case of Cellular Network Providers

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### Abstract

*Events that are incongruent with their prevailing context are usually very well remembered. This fact is often described as the distinctiveness effect (DE). DE has been considered as the basis of subconscious social judgment. This phenomenon can be traced back to the paradigm proposed by Von Restorff. This study is aimed to scrutinize multiple isolation techniques used by the telco companies for attracting consumers. Objective of the study is to clarify, how isolation technique works in ads. Qualitative data has been collected from different cellular officials via group interviews. Data was then transcribed and analyzed. The analysis revealed diverse isolation techniques used by the cellular companies. Ufone focuses primarily on humorous ads. Warid; places itself as the cheapest on voice balance or internet packages. Likewise, Mobilink is effectively using this technique for differentiation strategies. Zong is portraying itself, more as a product for youth. Similarly, Telenor is more focused on odd pricing and bundle pricing at different intervals for isolation. Additionally, they are also placing themselves as a network for remote areas. Results; primarily indicated that all the cellular companies follow the strategy of Von Restorff effect in their products promotion by designing distinctive and creative (ads), which has a significant impact on the consumers behavior.*

**Keywords:** Isolation effect, Von Restorff effect, distinctiveness and uniqueness

### Introduction

Humans tend to remember unique and distinctive things more than ordinary and similar objects (Ajzen, 2001). This effect is named as “Von Restorff effect”. It was first discovered by Hedwig Von Restorff, a German researcher, in 1933. The same principle has also been named as isolation effect, distinctiveness principle (Nelson, 1979), prominence

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effect (Gardner, 1983), environmental salience effects (Taylor and Fiske, 1978), novel pop-out effect, and next-in-line effect (Brenner, 1973).

Von Restorff effect emphasizes on differential attention towards an isolated object among the crowded one. The isolated object stands out like a sore thumb and is remembered more than other objects in the list. After Von Restorff many researchers have conducted research on this phenomenon, and found a positive effect of isolation. Attention is usually captured by salient, novel, surprising, or distinctive stimuli. These may be used to enhance the Von Restorff effect (Taylor and Fiske, 1978). The discovery of Von Restorff effect brought a great change in the marketing field. Marketers and advertisers want their product to look different, unique, and distinctive among all. They air unique ads on television and display unusual visuals on their billboard ads.

#### *Research Question*

How distinctiveness and vividness in ads is used by cellular network providers to create isolation effect?

### **Literature Review**

#### *Era of Attention and Isolation Effect*

Seeking subtle attention is natural to every human being. However, with the revolution in IT and advent of social media, this psyche has become more prevalent. It is both an opportunity and threat to companies and they are spending lots of resources to make their offers more differentiated and unique for subscribers (Kotler, 2008). In order to differentiate them, companies today, are operating more thoughtfully and always strive to find something very exceptional both for sustainability and profitability. For this purpose, Von Restorff effect will be instrumental since it takes on the subject of standing out in the competitive world.

#### *The Von Restorff Effect and Distinctiveness*

Individual parts or items, which are distinctive in relation to their context, can be recalled well than non-distinctive items, such an effect is known as Von Restorff effect. Most psychologists termed this effect as the effect of distinctiveness on memory. (Sarno and Alley, 1997) found that, in comparison with the less distinctive faces, more distinctive faces in an ad are recognized more easily by the viewers. (Garcea, 2009) quoted von Restorff experiments to assess the authenticity of this phenomenon. She found that differentiation always aid in memorizing things. Likewise, Hunt (1995) also explained this phenomenon with a

simple example, which included two lists, one is known as isolated lists 4.5.6.8.2.**T**.5.8.7.6 and the other one is homogeneous list Q.W.E.R.T.Y.U.I. In first list, the word “**T**” is catching the eyes as it is in isolation in the list as compared to the homogeneous list. It has been clarified that in any given number of items, different from the rest of list can be recalled easily. Similarly, in L.S.P.K.**O**.T.W.E.V, the word **O** is more prominent because of its color; these studies suggested that Von Restorff effect has many general forms of distinctiveness, which adds to memorizing (Schmidt, 1991).

