IPA

Testing to Destruction

A critical look at the uses of research in advertising

Institute of Practitioners in Advertising

Alan Hedges

Alan Hedges has worked in and around the market research business for 35 years. In the late 60s he became Research and Marketing Director of S H Benson. Benson's was then among the largest British and international agencies, but its name (one of the most established in the business) disappeared from the scene when it was taken over in an asset stripping deal in the early 70s. Since then he has worked as an independent consultant dealing with a wider range of research and planning matters.

Sally Ford-Hutchinson

Sally Ford-Hutchinson has worked in research and planning for 20 years. She joined DMB&B in 1986 becoming Executive Director of Planning and then Global Planning Director. Sally received commendation for her IPA Advertising Effectiveness papers on advertising to reduce pedal cycle and child pedestrian casualties.

Sally is a full member of the MRS and sits on the MRS Council. She is also a Fellow of the IPA and chairs the IPA Marketing Appraisals and Publications Committee.

Mary Stewart-Hunter

After graduating from Girton College, Cambridge, Mary worked briefly in market research before becoming one of a new breed, that of advertising account planner. Following a stint at FCB, she went on to become Head of Planning at Davidson Pearce and in 1988 joined Lowe Howard-Spink in a similar capacity. In 1994, she was made Director of Planning for Lowe Group Europe and became a Vice-Chairman of the agency.

Mary is a Fellow of the IPA and sits on its Marketing Appraisals and Publications Committee. She was a founder member of the Account Planning Group and contributed a chapter on pre-testing to the APG's best selling book, 'How to Plan Advertising'. She is also a full member of the MRS and a member of ESOMAR.

Contents

Foreword

In the early 1970s, the IPA Advertising Evaluation Working Party was set up to consider the role the IPA could play in improving knowledge and skills in the area of advertising evaluation. After some discussion it was decided that the IPAs contribution should be to bring out a book on advertising research.

The original book 'Testing to Destruction' was published not without controversy, in 1974. However, it is a testament to its quality and clarity of thought that it has been continually quoted since that date and is worthy of a second reprint over 20 years later.

It is inevitable in 20 years that there are developments in the theories and practices of advertising research, so to reprint the book without comment would be dismissive of the many excellent articles and papers on the subject. However, Alan Hedges' original book was very much about basic theories and fundamental thinking on advertising so to alter his original work would be detrimental to the clarity of thought. The solution was to reprint the key chapters with a short commentary at the end of each, designed to highlight any relevant changes, papers, articles or techniques. These new commentaries are shaded to differentiate them from Alan Hedges' original text.

Many people have contributed to the development of the book, the original IPA Working Party which developed the book in the early 1970s through to the current members of the IPA Marketing Appraisals and Publications Committee, who have overseen this reprint. However, our deepest thanks go to Sally Ford-Hutchinson and Mary Stewart-Hunter for their work on the contemporary commentary and last, but by no means least, Alan Hedges. This is still his book and we thank him for revisiting it some 20 years later.

Author's preface

September 1974

Although I started out to write a book about research in advertising I have found myself spending most of my time discussing the background against which research has to operate, and very little examining the techniques of enquiry themselves. I have thought very carefully about this, and I think I am right to have done so. What we need urgently in this field is a better and clearer understanding of what we are about. Given this, I am confident that useful improvements in research technique will flow.

But an important part of the case I shall develop is that techniques in this field are *by* their nature not perfectible, and that a longer and broader perspective on the problem will lead to a reordering of priorities and emphases which will effectively cut many of the Gordian knots of the advertising research world.

Let me borrow a metaphor from Edward de Bono. When he introduced his definition of lateral and vertical thinking he pointed out that sharpening and improving the drilling apparatus will not help you to strike oil more quickly if you are drilling in the wrong place.

I think a lot of drilling has been in the wrong place. That is why I spend more time looking round the landscape than fussing about the rig and the cutters.

October 1997

I would have been delighted but astonished when I started writing 25 years ago at the thought that a new edition would emerge to carry my words into the 21st century. I am grateful that the interest and energies of Sally Ford-Hutchinson and Mary Stewart-Hunter have brought this about. I am also very happy to endorse their commentary, which seems both fair and useful in the light of subsequent events.

My own feelings on looking back on the original text is that there is surprisingly little I would want to change in spite of all that has happened since, in communications and in society at large. I think this is because I was trying to write about fundamentals, not about ephemera. On the

surface advertising changes very rapidly, perhaps sometimes even oversensitive to the latest twists of style and fashion. Beneath the shimmering surface public attitudes, values and beliefs change more slowly and beneath that again, the basic dynamics of persuasive communication change very little.

'Testing to Destruction' was born out of a groundswell of changing professional views about advertising and advertising research - evident from the writings of many people like Stephen King and Timothy Joyce. This surge had a big effect on practice over the next couple of decades - among other things it ushered in the planning system, drove out many of the more simplistic approaches to advertisement research and established the developmental approach to advertising which I advocated in the following pages.

So are we now pushing at an open door? I don't think so, for four main reasons:

- Advertising is a difficult business, and each new generation of agency and client personnel has to reinvent the wheel for themselves. The struggle to understand what we are doing and how to do it better needs to go on from week to week and campaign to campaign.

- Over the past 10 years or so we have seen a serious loss of collective confidence in our society - a loss of faith in our ability to shape the future to our own ends, increasing short-termism and a withering of vision and entrepreneurial courage. I see too much defensiveness and pre-occupation with this year's bottom line - and this has recreated a climate in which many managements have once again started looking more for reassurance than for illumination. The desire for accountability, welcome in itself, reasserts the appeal of simple numbers. There has been a regrowth in numbers-based testing services, and although some of these are more sophisticated and potentially more useful than their 1960s forebears the spirit in which they are used sometimes seems worryingly reminiscent of the bad old days.

- Although the growth of planning and creative development research in the late 70s seemed entirely welcome to me, its value depends crucially on how well it's done. It is quite the opposite of a process model in which all you have to do is follow a series of prescribed steps - success comes from the skill, creativity and integrity of the people involved. Professional standards are sometimes impressive, but

I suspect there is also a certain amount of superficial work which plays straight into the hands of those who would like to re-establish advertising research as a nice tidy buttoned-down process. The planning/creative development approach offers the professional freedom necessary to high achievement, but this only works if balanced with high levels of professional discipline and high quality in thought and practice.

- Creativity flourished once freed from the more straitjacketing types of 'test' - but I wonder if it has not sometimes become over-indulgent and narcissistic, when creative virtuosity and striving for attention at all costs takes over from relevance of message. What is the value in attracting attention if you don't have much to say when you get it? I still feel that we do not pay enough attention to the ways in which advertising can be effective at low levels of conscious attention.

For all these reasons the debate about what we're doing needs to go on.

I still stand by what I said in 1974 about there being no simple predictive test. The technology of evaluative research has undoubtedly improved, but I don't believe that its ultimate limitations have lessened. It might well be possible to predict certain types of advertising effect up to a point - but that could be dangerous, since it would tend to shunt advertising towards more 'predictable' types of approach, which may well not be the most effective.

In one respect my book has been a signal failure. I sought to delete the word 'testing' from the advertising research vocabulary. A quarter century on it is still in widespread use. I continue to believe that this often sets up false expectations about what we're doing.

Alan Hedges

About this book

This book is about the ways in which research can help to make advertising expenditure more effective*.

I have tried to make it a practical book which will be useful to the people who are likely to commission and use advertising research as well as to those who may have to carry it out.

I have therefore tried to avoid being abstruse and academic, and I have also tried to do without the kind of jargon which peppers most research books and which comes to act as a substitute, certainly for communication and probably in many cases for thought as well.

At the same time this is not a cookery book full of tried-and-tested recipes which, if followed to the letter, cannot fail to give perfect results every time. Life is just not like that, and advertising certainly isn't. If this book achieves anything it will be by helping people think about what they are doing in fresh, clear and simple terms.

