

## Advertising Rivalries and Audience Response: A Case Study of Almaza and Beirut Beer in Lebanon

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### ABSTRACT

Competitive advertising, often built on a sequence of attacks and counterattacks, has become a defining strategy in markets where brands directly vie for consumer loyalty. In Lebanon, this phenomenon is particularly visible in the rivalry between Almaza and Beirut Beer, the two dominant players in the beer industry covering the years 2015-2024. This study investigates how competitive advertising shapes audience engagement by comparing reactions to rivalry-driven campaigns with those generated by standard advertisements. Data were gathered from Facebook and YouTube—two primary platforms for such campaigns—using engagement metrics such as views, likes, comments, and shares. To interpret these findings, four theoretical frameworks are employed: the Values and Lifestyles (VALS) model, framing theory, active audience theory, and identification theory. The analysis shows that competitive advertising stimulates higher audience interaction, especially when the challenger brand positions itself to attract a consumer base that contrasts with its rival's traditional audience. In this context, Beirut Beer, often adopting the role of attacker, leveraged new narratives and lifestyles to appeal to audiences beyond Almaza's established loyal base.

**Keywords:** Competitive Advertising, Brand Rivalry, Lebanon, Audience Engagement, Framing, Active Audience, Identification

### INTRODUCTION

In today's digital marketplace, brands are under constant pressure to sustain a visible and engaging online presence. Social media, in particular, has transformed advertising into a powerful extension of Integrated Marketing Communications (IMC), allowing companies not only to promote products but also to build meaningful connections with their audiences. Storytelling has become central to this process: by weaving narratives into campaigns, brands create emotional resonance, enabling consumers to connect with their values and identity.

Yet, advertising is no longer limited to building bridges between brands and audiences. Increasingly, it functions as a battlefield where direct competitors confront one another for visibility and market share. Competitive advertising—characterized by deliberate attacks and counterattacks—has emerged as a strategy through which brands attempt to highlight their strengths while undermining their rivals. Bonfrer et al. (2004) describe this phenomenon as the exposure of consumers to a focal brand's messaging in juxtaposition with that of competing brands within a short timeframe. In practice, such campaigns leverage contrast, humor, or symbolism to push audiences toward one brand over another.

Prior studies demonstrate that competitive advertising can be an effective way to communicate differentiation and establish superiority (Soscia, Girolamo, & Busacca, 2010). In crowded markets, this approach allows brands to position themselves more aggressively, aiming to secure a larger market share by persuading consumers that their product offers greater value. Internationally, iconic rivalries—such as Scope versus Listerine or Pepsi versus Coca-Cola—have demonstrated how competitive campaigns can energize markets, spark consumer debate, and maintain long-term audience attention (Beard, 2010).

In Lebanon, the dynamics of competitive advertising are especially visible in the beer market. The long-established Brasserie Almaza, founded in 1933, embodies tradition and heritage, holding a symbolic place in Lebanese identity. Its dominance, however, was challenged in 2014 with the launch of Beirut Beer by Kassatly Chtaura. Unlike Almaza, which capitalized on history and patriotism, Beirut Beer entered the scene with fresh storytelling, youthful energy, and a strong digital strategy. By portraying alternative lifestyles and modern values, Beirut Beer positioned itself as a challenger brand, often through implicit and explicit references to Almaza.

Understanding this rivalry requires attention not only to the history of both brands but also to the cultural diversity of Lebanese consumers. On one side, Almaza appeals to audiences who value heritage, tradition, and national pride. On the other, Beirut Beer speaks to younger consumers who embrace openness, individuality, and change. This division creates fertile ground for competitive advertising, as each brand seeks to mobilize its base while potentially attracting audiences that identify more closely with its rival.

For this reason, the present study investigates the effectiveness of competitive advertising in the Lebanese beer market by analyzing how audiences respond to campaigns launched by Almaza and Beirut Beer. Specifically, it explores whether competitive advertising generates higher engagement than standard campaigns, and how cultural, symbolic, and identity-based elements shape these responses.

## HYPOTHESIS

This study examines whether rivalry-driven campaigns outperform standard brand communications in driving audience interaction within Lebanon's beer market.

H1. Competitive advertising (attacks/counterattacks) generates higher engagement—measured by views, likes, comments, and shares—than non-comparative ads on Facebook and YouTube.