The above discussion can be summed up as; distinctiveness enhances the ability to memorize phenomenon. In the same pattern, it has also been found that ‘*serial position*’ and *technology* has an influential effect on the individual's’ ability to recall (Terry, 2005). Serial position effect is the tendency of a person to recall the first and last items in a series more than the items in the middle. Therefore, ‘primacy’ and ‘recency’ in recalling, plays a vital role. To understand the effect of serial position Terry (2005) performed two experiments. In the first experiment a series of commercials were run on television while in second experiment a list of words were shown to the participants to assess the effect of primacy, retention intervals, recency and serial position on memory. The findings revealed that items at the beginning (primacy) and the items at the end (recency) are more likely to be recalled than the items in the middle, hence, validating the effect of serial position. It is now well established that distinctive events are more memorable than the common events (Schmidt, 1991). Sutherland and Sylvester, (2000) stated that keeping all factors (price, quality, design, size, or power) equal for substitutes in the market; advertising play key role in the selection of brand. For example; the commercials of cellular industry in Pakistan; Ufone has always been at the edge because of its humorous flavor in advertisements.

#### *VRE and its Vividness*

Vivid images of anything are better remembered than the inconspicuous ones, (Von 1933, Hunt 1995). Cellular companies have been too innovative in designing hilarious statements, funny faces and cartoons. These components make the advertisements more prominent and eye catching. Isolation may be done by changing the nature of items by means of different fonts, color or background. For example, ABC DEF GHI JKL MNO **@** **&\*** PQR STU and AA BB CC DD EE **FFGG** HH. Placement of red word at position 6 compels the participant to recall quickly. Same is the case with the advertisements; in cigarettes ads, the

warning part is not prominent while the adventure and lifestyle used to be prominent.

### *Creativity in advertising*

Ang and Low, (2000) found that there are three dimensions to a creative ad that are; novelty, meaningful/relevancy and production of positive or affirmative feelings. They also added that attitude towards an ad is positively influenced by innovation. The creation of novel, publicly valued, and socially appreciated products is known to be creativity in the field of psychology. According to Smith and Yang, (2004), there are two primary determinants of creativity. First, it must be unique, imaginative or different; commonly known as 'divergence' and secondly, the divergent item must have some kind of 'relevancy'. A lot of fruitful research has been conducted to explain the dimensions of creativity. Kozbelt, (2005) found that creativity in drawing plays the role of isolation. This study was aimed to examine artistic creation from a problem-solving perspective and to examine closely the strategies that distinguish artists with creative work from those with less creative work. Likewise, Brenner, (1973), explained that recall tended to be best for words that participants had read out themselves (Von Restorff effect).

Novelty; numerous definitions of creativity have been offered by various disciplines, which encompasses a factor named novelty (Ang and Low, 2000). Jackson and Messick, (1965) stated, that a creative product, regardless of what other positive qualities it might possess, novelty should be the first factor in determining its creativity. Heckler and Childers (1992) define "novel ad" as an ad that is not consistent with other ads or ideas of the same product category. Unexpectedness or novelty, meaningfulness or relevancy, and positive or affirmative feelings (emotional content) known to be some of the dimensions of vividness that play a vital role in Von Restorff effect (Ang and Low, 2000).

Emotional content; in assessing whether an ad is creative or not, the content of an ad and its emotional direction is considered important. People respond emotionally to an 'out of the blue stimulus" signifies that emotional reactions will out play any other characteristic. According to Ang and Low, (2000) the contributions of ad creativity appear to be more apparent in Attitude towards an ad ( $A_a$ ) than towards another ad ( $A_B$ ). While creating ads, positive feelings should be the keystone. The results advocate that  $A_a$  is influenced more easily than  $A_B$  and PI by creative rudiments.

Entertaining element; is more likeable in Asian countries, (Gazley et al., 2012). Animations, symbols, lyrics, humor, pictures, color, situations, slogans, celebrities, magical tricks, atypical words, and

images are examples of that novelty or isolation effect. Articulated isolation is more prolific than mere isolation. Using information in advertisements in a unique way may increase recall for the ad as well as for the brand and may lead to the ultimate purchase of that brand. Different advertising agencies applied Von Restorff effect in an effective manner using humor, emotions, adventure, and curiosity etc.

Facial attractiveness; is remembered and recalled more effectively and plays a role of isolation on memory recall and purchase behavior (Chiu and Babcock, 2002). Their results indicated that human resource managers preferred to shortlist attractive females and males (both genders) over the less attractive women and men of the same qualification and experiences.