How the book works

Writing a short and simple book about a long and complicated subject is not easy. My main aim has been to keep the discussion brief enough to be of interest to the non-specialist, but a lot of the points I make are also worth exploring in greater depth. I have tried to get round this by dividing the material into sections which progress:

1.   A bald and simple statement of my main conclusions about advertising research. (p 3)

2.   A resume of the general line of argument which leads to these conclusions. (p 9)

3.   The argument in expanded form with more extended discussion of particular issues. (p 17, 23, 35)

4.   A series of notes and short essays on specific topics which support and amplify some of the premises and views on which the

*It is not just about testing advertisements, but about all the ways in which research can (and cannot) make a useful contribution towards improving the effectiveness of advertising.

arguments are based, or which simply explore interesting and relevant problems. (p 57)

Each section contains references to later pages, so that the reader may choose how far he is interested in tracking down a particular line of thought. Some of the references have specific, others only general, relevance.

I hope that this will allow the book to be used at various levels, and that anyone looking for some fairly simple guide lines will be able to get at these without being obliged to wade through pages and pages of supporting material first.

Limitations

In order to limit the field to be covered I have left out all problems relating specifically to the selection of advertising media, although these could, of course, be argued to fall within the scope of 'advertising research'. My concern here is with matters affecting the form and content of advertising.

It would also be possible to write several other books dealing with the differences between consumer and industrial; durable and consumable; high repeat and low repeat; product and service; and many other different types of advertising, not forgetting direct mail. My main focus of attention is on the field of high-repeat, mass-market consumable goods. Some of my remarks clearly will not apply to some other types of advertising. I have tried, however, to put forward broad lines of argument which will have fairly general relevance and interest. There are obvious differences between a company buying a computer system and a housewife buying a can of beans. There are also, less obviously but perhaps more importantly, considerable similarities.

The sober truth about
advertising research

Commentary

In the original book 'Testing to Destruction' Hedges drew some broad conclusions which were both sensible and of real importance. Most of the comments he made then are still pertinent to the advertising scene of today. However, it would be naive to assume that the world of advertising research has not in any way moved on. There have been real developments both in methodology and, perhaps even more important in the understanding of advertising and the thinking which surrounds its development. Within this chapter the approach that has been taken is one of incorporating Hedges' original conclusions within an expanded section.

Some broad conclusions

Conclusion 1

IT IS NOT POSSIBLE TO MAKE A REALISTIC TEST OF THE EFFECTIVENESS OF A COMMERCIAL IN A LABORATORY SITUATION IN ADVANCE OF REAL-LIFE EXPOSURE.
Until this simple but uncomfortable truth is grasped much advertising research will go on being sterile and unproductive. (p 9-12)

Commentary

The first conclusion that Hedges makes is, in its purest sense, still absolutely valid. Perhaps now what the evidence suggests is that if advertising research were a percentage game then the odds have been improved slightly. The evidence from some of the advertising research agencies cannot be ignored, but it is itself limited. Some of it suggests that predictability is dependent on the desired effect being a short term one. Predicting whether 'new news' will be communicated by a commercial and have a subsequent effect on sales would appear to be much easier than predicting the longer and broader effect of advertising so well demonstrated post the event by a number of the IPA Advertising Effectiveness case histories. Also, while useful, the prediction of a subsequent advertising measure such as the Millward Brown Awareness Index is not necessarily a prediction of a real market place effect.

THE MOST IMPORTANT CONTRIBUTION THAT RESEARCH CAN MAKE TO INCREASING THE SELLING EFFECTIVENESS OF ADVERTISING IS AT THE PLANNING STAGE BEFORE ANYONE HAS EVEN BEGUN TO THINK ABOUT PARTICULAR ADVERTISING IDEAS.

Research can heighten our understanding of the market and of the consumer so that we can better define the job that advertising has to do and the climate in which it has to operate. If this is done properly it not only guides and stimulates the creative process but also provides a much better basis for eventual decisions about the likely worth of a campaign. (p 12, 14)

Commentary

This would seem to be a conclusion that must have been learnt over the past decades, particularly with the development of the active and independent planning discipline. Early research is vital if we are really going to understand our markets and our consumers and if we are to have a clear idea of how advertising might deliver genuine value for money or, in simple terms, work. Early research can guide and stimulate the creative process, it can ensure that the sweat of the brow given by creative departments is not wasted in the wrong direction. Strategic research or research that inputs to strategic development is the 'stock in trade' of the account planner. If all this is so obvious, and surely it must be, then why is there a tendency for research to be telescoped, for strategic conclusions to be reached by testing creative ideas?[1] It would seem that Hedges' conclusions need relearning.

ONCE WORK STARTS ON SPECIFIC ADVERTISING IDEAS THE ROLE OF RESEARCH IS TO PROVIDE A FEEDBACK FROM THE CONSUMER ENABLING THE CREATORS AND MANAGERS OF ADVERTISING TO LEARN ABOUT THE PROPERTIES OF DIFFERENT IDEAS AND APPROACHES.

Feedback helps us to choose and modify ideas at an early stage, and what we learn from this campaign development process helps provide a basis for eventual management decisions about the advertising. Research at this stage should be done early on, before ideas and attitudes harden and while there

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[1] *See: Is the right research being used? Out of the gold fish bowl: can advertising research ever replicate reality?* Wendy Gordon, Admap February 1997.

is still time, freedom and money to benefit properly from what has been learned. Research should be rich and stimulating, and should aim at increasing understanding. (p 13, 14)

Commentary

The important word in this conclusion is 'feedback' Research does not make decisions, it requires interpretation, it needs to be added to the sum of knowledge for relevant and wise decisions to be made. Judgement is important. Undoubtedly the use of research to gain feedback has grown and the interest and the desire for managers to be involved in the process has also grown. Advertisers increasingly want to feel close to their consumers, to listen to them speak and to listen to them react. The growth of the viewing facilities for the conducting and viewing of research is testament to this development. The desire to be in contact with consumers is an admirable one but there is one downside. The viewing of one group discussion by inexperienced personnel frequently results in on the spot conclusions becoming the guide for action. Research requires interpretation and some contemplation, it also needs to be considered as only a part of the information gathering process and certainly only a part of the thinking process. Perhaps all viewing facilities should have a health warning "one respondent's comment does not a conclusion make". Also, perhaps, rigorous thinking should not be forgotten in the pursuit of the best consumer quote.

Conclusion 4

ONCE THE CAMPAIGN IS RUNNING RESEARCH CAN HELP TO SHOW HOW FAR OBJECTIVES ARE BEING MET AND TO REDEFINE THE OBJECTIVES FOR THE FUTURE.
This can be a very valuable function which eventually leads back into the planning phase for the next campaign. On the other hand it rarely gives a clear picture of the effects of advertising in isolation since these are usually difficult (or impossible) to disentangle from the effects of other selling efforts, or indeed from the general flux of the market place. (p 13, 14)

Commentary

Hedges emphasises the usefulness of this and outlines specifically its value as it is fed back into the beginning of the planning cycle. However, he also talks about the impossibility of isolating the effects of advertising. No-one is denying that doing just that is very difficult, anyone who has tried or even succeeded in writing

an IPA Effectiveness paper will agree with the thought, but many papers have been written and many cases for the effectiveness of advertising have been proven, so it is not an impossible task. What has changed since Hedges first wrote is that the use of modelling techniques have become both more sophisticated and paradoxically more simplistic. More sophisticated in their statistical rigour but more simplistic as they are sometimes simple predictions compared with observations of data and then combined with other evidence to reach a weight of evidence argument.

Some Questions and Answers

Question **Can research do anything to prove that my advertising money has been well spent?**

Answer Very little in a direct sense - although the more you know about what goes on the better placed you are to make intelligent judgements about whether your advertising has worked for you – but judgements they will remain. (p 11-14)

Question **Can research *prove* to me whether or not a particular ad will be effective before I run it?**

Answer No it can't. This is a judgement which you are paid to make, having heard the advice and arguments of your agency. Research *can* help you to understand what the strengths and what are the weaknesses of a particular ad or treatment; and to understand the market background against which the campaign has to work. The final decision is yours, however, and you have to accept that it must be taken against a background of very incomplete and imperfect information – like most other business judgements. (p 9-12)

Question **Is there then nothing which research can do to help me get better value for my advertising pound?**

Answer Yes, a great deal. It can give you better knowledge of your market and your consumer, which will help you to define much more closely the job which your advertising has to do, and the background against which it has to do it. That in turn makes it more likely that you will get the right kind of advertising

produced, and makes it easier for you to decide whether it is likely to hit the target you have set.