H2. Engagement peaks when the challenger reframes category meanings to court an audience that contrasts with the incumbent's core base. In this context, campaigns that position Beirut Beer toward audiences differentiated from Almaza's traditional following are expected to produce the strongest interaction.

These expectations are grounded in the interplay of VALS (audience psychographics), framing (message construction), active audience (decoding), and identification (felt alignment with a brand).

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Advertising rivalry is often described as a “war of ideas,” staged through short, symbolic messages that invite comparison and debate. Classic global cases—Pepsi vs. Coca-Cola, Scope vs. Listerine—illustrate how attacks and responses can energize markets, shift attention, and even correlate with short-term gains when a particular thrust resonates (Echevarria, 2008; Beard, 2010).

Whether and how brands should attack depends on competitive conditions. Research highlights three drivers of reaction likelihood—awareness, motivation, and ability (Steenkamp et al., 2018)—and cautions that power asymmetries matter (Bacharach & Lawler, 1981). Attacking a vastly stronger or weaker opponent can backfire: the former due to resource disadvantage, the latter due to image dilution.

Effectiveness has been evaluated via recall/recognition, brand evaluations, and sales (Bonfrer et al., 2004). Yet, in social media ecosystems, engagement is itself a strategic outcome: rivalry content merges and mobilizes two adjacent audiences around a single thread, increasing visibility and talkability. Though risks exist—legal exposure, reputational backlash, or “boomerang” effects (Meyerowitz, 1985; Brock, 1982)—executives have long acknowledged the upside of publicity shocks (e.g., the earned-media value noted in Moran, 1984). Against this backdrop, examining engagement as a primary performance lens is timely and appropriate for digital-first markets like Lebanon.

Theoretical Framework (VALS • Active Audience • Identification)

*Conceptual spine.* We theorize a pathway in which competitive ads (a) target psychographic segments (VALS), (b) frame contrasts that are easy to notice and decode, (c) are actively interpreted by audiences who recognize the rivalry cues, and (d) invite identification, thereby increasing interaction.

*VALS (Values and Lifestyles).* Psychographics help explain who a rivalry message speaks to and why it sticks. Building on SRI's typology and subsequent elaborations (Niefeld, 1989), challenger brands can select symbols, narratives, and lifestyles that resonate with segments distinct from a rival's base (e.g., youthful, exploratory

“Experientials” vs. tradition-oriented “Belongers”). When a challenger courts an opposite persona, it not only differentiates but also reframes the category.

*Active Audience.* Viewers are not passive recipients; they bring cultural codes, goals, and schemas to interpretation (Biocca, 2012; Livingstone, 2000). Competitive spots are rich with cues—visual echoes of a rival’s identity, wordplay, or cultural references—that reward decoding. When audiences “get the joke” or recognize the jab, they are more likely to comment, share, and debate.

*Identification Theory*

Identification. Following Burke, persuasion accelerates when people can see themselves in a message (Overall, 2017). In brand communities, identification strengthens engagement, trust, and participation (Algesheimer et al., 2005; Bagozzi & Dholakia, 2006; Adjei et al., 2012; Goh, Heng, & Lin, 2013). Rivalry content that aligns with a desired self-image or lifestyle (casting, settings, rituals) invites public displays of allegiance—likes, supportive comments, and shares.

*Framing*

Framing theory explains how ads make contrasts legible (Bateson, 1972; Goffman, 1974). Visuals and copy interact to elevate one meaning while muting another. In rivalry contexts, brands often (1) stage side-by-side contrasts in tone, pace, or setting; (2) borrow or allude to a competitor’s semiotics (colors, slogans, objects) as winks the audience can decode; and (3) characterize user personas (e.g., cosmopolitan vs. traditional) to anchor the contrast (Shimp, 1988; Edell & Staelin, 1983).

In the Lebanese beer case, framing maneuvers typically juxtapose heritage/patriotism with youthful modernity/openness. The analytical question becomes: which frames, and which characterizations, spur audiences to talk back?

**METHODOLOGY**

Design. Observational study of publicly available performance data for Almaza and Beirut Beer video ads from 2015–2024 on Facebook and YouTube (primary long-form platforms for the period).

Sampling & classification.

