familiarity with the product (Harris, Ponds, Maiorelle and Mermis 1993), and even in situations reflective of real-world advertising exposure (Harris et al. 1980). Moreover, message repetition does not significantly affect subjects’ ability to distinguish between pragmatically implied and asserted advertising claims, although repeated training does improve subjects discrimination abilities (Bruno and Harris 1980). These findings suggest that there is a strong tendency for consumers to infer information that is not explicitly stated in advertisements, and to treat the information as if it had been explicitly stated. Because it is based on well-rehearsed communication rules, the normal tendency to generate these inferences is hard to suppress. As a result, people often fail to recognize that beliefs about products or brands are based on inferences rather than facts (Harris, Dubitsky and Bruno 1983).

Summary

Interpretive inferences are likely to be generated on-line given that they require little effort and motivation. Limited knowledge may be required to interpret claims given that the wording of advertising messages makes their meaning unambiguous. When processing of the explicit claims leads to pragmatic inferences, interpretation will reflect the general, abstract meaning from a communication, which may be more influential than the literal content of the message. Moreover, interpretations may be incorporated into consumers’ belief system, becoming impossible for consumers to distinguish between beliefs based on their inferences and beliefs based on presented facts (cf. Johnson and Raye 1981).