Then research can put you, and the people who are creating your advertising, in much closer touch with the people you are trying to reach. It can give you some feedback on likely reactions and on possible problems. All this helps you to improve your advertising, and also puts you in a better position to make judgements about what to run.

Finally, once your campaign is running, research can monitor changes in consumer behaviour, awareness and attitudes. This not only helps you to judge the effectiveness of your campaign in relation to its objectives, it helps you to redefine objectives for the development of the campaign, or for later campaigns, as the market situation (and your brand's position) changes. (p12-14) Research of all these kinds properly carried out and properly used can be invaluable.

Commentary

It is in the area of demonstrating the contribution that advertising can make and its value for money or return on investment that perhaps show the greatest changes since the original book. The development of massive data bases, the growth of direct response advertising, the greater use of tracking studies rather than the once beloved pre post test, of how advertising might work[2] and the need to demonstrate to financial directors the worth of advertising, have all led to the use of research to demonstrate the effect of advertising. Similarly the rapid growth in data about the various media means that much finer judgements can be made about where the advertising might be best placed. However, if marketeers believe that there is one piece of research that can prove to them whether an ad will be effective in the market place or one piece of research that will categorically tell them that they have achieved the best return in the market place then Hedges is still right in emphasising that this is not the case, that judgement is vital, that research can only inform judgement but that it can help to make that judgement infinitely better.

[2]*See: Where is the 'scientific method' in the measurement of advertising effect?*
Terry Prue, Admap, December 1987.

Advertising research

in perspective

We do not know in any specific sense how advertising works. We are not likely ever to come up with a simple yet useful formula. Advertising is an extremely complex process, and different campaigns certainly 'work' in very different ways.

However, we can improve our perspective on advertising and our working understanding of the sort of things its does, and the ways it does them. (p 17, 23)

It is dangerous to study advertising as a self-contained system, since we can easily become 'advertising oriented' and lose the perspective of the market place. The key to a better understanding of advertising is by approaching it from the perspective of the consumer rather than that of advertiser or agency. (p 17, 23, 28)

Looked at from the advertiser's end of the telescope consumers are too often seen as being rational, orderly, goal-directed beings, intent on improving their decision-making performance in the advertiser's field or market. (p 17, 18)

In practice consumers are faced with a bewildering array of possible consumer decisions, all of which have to be taken in a state of very incomplete and suspect information. The risk attaching to a 'wrong' decision is generally seen to be minimal. In order to cope with this array of buying and consuming decisions three main types of mechanism are used to enable the majority of decisions to be taken at a very low level of conscious attention: (p 17-21)

Habituation: Buying decisions are routinised. Patterns of activity which have been found to be reasonably satisfactory are fixed on and become more-or-less automatic.

Imagery: Information about products is not normally processed piece-by-piece in any systematic or orderly fashion. Masses of impressions are stored and drawn on in the form of broad pictures or images which can be referred to or

9

compared more or less instantaneously as a basis for
choosing between options (or at an earlier stage throwing
up areas in which such choices have to be made).

Clustering: Buying decisions often tend to be taken in clusters, not
singly. Thus a housewife may decide to serve a given menu,
from which a number of subsequent buying decisions may
flow more-or-less automatically. (p 17-21, 23, 24)

Consumers develop what might be called 'flexible strategies' for shedding
the decision-making load while maintaining reasonable results.

That is to say that people develop a kind of routine approach to each
particular market which enables them to deal with purchasing decisions at
a low level of consciousness without fixing on totally rigid patterns of
behaviour which might prevent them from taking advantage of changing
local circumstances. (p 17-21)

People typically buy a number of brands rather than remaining loyal to
one only. They may well have a set of acceptable brands within which they
will shop. However, there will be a long-run disposition to buy certain
brands, which will affect the frequency with which each is bought.
Increasing or maintaining this frequency (rather than switching people in a
total way from one brand to another) is one of main tasks of advertising.
The strength and importance of these long-run dispositions will vary from
market to market. These varying strengths are one of the most important
characteristics of any market. (p 18-20, 25, 26)

Consumers' habits and images will tend to evolve loosely towards a better
fit with objective reality in the longer term (which is why objectively
better products tend to win out eventually). However, they will not
generally worry much about goodness of fit in the short term, providing
that the products and brands they buy perform adequately.

In fact consumers often operate irrationally and inconsistently. They may
stick to their habits even in the face of superior options because it is
simpler to do so, or because they do not have the time or interest to
reappraise their practices. They will generally be content with things
which are "good enough" and will not necessarily expend much effort
searching for "the best". (p 20, 21)

Advertising from the consumer standpoint is a vast and shifting mosaic of
impressions and pieces of information. Occasionally a particular
advertisement may be consciously attended to, either because of some
intrinsic fascination in the form of the advertisement itself or because the

content or subject matter seems important. Attention of this kind is likely to be the exception rather than the rule and much of the effect of advertising must be at a very low level of consciousness at which impressions 'rub-off' to become part of the vast store available to the individual for image-making. (p 20, 23-25, 29)

Thus, although advertising may sometimes be designed to (or may happen to) influence immediate purchasing, the most significant part of its effect in many cases will be its longer-term contribution to the way in which the brand is seen and valued by the consumer. (p 18, 19, 23-26)

There is no reason to suppose that in the general case advertising which is consciously noticed and thought about is any more effective than advertising which is not. (p 20, 23-26, 29)

The most we can say is that the advertising which succeeds best at seeding relevant and useful impressions is likely to be the most effective. But we cannot assume that these impressions will necessarily be either received or stored at a high level of consciousness. (p 21, 23-31)

The kinds of impression which will be 'relevant and useful' (and hence effective) will vary:

- from each market to market, depending on the nature and state of each market.

- from brand to brand within a market, depending on their respective positions and characteristics.

- from time to time even for a given brand within a given market, depending on the state of play. (p 21, 23, 25-29, 36)

It is therefore axiomatically impossible to say that advertising which does such-and-such will be effective, since effectiveness depends mainly on suitability of the advertising to the occasion and not on its own intrinsic properties.

There is no way of 'testing' an advertisement in advance of market place exposure which gives you a simple yet reliable guide to the effectiveness of the advertisement in question. The tools of measurement are too crude and of too uncertain relevance; the laboratory situation is too little like the real-life one; the factors which may affect success or failure are too many and too complex; the ways in which different campaigns work are too varied; and the competitive circumstances in which the advertising must work are too unpredictable. (p 23, 30, 31, 41-48)

These limitations are largely intrinsic to the situation and not merely limitations of technique to be overcome by improvements in either the hardware or the software of testing technology. (p 23-26, 41-48)

There is a great deal of understandable attraction in the idea of being able to use advertising testing to predict effectiveness. Making judgements about advertising is difficult and inevitably somewhat subjective. A test which removes these uncertainties would be a very desirable property.

Few people now believe that such simple evaluative tests are or could be available. But the legacy of advertisement research comes from a time when it was widely assumed that a few simple measures administered to audiences of a few hundred people could tell you whether or not your particular ad was likely to have a beneficial effect on sales; and when it was common to have horse-race tests between several different candidate ads to decide which should appear in the market place. (p 45-49)

This legacy has been responsible for a lot of abortive and arguably often harmful advertisement research. **We would be well advised to strike the word 'testing' from our advertising research vocabulary, because it gives a quite misleading impression of the proper aims and possible achievements of the operation.** (p 23, 30, 31, 41, 43-49)

Attempts to make simple numerical tests of the future effects of an advertisement do not provide a sound basis for decision-making, although they may give the illusion of doing so. There is also a danger that their use can restrict and stifle creativity, hinder the proper process of advertising development and distort the perspective of advertising management. (p 41-48)

There are nevertheless various types of consumer research which may be useful in helping to make advertising more effective. But they are at their most fruitful when used to enhance and enrich the understanding of those who have to devise and fashion advertisements, and those who have to take decisions about them. Research cannot and should not be asked to **control** either the creative or the decision-making process. (p 35-48, 51-53)

There are three main ways in which research can help to make advertising more effective:

At the stage of strategy planning, research can help us to understand how our particular market really works; what factors militate towards the purchasing of our brand as opposed to other brands; the way our brand

and its competitors are perceived; and so on. Knowing this we can decide how our brand is to be positioned within the market – the sort of people we want to attract, and the basis on which we think they can be attracted. This in turn defines the job that advertising has to do, the type of people it has to influence, and the climate within which it has to work.