- Collected brand-posted video ads; excluded reposts by third parties.
- Coded each ad as competitive (direct or indirect reference/contrast to the rival) or standard (no rivalry cues).
- Annotated creative features relevant to theory: symbolic allusions, characterization, lifestyle cues, and apparent target segment (VALS-informed).
- Noted platform, date, and format.

Measures. Engagement = views, likes, comments, shares (as available per platform). Additionally conducted a light comment scan to gauge whether viewers recognized rivalry/framing cues (e.g., explicit mentions of the other brand, culture/lifestyle references, or team-taking language).

Scope note. While both brands increased Instagram activity in/after 2023, Facebook and YouTube remained the consistent repositories of full ads across the window; analysis focuses on these to ensure comparability over time.

**RESULTS**

The comparative analysis of Almaza and Beirut Beer advertisements relied on detailed data collection across Facebook and YouTube, examining metrics such as views, likes, shares, and the tone of audience comments. This process highlighted how audiences responded to competitive campaigns relative to conventional brand advertising. A pattern emerged: Beirut Beer’s rivalry-driven campaigns consistently triggered more audience interaction than standard brand messages. Comments were more numerous, debates more animated, and shares more frequent when ads were framed as challenges or critiques. Even when the reactions were divided—some praising the creativity, others defending Almaza—the very act of choosing sides increased the visibility and resonance of these ads. The titles of the ads and advertising campaigns are translated from Arabic.

**TABLE 1.** AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT ON DIRECT COMPETITIVE ADVERTISEMENT BY BEIRUT BEER ATTACKING ALMAZA – FACEBOOK

Ad	Number of Views	Number of Likes	Number of Comments	Number of Shares
A1	532,000	9,600	442	944
BB1	535,000	3,400	908	736

A1: A Facebook ad posted by Almaza on July 19, 2016, highlights the history of how Almaza first began in Lebanon up until the date posted and gives it the title of “Lebanon’s beer”.

BB1: A direct attacking ad made by Beirut Beer on Almaza's A1 ad, titled "Which country's beer are we?" (using sarcastic Arabic articles) on August 2, 2016, using a similar storyline and the same mood board in the background yet adding a narrator that talks over the actions happening in the background, criticizing Almaza's storyline. Many of the comments on this ad showed a direct understanding of the attack made. Some comments enjoyed the propaganda and showed an interest in the value of this warfare while others chose sides.

Key examples illustrate this dynamic. Almaza's 2016 ad "Lebanon's Beer" (A1) celebrated its heritage, but the follow-up counter-ad by Beirut Beer (BB1: "Which country's beer are we?") sparked significantly more engagement. The use of a mirrored storyline, with sarcastic narration overlaying Almaza's own imagery, made the rivalry explicit and easy for audiences to decode.

**TABLE 2.** AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT ON DIRECT COMPETITIVE ADVERTISEMENT BY BEIRUT BEER ATTACKING ALMAZA – YOUTUBE

Ad	Number of Views	Number of Likes	Number of Comments
BB2	17,000	124	6

BB2: A direct attack called "Be Aware of Imitations" made by Beirut Beer to address Almaza on April 12, 2018, labeling the ad as a direct message to the competitor through a written format before the start of the ad. They wrote a foreword at the beginning of the ad, mentioning its purpose and announcing that the competitor will be called "Mjadra" (a traditional Lebanese dish that is part of the Lebanese culture) to avoid lawsuits. The ad calls out "Mjadra" for copying Beirut Beer's mini-sized bottles which they have previously introduced. Another purpose of the ad was to launch an extra mini-sized bottle. The ad portrays a young, different, and unusual CEO persona to represent Beirut Beer, and a traditional, formal, and well-composed CEO persona to represent Almaza. The ad uses elements that target Almaza and calls it out for copying Beirut Beer and shows Almaza throwing its product at the end. Comments on this ad showed an interest in this marketing campaign, for even consumers of the competing brand acknowledged the effectiveness of this advertising campaign (e.g. "Great job guys u really did well, im also sry because i really think that the mjadra tastes better. But really great job you have my respect!" – via YouTube comments).

