CHAPTER 5
IMPLIED SUPERIORITY CLAIMS AS COMBINED COMPARATIVES

As previously discussed, combined comparatives may position the sponsor brand either on par with the competition or as significantly superior. Moreover, such claims may be based on specific attribute information or may be made in the form of general superiority or evaluative statements, even puffery (Pride, Lamb and Pletcher 1979; Neese and Taylor 1994; McDougall 1976; Droge and Darmon 1987). This form of claim is popular with advertisers because it allows them to 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).

Research suggests that suspicions about the potential harm to competitors and consumers from false combined comparative claims are justified. First, comparative claims negatively impact perceptions of the comparison brand (Kamen 1987). A meta-analysis of the comparative advertising literature reports that attitudes towards the comparison brand are less favorable than for the sponsor brand, and that purchase intentions and choice behavior are negatively affected as a result (Grewal, Kavanoor, Fern, Costley and Barnes 1997).