Setting strategy is, again, a matter of judgement. Devising the right strategy is in its own way as creative a process as devising an ad. But a sound platform of research into the way the market works and its current state is an important starting place. (p 35-41)

This is the most important and the most neglected stage of research, and it is the stage most likely to affect the cost effectiveness of subsequent advertising expenditure.

At the stage of advertising development, research on experimental advertising can provide a vital feed-back mechanism. It helps creative people to select and strengthen their ideas. It helps advertising management to understand the implications of following different creative paths, and shows them the problems or strengths and weaknesses of particular ideas or treatments. (p 41-43, 44-48)

This helps to strengthen their eventual decision-making.

When the campaign has finally been exposed, research can study what happens in the market place. This helps to show whether the advertising is achieving its objects; to redirect advertising effort as necessary; and to provide input for the next cycle of campaign planning by showing what remains to be done. (p 30-31, 50-53)

It is rare that the effects of advertising can be precisely measured even at this stage, since they cannot normally be disentangled from other effects due to sales-force activity, changes in product or packaging, consumer or trade promotions, competitive activity, underlying changes in the market, or the host of other factors which keep most markets in a state of perpetual flux.

However, it is more profitable to look ahead to the job of redirecting and replanning than to spend a great deal of time trying to isolate the past effects of what is after all only one element in a complex mix of marketing activities.

At each of these three stages many different types of research may be used, depending on:

- the nature of the market

- the state of existing knowledge

- the way in which the advertiser and agency work, and in particular their approach to decision making

A suitable programme of research for the development of a particular brand's advertising can only be drawn up in the light of careful thought about the particular situation of that brand in its market. **There is no standard programme of research which will fit all needs**.
(p 23, 35, 36-41, 43-44, 48-49, 51-53)

The possible types of research are too various to be reviewed in detail, (although some comments on the most important types are given in later sections). However, research which enhances understanding and insight is likely to be vastly more useful than research which merely produces mechanical or standardised lumps of information. These generally turn out to be indigestible and lead only to mental constipation – a condition which impoverishes marketing as well as leading to cynicism (sometimes, unfortunately, only too justifiable) about the uses of research.
(p 23, 35, 36, 38, 41-48, 51-53)

In summary, the emphasis, at all stages should not be on using research for political vindication of decisions taken, which:

- is defensive and sterile, and

- throws a load on to the shoulders of advertisement research which it is simply not robust enough to bear. (p 41-45)

Instead we should look to research to illuminate and inform us well before decisions need to be taken, so that the options we consider and the decisions we take about them are as soundly based as possible.

This general line of argument is expanded in the next three sections of this book, in which each of the steps in the argument is set out and discussed at greater length.

Commentary

In this chapter the author makes a number of key points many of which remain not only pertinent but indeed magnified. On pages (9) and (10) there is a discussion of the complexity of markets and the consumer decision making process. Advertising is described from the consumer standpoint as "a vast and shifting mosaic of impressions and pieces of information". How much more complex the mosaic is today, with the proliferation of communication media and the growth of additional forms of marketing communication such as direct marketing, sponsorship and cross promotions.

Perhaps the most telling sentence on page (12) is the one that refers to pre-testing's ability to predict the effectiveness of advertising: "Few people now believe that such simple evaluative tests are or could be available." This was written at a time when there was a strong trend towards the use of early diagnostic research away from later evaluative research. It seems that the pendulum continues to swing and that the 1990s is seeing the re-birth and growth of quantitative pre-testing and the consequent growth of research companies claiming to have the technique that most accurately predicts success or failure, this is particularly true of those companies promoting the use of persuasion shift measures. Some people may well believe that the original quote from the author remains true.

It is also worth highlighting the comment on page (14): "There is no standard programme of research which will fit all needs". Words that many may believe still ring true despite the understandable move for global corporations to seek consistency in research measures across the world and across brands and product categories.

Finally, it is worth adding an addendum to the author's belief that when a campaign has been exposed "it is rare that the effects of advertising can be precisely measured even at this stage; since they cannot normally be disentangled from other effects". It is certainly true that it is difficult to measure advertising effect as all aspiring authors of IPA advertising case histories will attest. This is particularly true in the fmcg markets which are the main focus of this book. However, the fact that over the years there have been some 250 IPA entries commended or winning awards shows that it can be done whether through the use of econometrics or through less technical uses of simple data, hypothesis and rationale.

How do consumers work?

In order to see how advertising works it is really advisable to go back a stage and ask how consumers operate. Advertising is, after all, a part of the whole process of buying and using products, and we can only expect to make sense of it if we look at it in this way. Far too many discussions of advertising treat it as if it were a kind of sealed off process trundling consumers along mysterious paths of its own towards the distant goal called 'sales'; or, to switch similes for a moment, as if consumers were just a kind of litmus paper to be dipped in advertising in order to turn red or blue, their resulting colour being a measure of the effectiveness of the advertising concerned.

This sort of advertising centred view of the world seems to prevent a lot of otherwise intelligent people from seeing some fairly simple and self-evident truths about the way consumers act.

An advertiser and his agency are very closely bound up with the brand and its advertising. They spend a large part of their waking life thinking and worrying about it. They know a great deal about its market. They are vitally interested in its future. They read and work over the advertising copy many times in the various stages of its evaluations. It is very difficult but very important for them to remember that the consumer generally shares neither their interest, nor their knowledge, nor their anxieties, nor their preconceptions.

I am not going to try to develop a complete 'model' of the consuming process. It is far too complicated, for one thing, and it will vary importantly from one market to another. Instead I am going to make a series of simple observations about the way consumers are likely to operate in the kind of high-frequency, low-value markets which account for a large proportion of advertising expenditure. Other types of product may not conform to all of these rules, and there will be many exceptions which need to be thought out market by market.

Although the statements which follow are generalisations, therefore, they nevertheless provide a broad and useful perspective which will start us off on the right foot for the ensuing discussion of advertising research.

Most people are faced with an incredibly large number of actual and potential purchasing and usage decisions every day of their adult lives. Consider how many such decisions a typical housewife in a family of four has to make every day. Decisions about what to use, how to allocate her resources, where to shop, what to keep in stock (and so on) all have be arrived at by some method.

It is simply not conceivable that all these decisions could be the product of separate rational judgements, reached after dispassionate analysis of the available evidence. That way madness would certainly lie.

Moreover in most markets buyers simply do not have very much or very good evidence available, even if they thought it worth the effort to sift it and arrive at calculated decisions. (p 90-93)

Decision-making is in itself by nature often a painful and stress-provoking process. This is especially true where:

- there is inadequate information on which to make judgements
- there are too many decisions to permit proper evaluation.

I have suggested that both these conditions are typically present in a wide range of consumer purchasing situations. (p 66-70, 90-93)

The majority of consumer purchases are objectively trivial. That is to say that the perceived risk from a 'wrong' decision is frequently minimal. Bloggo may conceivably be more economical than Sudso. I may act as a buyer on the assumption that it is. But I am unlikely to sit down and **worry** about it.

So we have typically a situation in which consumers have to take vast quantities of fairly unimportant (and often intrinsically uninteresting) decisions in conditions of imperfect information.

These have to be taken day in, day out simply in order to carry on the business of living in a modern urban society. It is imperative in the interests of sanity, balance and common-sense that consumers should find simple ways of handling and processing these great masses of decisions. (p 90-93)

There are three obvious ways in which the load of decisions is shed:

1. By habituation. Habit patterns are formed which allow the majority of decisions to be relegated to a very low level of consciousness.

2. By utilising broad conceptual pictures of the options available rather than making detailed or systematic studies of their objective features. These pictures will not be clear or fixed. They are rather inchoate masses of unorganised impressions, different features of which may be called into play by the external situation or by chance events. (p 60-62)

3. By 'clustering' decisions. A housewife may decide to serve bacon and eggs to her family. This general decision carries a number of subsidiary decisions in its train as semi-automatic concomitants. In other words, you probably don't decide to serve eggs independently of deciding to serve bacon. Quite a number of purchasing decisions may in this way be carried along in wake of a general decision. (p 90-93)

Rigid habituation is not really satisfactory, however, since it prevents one from dealing with all sorts of variation in local circumstances from occasion to occasion – your brand may be out of stock, may be the only one not reduced this week, etc. Nor does it allow for variety, which may be important in some markets.