Novelty and divergence; the two important aspects of creativity, plays an important role of isolation in advertisements (Smith and Yang, 2004). For advertising to be effective; it must stand out and must use attention grabbing techniques. The best known attention grabbing techniques are sex, glamour and humor. Nevertheless, these techniques have its limitation; since it may make the people happy but may not directly address the brand attributes or usefulness. Here, product attributes recall will lead to attitude formation and positive evaluation, both are in turn affected by a brand's advertising (Gardner, 1983).

### **Methodology**

Purpose of this study is to find out different isolation techniques used by cellular companies to attract subscribers. This study is also aimed to explain how distinctiveness and vividness in ads is being incorporated by cellular companies? Being qualitative in nature, in this study semi structured group interviews were conducted. After collection, the data was analyzed through thematic analysis. A total of 10 structured questions were asked from each respondent. Population of the study was sales and marketing people working in different cellular companies. There are five different cellular networks available in Pakistan, namely; Mobilink, Ufone, Warid, Zong, and Telenor. Results of the study and proposed theoretical framework is then compared with the results of different previous research studies.

#### *Analysis of Interviews*

##### **Group A.**

Comprises of franchised support officers and marketing staff of Ufone. When they were asked about how isolation affects the purchase intention/behavior of consumer, they responded that isolation has a positive impact on the consumer's behavior. They further added that Ufone has gained isolation effect through different ways. Some of these

are pricing: like the introduction of Super card. They further added that Ufone has strived to keep its isolation position by offering a vast array of packages like: Daily Offer, 24 hrs. offer (24 ghanstay offer), Daily Chat and SMS offer, Super Call Offer, Location based offers and many more.

Group A, further added that in location based offer, one can get connected with their friends and family members for Rs 3 only. They explained that Ufone is the only Pakistani company that has collaboration with Pakistan Telecom Company limited (PTCL). It is the only national company, and people trust it. They said that Ufone has initiated customer feedback service not only nationwide but throughout the globe. This feedback service has received 'service of the year award'. There is a department that provides door step service 24/7 to the consumers, since 2010. Any customer, who is consuming thousand plus rupees, can become a priority service member and these people do not need to visit their franchise or service office for any problem such as losing a sim or any other network issue. Group A explained, that Ufone management is always thinking of bringing changes in ads to get customers' attention e.g. Ufone ads are funny, entertaining and focused on concept. For ads, Ufone has already signed a contract with celebrities i.e. famous comedian of 3/3 (Teen Batta teen) comedy serial. Ufone management is focusing on how to catch consumer attention by ads and these ads regularly are aired (on-air) on different TV channels at peak timings. It always tries to convey messages in a humorous way to relieve the viewers' tension as well. With regard to the effect of color in isolating the product, Group A briefed, that presently Ufone is using two color schemes, that is orange and green and management is planning to add the silver color as well. Viewing all the strategies combined with branding, color scheme and advertising appeals, Ufone has always tried to enhance isolation effect in order to modify customers' perceptions about the brand by using orange color; that represents color of enthusiasm, entertainment, fun and sports.

#### Group B

Likewise, the sales staff and marketing manager of *Telenor*, Group B was interviewed. They explained how Telenor has introduced different packages to catch consumer's attention in the market? Light has been shed on three major product lines: the consumer packages, value added services, and corporate packages. Consumer packages include the postpaid and prepaid packages; value-added services provide entertainment and information; whereas, corporate packages are for large businesses. For staying in competition Telenor have launched (Telenor easy card) that includes following features;

Telenor has introduced Pora Maheena Offer and On-Net Voice Bundle of Rs 250, which is an example of odd pricing and bundle pricing. They added that Telenor uses both electronic and print media (ads) for recalling effect. For this purpose, celebrities (both genders) have been hired as brand ambassadors of the brand like Ali Zafar, Mehwish Hayat and Asim Mehmood. They explained that every color has its own meaning. Blue color logo is a symbol of balance, movement and change, which represent innovation, while white background represents perfection. They added that yes, primacy and recency affect recalling ability of consumers. They present ads vividly and distinctively. Regarding the isolation compared to competitors they added that 'Mobillink is our main competitor and is the market leader but we are also the fastest growing mobile network in country'.