**TABLE 3.** AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT ON INDIRECT COMPETITIVE ADVERTISEMENTS BY BEIRUT BEER – YOUTUBE

Ad	Number of Views	Number of Likes	Number of Comments
BB3	36,000	212	10
BB4	21,000	141	2

BB3: An ad called "Mjadra every day?" – one of the initial TVCs made on March 1, 2015, by Beirut Beer to launch their product in the Lebanese market. It used the "Mjadra" nickname which was the first step into labeling Almaza as "Mjadra" in all their next ads. The ad shows users that the habitual "Mjadra" is for people who do not seek change, but there is a new world full of changes, and it is time to try it by choosing to drink Beirut Beer. Many comments acknowledged the creativity of the ad and understood the indirect correlations made by Beirut Beer to indirectly attack Almaza.

Earlier, Beirut Beer's launch ad "Mjadra every day?" (BB3) set the tone for the campaign by playfully assigning Almaza the nickname "Mjadra," a metaphor for routine and lack of change. This motif reappeared in later ads, reinforcing a narrative that Almaza represented tradition while Beirut Beer embodied novelty and openness. Audiences recognized this contrast and many commented directly on its symbolism.

A particularly striking example was "A Beer on the Rise" (BB4), made by Beirut Beer on May 10, 2016, which presented Almaza as the favored older sibling and Beirut Beer as the overlooked younger brother with untapped potential. Rather than denigrating Almaza, Beirut Beer framed itself as the fresh alternative, appealing to viewers who valued fairness and innovation. Comments reflected an appreciation of this metaphor, with some acknowledging the respect paid to Almaza while supporting the challenger's message.

**TABLE 4.** AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT ON INDIRECT COMPETITIVE ADVERTISEMENT BY BEIRUT BEER – YOUTUBE

Ad	Number of Views	Number of Likes	Number of Comments
BB5	12,000	56	1
BB6	31,000	195	7
BB7	6,100	42	3

These ads are part of an advertising campaign titled "A Beer that Has a New Way of Thinking"

BB5: This ad, posted on October 2, 2017, titled "Your hair, son", talks about a young guy with a man bun sitting

with his old father and his old friend. His father is telling him to cut his hair because he is a sound engineer, and sound engineers should look more presentable. The ad ends by saying “You have a new way of thinking, and we support you. Beirut beer, a beer that has a new way of thinking”.

BB6: This ad was posted on September 19, 2017, and titled “Sound Engineer”. It has the same actors as BB5, and both ads are complementary. The father and his friend are questioning whether a sound engineer is a ‘real engineer, and the father feels skeptical and somehow ashamed of his son’s career choices because they are not compatible with famous jobs that he is familiar with. It also ends by saying “You have a new way of thinking, and we support you. Beirut beer, a beer that has a new way of thinking”.

BB7: This ad titled “Your project will not work” and posted on October 9, 2017, includes three guys, two of them telling their friend that his project will not work by quoting famous Arabic sayings. It also ends by saying “You have a new way of thinking, and we support you. Beirut beer, a beer that has a new way of thinking”.

The 2017 campaign “A Beer with a New Way of Thinking” (BB5–BB7) took a more lifestyle-oriented approach, showcasing characters who faced generational conflicts or skepticism about unconventional career choices. By positioning Beirut Beer as the supporter of individuality and rebellion against outdated norms, these ads reinforced identification with younger, trend-seeking audiences. Again, comments revealed recognition of the underlying contrast between the progressive values embodied by Beirut Beer and the traditional image associated with Almaza.

**TABLE 5. AUDIENCE ENGAGEMENT ON NON-COMPETTIVE ADVERTISEMENTS BY BEIRUT BEER – YOUTUBE**

Ad	Number of Views	Number of Likes	Number of Comments
BB8	1,500	9	0
BB9	6,200	26	0
BB10	6,100	36	2

BB8: An ad posted on October 6, 2017, that documents the “Happy Hour Event” organized by Beirut Beer in Mar Mikhael – Beirut.

BB9: The first ad/episode from the advertising campaign titled “The Series” (consisting of 6 parts), posted on April 28, 2017, talks about two young Lebanese advertisers trying to search for the best idea to market Beirut Beer and seek their boss’s approval.

BB10: The last ad/episode from the advertising campaign titled “The Series”, posted on July 10, 2017, shows the two young Lebanese advertisers who finally found the perfect way to advertise Beirut Beer and gained their boss’s approval.

## DISCUSSION

The results confirm that competitive advertising drives higher audience engagement than standard brand campaigns in the Lebanese beer market. In particular, explicit and cleverly framed counterattacks—such as BB1—provoked immediate conversations, fueled by the audience’s recognition of the rivalry. Importantly, this recognition aligns with the active audience theory: viewers were not passive recipients but participants in decoding, debating, and amplifying the message.