Therefore people will tend to develop flexible strategies for dealing with particular markets which will at the same time help them to relegate their decision making to a low level of consciousness, and allow them to obtain reasonably satisfactory results from it.

These strategies may well involve selecting a loosely defined set of acceptable brands within which simple choices can be made according to criteria relevant to the market in question. The way in which people choose within this set will be one of the most critical determinants of any market.

In most markets consumers will tend to buy a number of different brands rather than remaining loyal to one particular brand. In some markets (e.g. confectionery) this reflects a positive need for variety. In others it simply reflects the fact that people respond to short-term variations (in price or availability, for example). Thus it is generally misleading to talk of 'users' of a brand as though these were in some kind of permanent and exclusive thrall to the brand in question.

Consumer choices are not presented to them in the market place in logical and sequential order, as in most research questionnaires. The consumer has to impose some kind of structure on the bewildering variety of possible choices open to him. Again, the decision to spend in some markets rather than others is not (and cannot be) the result of a complete evaluation of all possible expenditure patterns. Very many forms of possible expenditure

have to be ignored entirely in order to be able to reduce the number of decisions to be taken to manageable proportions. (p 90-93)

Product group decisions do not **necessarily** precede brand decisions (as they do in logical decision trees). A man can decide to buy a Mars bar without having gone through the previous stage of having decided to buy a count-line, or even the still earlier stage of deciding to buy some confectionery. He may simply get a sudden desire for a Mars bar, quite out of the blue.

Consumers do not generally have clearly defined or logically structured sets of needs. Most products are bought for a complex of reasons which purchasers will be largely unaware of and unable to disentangle.

People tend to interpret their needs in relation to the means which are (or appear to be) available to satisfy those needs. As a rule people do not hanker after products which do not exist. They simply choose from those products or services which they know to be on offer. New needs will rarely be recognised by the majority of people until something arrives to satisfy them.

Some decisions are taken only after careful and conscious consideration, but in the nature of things this only happens in a minority of cases. Some markets may stimulate this more than others. Some people may focus more of their attention on consumer product purchases than others do. (p 90-93)

People have many different sets of desires and aspirations which often conflict with one another. Almost any course of action is liable to have pleasing and unpleasing features – indeed a given feature may be pleasing and unpleasing at one and the same time.

Motives for purchasing may be rationalised to mask or deal with conflicting aims. (p 66-70)

Consumers are not obliged to behave rationally or consistently, even where they do apply conscious scrutiny to their decisions. There will be a certain tendency to harmonise actions and beliefs, but people have a large capacity for managing contradiction by sealing off different sectors of their experience from each other.

Thus a man who values thrift and who generally buys thriftily may have certain areas of wild extravagance. These may not, however, violate his concept of himself as a thrifty person, and he may not even be aware of

the apparent contradiction between his behaviour in different fields.
(p 66-70, 75-82)

People may use their purchase of consumer products to help express facets of their character to themselves or to others, or to mediate in other ways between themselves and their society.

Particular types of product may tend to fulfil this sort of role, but in general expressions of this kind will relate to masses of purchasing decisions rather than to individual decisions. (p 60-62, 75-82)

Obvious and important differences in objective value or product performance will tend to outweigh other factors where they are present. Such differences are not common in inter brand situations, and appear to be getting less common. (p 75-82)

Purchasing in many high-repeat markets is done largely on a stock taking basis, where the purchaser is stimulated to purchase by running out of existing stock. In these (as in some other) circumstances stimulating consumption is tantamount to stimulating sales. Stock routines of this kind are another way of managing decisions.

Consumers may select certain types of product purchasing as fields to which they will pay especial attention: because they are particularly interested in them; or because they think that decisions in those fields are especially important to watch; or because they feel some moral pressure to be especially careful in those fields. Their strategies in these fields will then tend to throw up choices for conscious attention more often.

Consumers are rarely interested in making serious efforts to maximise or even optimise their purchasing (except perhaps, in relation to purchases which seem for some reason to be abnormally important or interesting). Normally they are interested in what has been termed 'satisficing' – obtaining adequate performance for reasonable cost, rather than necessarily obtaining the best performance for the lowest cost. This is another way in which the decision making load is shed. This does not mean that product quality is unimportant, since (other things being equal) trial and error processes will cause consumers to flow from less to more satisfactory products, where differences in performance count.

What it does mean is that consumers will not typically be prepared to expend a great deal of time and mental energy in refining their decision making processes.

Increasingly with the development of one stop-shopping the choice of outlet itself is tending to become a first stage decision from which other things follow. Having chosen an outlet the consumer's choices are largely limited by what the outlet has on offer, and will be influenced by what the outlet chooses to feature in one way or another.

This view of the way consumers operate is offered as a general corrective to the brand-oriented, advertising-oriented perspective which colours and distorts so much advertising thinking.

Everyone responsible in any way for advertising would be well advised to spend time thinking out in the above terms how his own markets work. This will not tell him what to put in his advertising, but it will greatly improve his understanding of the way his advertising will need to operate.

Commentary

This chapter, quite rightly, is designed to bring all advertisers and their agencies down to earth. It reminds us that brands are simply not as important for the consumer as for the brand owner or managers. However, the book does focus on "high-frequency, low-value markets which account for a large proportion of advertising expenditure"; this model for the advertising market place does not dominate today. Considerable growth in advertising expenditure has come from consumer durables, automotive, financial services, telecoms and business to business advertising. The decision making process in relation to these categories is very different to that which prevails in fmcg markets.

This change in the world of advertising does not negate what the author says about consumer behaviour, it merely adds to the complexity. Certainly there is an increased number of ways consumers go through the decision making process. With larger, more valuable purchases the decision process is longer, the information gathering is more intense and the ways advertising has to contribute to this process varies. The need to understand the precise role for advertising becomes even greater because without this understanding it is impossible to set out the requirements of the research.

How does advertising work?

Having sketched a general view of the way consumers tend to operate I can make some general comments about what advertising is and the kinds of way it is likely to work.

Any discussion of 'how advertising works' which implies that all advertising works in the same way does nothing but disservice to its subject. It is simply not true except at a very high level of generality. Different campaigns aim to reach different objectives over differing time-scales against different market contexts by having different effects on different groups of people. To suggest, as many theorists have tried to do in the past, that this diversity can be encompassed by a single rule of thumb is naively unrealistic.

We can, however, make some useful observations about the nature of advertising which will help us to see, not only how to approach the planning and creating of advertising, but how and when to use research in the process.

It is important to begin from the consumer's viewpoint of the previous section. Advertisers and their agencies can easily get too close to their campaigns, and lose the true perspective of the market place. An advertiser is concentrating on his own campaign. He has studied it, argued about it, researched it, worried about it.

For his company it is a significant – often a dominant – slice of the sales budget. He is, quite properly, very concerned down to a level of fine detail with the precise make-up of his advertising. His agency are equally absorbed, equally close to the problem.

Within this microscopic focus on the advertising it is very difficult to stand back and look at matters with a consumer's eye. Yet this is necessary if we are not to lose touch completely with the real nature of the advertising experience.

To the consumer advertising is mainly just part of the background scene. Advertisements form part of the continual whirling mass of sense impressions which bombard the eye.

The average person is probably exposed to hundreds if not thousands of pieces of advertising each day. These are imbedded in literally countless numbers of other sensory impressions, a small proportion of which also relate to branded products. (p 62-64, 70-75)

Just as we cannot take all our consuming decisions in discrete rational steps, so we cannot stop to evaluate and classify all the pieces of sensory input we receive. This, too, has to be relegated to very low levels of consciousness for the most part.

In order to navigate through the shoals and hazards of a day in a fast moving urban society it is necessary to be able to process a vast range of simultaneous sensory messages at low levels of consciousness. Conscious attention is reserved for a very narrow range of input which is selected in some way as being relevant to the business in hand.

It is not only this narrowly selected band of consciously processed input, however, which affects our behaviour, either immediately or in the long-term. We continually absorb impressions from the great mush of sense-data which strikes us, impressions which build and modify our pictures of the people, objects and events around us.

