said to feature a mixture of comparative and non-comparative claims (Barone and Miniard 1999).

Combined Comparatives: Direction and Specificity

One of the goals of comparative advertising is to achieve a specific positioning for the sponsor brand (Wilkie and Farris 1975). Such positioning may be obtained via an associative strategy by which the advertised brand claims to be similar to one of its competitors, usually the market leader (Droge and Darmon 1987; Gorn and Weinberg 1984; Wilkie and Farris 1975). More often, however, comparative ads are designed to emphasize differences between brands (Preston 1994; Goldman 1993; Pechmann and Ratneshwar 1991).

When objective differences between brands are negligible, the challenge rests on advertisers to create an important difference in the mind of consumers. For instance, half of the lawsuits from 1955 to 1989 involving comparative advertising dealt with explicit differential comparisons, while 20 percent involved explicit associative comparisons and 22 percent involved implicit comparisons. In a majority of these cases, the advertisers' attempt at a unique positioning of the brand was unsubstantiated (Felix 1995).

Combined-comparative claims are popular with advertisers because they can efficiently clarify and strengthen a brand's positioning. With combined-comparative claims advertisers can achieve both association and differentiation from the competition. Such advertisements can position the sponsor against various brands or target a single brand with comparative association and differentiation achieved in relation to different attributes (Muehling and Kangun 1985; Barry 1993; Neese and Taylor 1994). The claims are always literally true. Recent legal challenges indicate, however, that advertisers use