Beirut Beer’s effectiveness lies in its strategic framing. By echoing Almaza’s narratives and visual cues but twisting their meaning, Beirut Beer reframed the heritage-driven storyline to resonate with audiences seeking modernity. This demonstrates how framing theory operates in competitive contexts: the same symbols can be reinterpreted to appeal to a different psychographic segment.

Identification further reinforced engagement. In BB5–BB7, for instance, the portrayal of youthful characters resisting conservative expectations allowed Beirut Beer’s audience to “see themselves” in the ads. These narratives tapped into broader cultural tensions between tradition and modernity in Lebanon, giving viewers reasons not just to watch but also to respond and align themselves publicly with one brand or the other.

Notably, Beirut Beer’s campaigns avoided direct disrespect toward Almaza. Instead, they maintained a tone of acknowledgment—referring to Almaza as the “older brother” or “the traditional choice”—while presenting Beirut Beer as the modern alternative. This delicate balance prevented backlash while still creating space for new audience identification.

## CONCLUSION

The evidence suggests that Beirut Beer’s use of competitive advertising significantly enhanced audience engagement on social media. By framing Almaza as a symbol of heritage and positioning itself as the voice of youth, change, and individuality, Beirut Beer succeeded in rallying audiences to interact, debate, and even adopt sides.

This strategy relied on carefully layered rhetorical choices: repetition of symbolic motifs like “Mjadra,” casting

actors who represented contrasting lifestyles, and embedding identification cues that spoke to Lebanon's younger, more unconventional consumers. In doing so, Beirut Beer expanded its relevance beyond the product itself, selling a lifestyle and identity.

The broader implication is that in markets where one brand is entrenched in tradition, challengers may benefit from targeting audiences positioned as the cultural "opposite" of the incumbent's base. Rather than attacking heritage directly, framing an alternative identity allows new audiences to engage actively without alienating those who still respect the traditional brand.

## APPENDIX

A1	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/AlmazaLeb/videos/10153742512236762/">https://www.facebook.com/AlmazaLeb/videos/10153742512236762/</a>
BB1	<a href="https://www.facebook.com/beirutbeerlebanon/videos/1750682595206194/">https://www.facebook.com/beirutbeerlebanon/videos/1750682595206194/</a>
BB2	<a href="https://youtu.be/Hm2pEGCUivA?si=4-8CRKz58ygFLVXj">https://youtu.be/Hm2pEGCUivA?si=4-8CRKz58ygFLVXj</a>
BB3	<a href="https://youtu.be/QZj3NtAbLiU?si=9B0mTKPijHXtNK7y">https://youtu.be/QZj3NtAbLiU?si=9B0mTKPijHXtNK7y</a>
BB4	<a href="https://youtu.be/ggJOTJqVOVQ?si=i9-exoKiFnZA6Eu6">https://youtu.be/ggJOTJqVOVQ?si=i9-exoKiFnZA6Eu6</a>
BB5	<a href="https://youtu.be/_C6D0Eu0B_k?si=N-pB-ike6wBHCGGq">https://youtu.be/_C6D0Eu0B_k?si=N-pB-ike6wBHCGGq</a>
BB6	<a href="https://youtu.be/2bIDIjWgXjw?si=Q8DuR1671w4QjxIB">https://youtu.be/2bIDIjWgXjw?si=Q8DuR1671w4QjxIB</a>
BB7	<a href="https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a6Rb3PeIMas&amp;ab_channel=BeirutBeer">https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=a6Rb3PeIMas&amp;ab_channel=BeirutBeer</a>
BB8	<a href="https://youtu.be/pEhbwAHrum4?si=i4mzr83iI6tPrU7G">https://youtu.be/pEhbwAHrum4?si=i4mzr83iI6tPrU7G</a>
BB9	<a href="https://youtu.be/NQp9W36bMLs?si=-CiVK_RQKfCYvPPG">https://youtu.be/NQp9W36bMLs?si=-CiVK_RQKfCYvPPG</a>
BB10	<a href="https://youtu.be/h2MJP2yWWuI?si=T22WikefqXwIcHB">https://youtu.be/h2MJP2yWWuI?si=T22WikefqXwIcHB</a>

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