A motorist, for example, is able to take important and decisive action on the basis of a dozen different sense-messages at once, without really focusing his attention on any one of them. Without this ability one could not drive down a crowded street at all.

It is arrogant and unrealistic to suppose that more than a tiny fraction of the available advertising messages are likely to be selected for conscious attention and processing. But this is not to say that the bulk of advertising messages are wasted. They may well be having important effects at those lower levels of consciousness to which, I have argued, the bulk of consumer decision making has to be relegated.

This gives each advertiser the choice either of striving to get his ad into the necessarily small group of ads which are selected out in this way, or of trying to make sure his advertising works for him even if it is not so selected. These are, of course, not necessarily exclusive alternatives.

It follows from this argument that noticing and remembering advertising is not by any means a necessary prerequisite of advertising effectiveness. Advertising may, and probably generally does 'work' without ever having been processed by our higher-level rational faculties. (p 62-65, 70-75)

We can distinguish a number of different levels at which advertising can operate:

- At the lowest level advertising can simply create a sense of familiarity, a feeling that the brand is 'around'. This engages neither our intellect nor our emotions, and almost certainly happens below the threshold of conscious perception. If I have seen a lot of advertising for a brand during the previous year I am likely to recognise it and to feel that it is generally current and popular. This does not necessarily presuppose that I shall actually remember seeing a lot of advertising – in fact the impression of popularity might well be lessened if too obviously connected with advertising in my mind. (p 62-65, 70-76)

- On another level advertising may surround the brand with particular associations, with moods, feelings, emotional colours and so on. It follows from the earlier trains of thought that potent emotions are unlikely to be aroused, since these would be disproportionate in most cases either to the ads themselves or to their subjects. It is more a question of emotional shadings which can nevertheless be very important to the way in which we perceive the brand, and the way we respond to it in particular situations. (p 60-62, 70-75)

- On a different level again the advertising may convey pieces of information about the brand. These may range from the mere fact of its existence, through to its price, its functions and so forth.

- Sometimes it is important that these pieces of information are registered precisely and in their own right. On other occasions they will merely need to contribute towards a general impression or atmosphere.

- Then again, on another level advertising may try to put across rational arguments – statements of premises and conclusions which follow from them. It is at this level of operation that the customer's conscious attention is most likely to be needed. (p 70-75)

If advertising impressions strike people in more or less continuous streams and if they are handled at a low level of consciousness (like all the other signals which the environment makes at us) it seems likely that their effect will be cumulative over a period of time rather than instantaneous upon a single exposure. There is a temptation (probably because it makes life simpler to think of the effects of advertising as being analogous to the conversion of Paul on the road to Damascus – something involving a blinding flash of light and an instant transformation.

This model may expect a gradual build up of 'effects' perhaps over the whole duration of the campaign (or even spanning a series of campaigns with similar themes).

Putting it another way, advertising works over a period of time as a part of the gradual evolution of the individual's perceptions of a brand and its relations to other brands. The effect of a single isolated advertising exposure is likely to be minimal in most markets. (p 70-75)

People used to think of advertising as something which reached out and grabbed someone who was a devoted and loyal user of a competitive brand, and presented him with reasons why he should become instead a loyal and devoted user of the advertiser's brand.

In few markets will you find many people who are really loyal and devoted users of anything, and you will seldom persuade people to become loyal and devoted users of your product either. You are not pressing a switch which, like points in a railway system, shunts people from someone else's set of rails on to your own. Often, as I have suggested, people will already be using your brand and a number of others as well, switching about according to local price or availability, or in order to obtain variety. If the local variations are more or less random over a period of time then the frequency with which they buy one brand or another will reflect their degree of predisposition towards each brand ñ even though these predispositions will rarely be sufficiently strong to over-ride in any specific instance the pressures of price or availability. It is the job of advertising to affect these predispositions. (p 75-82)

People's predisposition to buy certain brands rather than others depends on two types of factor:

• the identities of the various brands concerned, and

• the way in which these identities seem to relate to people's own needs and wants.

Advertising can affect both factors. Take for example the property of durability in lawnmowers. Given that people think durability is an important quality in this field, advertising could be aimed at trying to give an impression of durability to a particular make of mower. Conversely, if durability is already seen as a property of your make, advertising might be designed to stress the importance of this property when considering a mower purchase.

In general it is probably easier to affect people's perceptions of the identity of a particular brand than to affect their assessment of personal needs, but this is by no means always true. (p 60-62, 75-82)

We can further divide the notion of identity into three parts:

- The prominence or salience of the brand (the extent to which it springs readily to mind).

- The clarity or distinctiveness of its identity (the extent to which it is seen to have clear and pronounced characteristics and properties).

- The nature of its identity (the kinds of feeling, thought and belief which people have about it).

The first two of these tend to be related, and could well be regarded as different facets of the same basic idea. Again, advertising may be designed either to sharpen, point up or bring out the brand's identity on the one hand, or to modify it on the other. (p 60-62)

'Identity' in the senses defined above is critically important. It is basically what distinguishes branded from unbranded products. It is what enables people to handle brands easily in their minds. If we have a clear picture of a brand in our minds to refer to we can handle it easily in decision making, even at our lower levels of consciousness. The identity of a brand endures over time, and stops us having to grapple afresh with evaluations of all the options available whenever we make a purchase. If we are just confronted with half-a-dozen brands each with a clear identity we have much simplified task. We can bring to bear a kind of distillation of previous experience and information on the choice problem. We have the reassurance that comes with familiarity and with the sense of pattern and order this gives us. (p 60-62, 70-76)

One of the most important roles of (and of packaging and naming too) is in helping is to form these pictures or identities. They not only simplify our decision making, but they can add to the possible satisfactions to be derived from use. There are few products in modern society which are bought solely simply to cover our nakedness or to keep us warm. We buy them because they help us to express to ourselves and others the sort of people we are; because they fit particular moods or situations; because they give us aesthetic pleasure; or for a host of other possible reasons. By enriching the identity of a brand advertising can also enrich the possible satisfactions which people may get from owning or using it. (p 60-62)

Another way of describing the process is to say that advertising 'adds value' to the product over time by surrounding it with a halo of images and associations. At the simplest level these provide basic reassurances about the quality and consistency of the product. They also imbue the product with a personality to which people can respond and with overtones of personal or social satisfactions.

It must be true in any market that some people are more easily capable of being influenced towards the use of a particular brand or type of product than others. This being so it will be an important part of advertising planning and planning research to identify the types of prospect that the advertising is designed to influence. A consumer is not a virgin plate on which advertising messages may be engraved. Advertising ideas are more likely to be absorbed if they fit in with existing attitudes, beliefs, ideas, prejudices and pieces of knowledge; and if they seem useful or relevant or interesting.

Advertising may be at its most effective when it is reinforcing and clarifying the thoughts which people already hold, rather than when it is trying to change things more fundamentally. (p 66-70, 70-75)

This is not to say that attitudes cannot be changed, but that changing them will often be a very long-term and uphill job. If your advertising is going to fly in the face of everything people currently believe then you had better have a good story, and you had better have something to support it.
(p 60-62, 66-70, 75-82)

Advertising does not work in a vacuum. Not only does it combine for its effect with other elements of the advertiser's own marketing mix, it also interacts with competitive campaigns in a way which is often overlooked. It is recognised that advertising campaigns compete with each other for the consumer's **attention**, but somehow we tend to ignore the obvious fact that there is interaction between the **content** of competitive campaigns. The way a particular campaign will affect consumers is partly determined by the effect of competitive campaigns, not merely in the ultimate sense of determining sales.

Imagine the following simplified situation. Brand A decides to run a basic economy story. Brand B, the leader in the same market, has independently decided to stand on the same platform. The campaigns are likely to be partly self-cancelling unless one is either creatively much more powerful or objectively far more true than the other. On the other hand, if Brand B had decided to run a high-quality theme this would fundamentally affect the

way in which Brand A's advertising was received and interpreted. **How** it would affect it would depend on the market, the historical standing of the brands, and the appropriateness of the respective claims to the market and to the brands concerned. (p 70-76)

Advertisements largely work as wholes and not as parts. This is not to say that we cannot consider pieces of an ad separately, or that we cannot sometimes usefully research parts of an ad individually. However, it is ultimately as a totality that the thing will work, and it is basically in this light that we should consider it. (p 64-66, 70-76)

Advertising must, in order to be effective, work in harmony with the product itself, with its packaging and with all the other tools of consumer marketing activity. Advertising does not work in a vacuum. Promotions are no exception here. Promotions themselves (or advertising designed to support them) may be considered by the advertiser as a purely tactical and short-term weapon – but extensive or inappropriate use of promotions can have as powerful and lasting effect on the brand's image as any theme campaign. The fact that they are not **intended** to affect images is not any assurance that they do not in fact do so.