#### Group C

Interview with the Senior Executives of sales and marketing department of Warid revealed that it offers sims with zero cost (pricing) as sim is their main product. In order to compete and attract more customers, Warid has divided its customers in three different categories, the youngsters, the old age, and the official. Warid's main target is to touch the youngsters and the officials. To attract more customers, Warid provides free sims to its business partners. Warid is attracting its users by providing lowest offers on voice balance or internet packages. The internet bundles like the voice calls, video calls and Skype are available not only nationwide but also internationally. Warid has recently introduced a 'North Bundle' compared to Ufone Super card. Its price is Rs.330 and it offers: 150 minutes off-net, 1000 On-Net minutes, 1000 MB Net and 1000 SMS.

While answering a question they said, "Warid is trying to catch customer's attention by using different unique advertisements". Warid has endorsed Shahid Afridi and Fawad Khan as brand ambassadors for publicity. Shahid Afridi has been assigned for 4G network promotion while Fawad Khan for new packages promotion like LTE (Long Term Evaluation). Regarding the role of color in attracting consumer attention they said that Warid has used two colors for their branding i.e., Red and Blue. Red color represents speed and blue represents the community. The 3G network of Warid is equal to 4G, while it has contracted the world expensive vendor that is Erickson to ensure fast internet speed. Due to high speed of internet, no voice call can be dropped or end. For isolation in advertisement, Warid ads are on air in peak timings that is from 6:00 pm to 11:00 pm. In response to a question they said that facial attractiveness has its value but Warid give priority to gender balance. If

there is one male there must be one female staff. The logic behind this is that users are of both genders and if a female user comes to the office for any problem, she will be facilitated by female staff. User attention can be gained by providing low pricing for long duration.

#### Group D

Interview with the Marketing Manager and sales executives Group D Zong revealed that Zong offers sims with zero cost (pricing). Zong has divided customers in two different categories, the youngsters and officials. Zong is attracting its users by providing lowest offers on internet packages. The internet bundles like the Daily, Weekly, Monthly, Zee world, Social packages and add-ons are available not only nationwide but also throughout the globe. They added that Zong has recently introduced a "Zong Super Load or Zong Super Card" which starts from Rs.30 to 500 and it offers:

Table 1

Bundle Type	Price	On Net Minutes	Off net Minutes	SMS	Internet
Daily Bundle	20	40	4	400	40mb
Weekly	100	350	35	350	150mb
Monthly	250	700	70	700	700mb
Monthly (2)	500	1500	100	1500	1500mb

While answering a question Group D said that Zong is trying to catch consumers' attention by using unique advertisement. It has been observed that people living in rural areas (geography) prefer Zong network as their ads are reflecting the rural culture. Zong is very good in its ad campaigns. Features of Zong ad campaigns are; Criticism on other companies, celebrities, Good packages like break time offer, Very attractive TVC's etc. Regarding the role of color in attracting consumers' attention they told that Zong uses two colors, Blue and Red. The Zong logo is clear with modern approach, it is simple and in italics to show that the company has a progressive and forward lookout, yet it comes out as composed and coherent. The blue background gives the brand a young and fresher look signifying success and security, whereas; the red represents emotions like love and passion. Zong does isolation in advertisements at peak timings. Zong is focused on facial attractiveness especially in ads but gives value to both genders.

#### Group E

Group E, told that Mobillink has introduced USP service that stands for Unique Selling Proposition. USP gives an edge in the market. There was a time when Mobillink was considered as the network of executives and



corporate sector. But now, Mobillink is trying to change this perception and address all class of people. For old age people Mobilink has introduced a daily 75 paise package (pricing) where they can easily talk to Mobilink users for whole day without extra deduction. They further explained, that every color has its psyche and Mobilink has selected two colors that is Red and White. Red is considered a color of passion/energy; it's a color that alerts mind while white is a color that represents purity. So, Red and White depicts that Mobillink is strong, unique but pure.

Regarding isolation in product, they explained that under USP sims have been designed only for Afghan nationals (geography) and stated that Mobillink is the first cellular company who took this initiative for Afghan nationals. Similarly, for national and international remittance, it has introduced the ‘Mobicash’ (technology) system. Now it just takes a few moments to transfer money. Moreover, Mobilink offers different low prices call offers to its users in Afghanistan, China, Dubai, and Saudi Arabia. Mobilink, has invested a huge amount and purchased the Warid company. It has introduced a package for local Peshawar and the user can talk for whole day on 5 rupees only. Mobilink has also introduced branded items like wallets, key chains, and calendar etc., where (gifts) are given to its users.