The general impression which an ad creates at a quick glance may often be more important in the typical exposure situation than the impression which is gained from studying the copy. In a television commercial the apparently incidental features of casting and production may well tell the viewers far more than strict content of the script which has been so carefully worked over. (p 64-66, 70-76)

Advertising may fail in three quite different kinds of way. First it may fail because it does not have the effect that is looked for. It may lack the impact or fail to get across the kind of impression you intended.

On the other hand, it may fail because it has side effects – positive effects quite different from those intended. An ad designed to show that a piece of electronic equipment is sophisticated may simply convey the impression that it is complicated and difficult to use. One may intend to show that a drug is powerful and end up by implying that it is dangerous.

Thirdly it may fail because, although it has faithfully achieved its objectives, these may simply be irrelevant to the target consumers. They may have learnt and felt just what we wanted them to learn or feel, but we may have been wrong in assuming that this would lead them to buy or use our brand.

It is of course possible that an ad could succeed for the wrong reasons. The side effects might be motivating even though the main intentions of the ad were not working. This may happen more often than is supposed, but it is clearly not something you can plan for. (p 64-66, 70-76)

The job of advertising will often be to stimulate use as well as purchase. The frequency of purchase is largely dependent on the rate of use for consumable products. There are some markets where sales would benefit more from exhorting people to use than from exhorting them to purchase.

One of the probable aims of advertising is generally to increase sales of a product or service. The increase may be in volume, in value or in share of a particular market – or often in all three.

However, it cannot necessarily be assumed that advertising is not being effective if increases of this kind are not observed. It may be true that advertising is doing a heroic job keeping static the sales of a brand which would otherwise be declining rapidly, or even turning a precipitate decline into a gentler one.

Conversely we cannot assume that advertising *is* being effective just because sales are rising, since there may very well be other factors operating in our favour.

It is often difficult to disentangle the effects of advertising from the effects of all other activity, and from the general cut-and-thrust flux of the market place.

Advertising is too often seen as a one way process, an instrument which an advertiser uses to do things to people. This is not only a socially undesirable view of advertising, it is also unrealistic. Advertising has very little specific power to **make** people do things.

Perhaps one should think less about what advertising does to people and more about what people do with advertising. Advertising is part of a two-way relationship between manufacturer and consumer. The advertiser communicates to his public through advertising, packaging, public relations activity and so on. And the public communicates to the manufacturer both directly, through purchasing or not purchasing his product; and indirectly, through consumer research, letters, complaints and (increasingly) organised consumer pressure groups. This whole process works best

when the outcome is **mutually** satisfactory to producer and consumer: which is an interesting thought.

In summary it may be said that we do not know how advertising works, and that we are never likely to be able to make any simple and useful yet comprehensive statement. Indeed it is certainly true that different ads work in importantly different ways. Clear definition of the objectives and methods of each campaign based on clear understanding of the way in which the particular market works, will be more useful than golden rules. (p 70-76)

Commentary

In this chapter, Alan Hedges sets out to dispel the widely held assumption that there is one, singular way in which advertising works and that, as a consequence, there is one singular way in which it can be tested.

The prevailing assumption at the time Hedges was writing was that all advertising worked in the same way, through a linear sequence of effects. Since this view remains prevalent today in some quarters of our industry, it would seem useful to spend some time examining what Hedges had to say about it, and to add, where relevant, more recent thinking or evidence.

The linear sequential theory is founded on a number of assumptions. The first of these is that for an advertisement to have an effect, it must be consciously noted and processed. In this chapter, as he does throughout the book, Hedges draws on common-sense and observation of consumers to argue that in practice this is not very likely.

> *"The average person is probably exposed to hundreds if not thousands of pieces of advertising each day. These are embedded in literally countless numbers of other sensory impressions, a small proportion of which also relate to branded products."*

The only way, he argues, that the consumer can operate effectively in this environment is to process the vast bulk of information at very low levels of consciousness, and pay active conscious attention to only a selection which, in some way, are relevant to the business in hand.

If the point about the volume of information was true in the mid-1970s, consider how much more information consumers are confronted with in the late 1990s, and the implications that this carries for the need for selectivity in processing.

Hedges is not suggesting that advertising which is not consciously noted is ineffective; he believes that it plays an important role in increasing familiarity of the brand and by surrounding it with particular associations. Indeed, it is clear that one of Hedges' aims in this section is to encourage the reader to think more clearly about how their advertising does, or even should work to achieve its objectives. He distinguishes a number of different levels at which advertising can operate:

- *creating a sense of familiarity or a feeling that the brand is 'around'*

- *surrounding the brand with particular associations*

- *conveying pieces of information*

- *registering, on a more rational level, pieces of information*

- *communicating rational arguments*

Many of today's readers will be aware of parallels between this list and other recent, and more fully developed attempts to categorise the ways in which advertising can operate[1]. Although the precise nature of the proposed mechanisms may vary (usually in degree rather than kind) there is now a growing consensus that advertising does operate in a number of different ways and, crucially, that it should be tested through criteria that reflect these different mechanisms.

At the heart of the linear-sequential model of advertising is the belief that people will be persuaded into an action by a message that communicates a rational reason. Although Hedges does not deny that some advertising works in this way, he is clearly unhappy with this as a global assumption. As well as for the reasons noted above, he fundamentally disagrees with the implicit casting of the advertising audience as a passive being, as a blank canvas or 'virgin' consumer.

Indeed the thrust of the whole book concerns the 'humanity' of consumers, their emotions and prejudices, their scepticism and satisfactions, the strategies they adopt to simplify their lives and survive the onslaught of sensory overload, and most of all, the insignificance of advertising in their lives. Of note, he believes that the view of advertising as an instrument to do things to people is both unrealistic and socially undesirable, and it in this chapter that Hedges' influential maxim appears:

[1] *See: i) How does research practice match advertising theory?* Mike Hall and Doug Maclay, MRS Conference 1991 *(ii) Practical Progress from a theory of advertisements.* Stephen King Admap October 1975.

> "Perhaps one should think less about what advertising does to people and more about what people do with advertising."

Of course, one of the things we can observe that people do with advertising is to consume it as part of their everyday culture. Unlike the 1970s, advertising today is the subject of regular editorial attention (be that serious, trivial or even satirical); it is the target of public protests, regulation and even legislation it has spawned cults, clichès, stars and has transformed the opera aria into a popular music form. As many commentators have shown[2] and as anyone who attends group discussions will attest, the majority of consumers are now pretty much aware of what advertising is intending to do and are conscious of advertisements as expression of the brand's values.

Another assumption of linear-sequential thinking is that advertising operates immediately to convert a purchaser from one brand to another. Firstly, Hedges points out that this assumption is in conflict with real life observation of buying behaviour, which rarely seems to demonstrate this kind of instant conversion to a brand but rather the waxing or waning of the brand's position in the consumer's repertoire. Most likely, he contends, most advertising works cumulatively, over time "as part of the gradual evolution of the individual's perceptions of a brand in relation to other brands". The dynamics of purchase repertoires and the influence of advertising on them is a topic that has been subject to a great deal of empirical research and theory in the years since Hedges originally proposed these ideas. The gradual evolution of the repertoire has been widely accepted, though there is still active debate about how 'instantly' or 'cumulatively' the acceptance of a brand will occur[3].

Hedges also comments that the immediate conversion model seems to assume that the job of advertising is always to increase the sales of the brand. Whilst this is undoubtedly the case for some brands in some markets, it is apparent, he maintains, that there are as many cases where advertising is working over time to maintain sales at their existing level in the face of similar activity from competitors. The concept of 'dynamic equilibrium' in sales has been well documented by a number of commentators[4] and more recently has been well demonstrated in some of 'longer and broader' case histories published in the volumes of AdWorks[5].