**Conceptual Framework**

The coded data was then integrated which resulted in the conceptual framework.

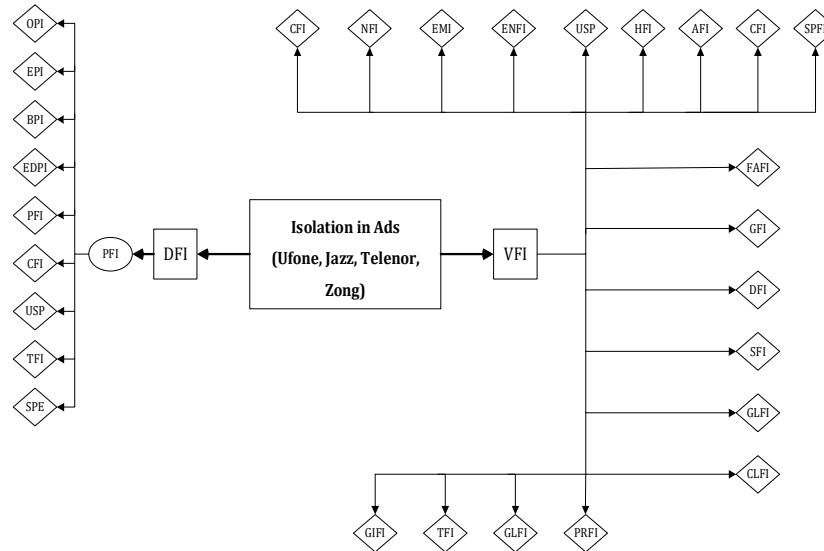


Fig 1 Conceptual Framework

The overall data can be coded as following: Isolation effect =IE, Distinctiveness for isolation=DFI, Pricing for Isolation=PFI, Even Pricing for Isolation=EPI, Odd Pricing for Isolation=OPI, Bundle Pricing for Isolation=BPI, Every Day Low Pricing for Isolation=ELI, Product (innovation) for Isolation=PDI, Color for isolation=CFI, Technology for isolation =TFI, Serial position effect=SPE, Vividness for isolation=VFI, Creativity for Isolation=CRI, Novelty for isolation =NFI, Unique selling proposition and Innovation=USP, Humor for isolation =HFI, Emotions for isolation =EFI, Adventure for isolation=AFI, Curiosity for isolation =CFI, Gender for isolation =GFI, Divergence for isolation =DFI, Entertainment for isolation =ENTFI, Sex for isolation =SFI, Glamour for isolation =GLFI, Celebrity for isolation =CLFI, Sports for isolation =SPFI, Primacy n regency for isolation=PRFI, Geographical location for isolation=GLFI, Time for isolation =TFI, Gifts for isolation =GIFI, Facial attractiveness=FAFI

### **Conclusion**

Interviews of the focal people serving in different cellular companies revealed that the industry is trying to achieve customers' trust and confidence by using multifarious isolation techniques. Results of this study further indicated that Von Restorff has significant impact on the consumers' behavior and ultimately on purchase intention. Cellular industry is continuously bringing innovation in their products and offerings for their sustainability and profitability in the hypercompetitive market. Isolation is either being achieved via unique ads/display unusual visuals on their billboards or unique pricing strategies for the attainment of VRE effect. Moreover, multifarious techniques are being used, encompassing different packages at low prices (penetration strategy). Further, originality plays a vital role in advertisements, which is evident from the study results, that novel and classy ads catch the attention of the consumers. Companies can create their own identity by adopting isolation techniques in conformity with their goals. Hence, Von Restorff effect is one of the best recommended techniques for companies striving to excel.

The main contribution of this research is; it is amongst the very few studies having tried to explore the importance of isolation effect (Von Restorff Effect) in advertisement. This study has also tried to highlight the core areas through which cellular companies can isolate their marketing campaigns from those of competitors by offering a comprehensive framework at the end for guidance. Hence, telecom companies can successfully implement the procedures discussed in the research keeping in view the brand mantra and context and they can come up with novel ideas of advertisements that will isolate them from competitors easily.

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