It is worth remembering at this point (as mentioned in the introduction to Chapter 4) that when Hedges was writing, the majority of advertising activity concerned fast moving consumer goods. In today's conditions when other

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[2] See: Humanistic Advertising. Judie Lannon & Peter Cooper. IJA Jul-Sep 1993.
[3] See: (i) Over promise and under delivery. John Philip Jones. ESOMAR seminar 'How Advertising Works and How Promotions Work' April 1991.
[4] See: (i) Advertising Effectiveness Revisited. Colin MacDonald, Admap April 1986.
(ii) The different ways ads work. Josh McQueen, JAR Aug-Sep 1990.
[5] See: Advertising Works Vol 1-10. IPA.

categories such as retail and financial services have assumed significant proportions of overall spend and advertising activity, the above debate can seem to lack a certain relevance. More often than not the primary purpose of the advertising, in these and other categories, is not to convert anyone to anything, but rather to encourage existing customers to maintain or deepen their commitment to the brand. It seems more than likely that the kind of advertising planning required for these categories has done much to illuminate thinking about advertising in general.

Likewise, the growth in usage of direct marketing tools has helped advertising practitioners accept that there are some parts of the consumer decision making process that advertising is not well equipped to fulfil. This has had the benefit of encouraging the industry to think more clearly and, crucially, more realistically about how advertising can operate.

What is advertising research?

Research is a process of learning more-or-less systematically about objects or processes with a view to understanding them better. In applied research this understanding is directed towards being able to manipulate the objects or processes concerned more effectively.

Advertising research, we might say, includes any kind of more-or-less systematic study which will help us to understand the advertising process better and enable us to operate it more effectively.

We must therefore include research which takes place before a particular campaign is devised; research which studies the developing campaign before it is exposed; and research which attempts to assess or monitor the effects of the campaign once it is exposed to the public.

This book concentrates on research concerning the creative content of advertising, and I have throughout excluded research which bears principally on media decisions – although I am conscious that in real life these should be taken integrally.

Objectives of advertising research

We can distinguish four possible objectives for advertising research. These are, in time-order:

1. To help define advertising strategy and to provide understanding of the market and the target consumer.

2. To provide a basis for developing and modifying campaign ideas through looking at consumer reactions.

3. To provide a basis for final decisions about whether or not a campaign is fit to run.

4. To help us decide what our advertising has achieved once it has been exposed.

This should be seen as a cyclical process, since the output of research done to meet the fourth objective feeds naturally back into the first objective for the development of a subsequent campaign.

Each of these objectives will be considered in turn. What kind of contribution can we reasonably expect research to make at each stage? What kinds of research are useful?

Research at the planning stage

This is, without doubt, the most important stage at which research can contribute to the whole advertising process.

The most brilliant advertising execution will be of little value if the advertising is trying to say the wrong kinds of thing to the wrong kinds of people.

In consumer marketing we are only in a position to make sound judgements about advertising strategy if we have a good knowledge of the way people think, feel and behave in relation to products like ours. The better our understanding of the market the better our chance of devising and adopting an effective strategy.

It is not possible to set down a check list of pieces of information which, if faithfully assembled, will lead infallibly to the correct strategy. Marketing is just not like that, even if we sometimes like to pretend that it is. The kind of information you really need depends on:

- what you already know about the market

- what sort of market it is

- the competitive state of play

- what sort of company you are.

In order to plan advertising properly you need to have a clear picture of the sort of market you are operating in, and the sort of person you will be selling to. You need to know a good deal about the way consumers go about making their product and brand choices, as well as about what they actually do and what they think of the various brands in the market, in the sort of terms outlined in the third and fourth sections of this book.

How important are the differences between brands in your market, and how important are they seen to be? Is it a market of high intrinsic interest? How and at what level are buying decisions taken? What sorts of 'flexible strategy' do people adopt for dealing with them? How far is the market brand loyal, and for what sorts of reason? And so on.

When you are satisfied that you know (or have made reasonable assumptions) about this sort of matter you can make a positioning statement which will define the way you see your brand fitting into the market, and the sort of role you think it best to develop it to play.

This positioning statement is the seed from which your advertising should grow. It should point the direction in which you want to go, and define the context in which the advertising will work. (p 75-78, 90-93)

The form and details of the positioning statement will necessarily vary a good deal from market to market. But there are two essential ingredients if the statement is to provide a useful basis for developing advertising:

1.   **Who** the advertising is to be aimed at.

2.   **How** it is intended to affect them.

The first of these ingredients is sometimes called the target group. There is still a tendency to define target groups like this:

> "The advertising will be aimed at younger C2DE women who are already users of the product category."

This is a useful statement within limits. It helps with media planning, for example, and at least the drafter has avoided the temptation of including everybody in the target definition. But for the purpose of helping to steer the development of advertising content (which is what it should be designed to do) it does not take us very much further. The fact that they are younger working class women provides only a general sort of clue about what sort of people they might be, or why it is that they are current purchasers of products of this type. Is anything known of their personalities, their attitudes, their life-styles, their approach to the product field? What other, similar products do they buy? How are the products in question used, when and why? What sort of family backgrounds do they come from? What is the influence of other family members? And so on. It would be much more illuminating and useful if we could produce something more like the following (admittedly hypothetical) target group definition for our (equally hypothetical and deliberately oversimplified) household project.

> "Users of this type of product tend to be younger women from C2DE backgrounds. Typically they are married with larger than average families. A high proportion of them work full or part time, and they are conscious of having little time to spare for household tasks. The family makes heavy

demands on the living space, which is generally limited. Users tend to be particularly conscientious in their care of the home. Generally short of money they nevertheless spend quite heavily on products of this type in order to make up for the fact that they do not have the time to keep the home as they would like to see it. They typically take a lot of time in the choice of brands, and real differences between the different brands available are thought to exist. Brand loyalty is fairly high. We believe that the market divides between those who are especially concerned with performance characteristic A, and are prepared to spend a little extra to get it; and those to whom this is a dispensable luxury and who would rather make economies. Our brand, in view of its history and characteristics, is to appeal to the former group. These people have all the above characteristics, generally in more extreme measure. They are also likely to read specialist articles about using the product, and to make an active attempt to learn from advertising about the properties of the different brands."

Even this more extended statement could usefully be further extended in a number of directions, but it gives a much better picture of the kind of person the brand is aimed at than the preceding brief and sterile formula. We can start to understand the way the market ticks (if, of course, our diagnosis is right) and the mind is immediately set working on ways of approaching a group like this through advertising. (p 75-78, 90-93)

Those with a gift for mental arithmetic may start to object that there can be very few people who would fit **all** the characteristics in the above market precisely. Such people are likely to be researchers, who are used to thinking of populations only in terms of the number of times you can subdivide them before running out of interviews.

The point is that the above is a general picture of a group of people which is assumed to be large enough to form a worthwhile marketing target for the brand in question. It is not important that every member of the group has every characteristic described (as it would be in an equivalent multi-way researcher's cross-tab), but only that the statement as a whole may be taken as a reasonable description of what typically would be found in the target group. (p 75-78) In fact it is unlikely that the evidence for all this will come from one single piece of research (although it could easily do so). In real life some of it might come from last year's data (where this

may reasonably be supposed to change little from year to year); some more may come from odd qualitative projects; the bulk from a recent major market survey; a few bits and pieces perhaps from published or government research; and the rest perhaps from reasonable supposition or accumulated experience of the market, unsupported by particular pieces of research.

This latter suggestion may strike as heretical coming from someone who has spent much of his working life as a practising researcher – it would no doubt be the sort of thing people would get drummed out of the Market Research Society for (if the Market Research Society were the sort of body given to drumming people out). But there are decided limits to what research can tell us about the way a market works, and an intelligent guess which is in line with what you do know is not only permissible but essential. (p 82-86)

Marketing and advertising strategies do not spring full-grown from the pages of computer print-out. Those that purport to do so should be consigned sharply to the waste bin with the other garbage.

Devising an advertising strategy is an act every bit as creative as designing an ad. In fact it could be argued that it is a higher-level and more significant area of creativity. **It is an act of imaginative business judgement to select the crucial pieces of information from a mass of source-data and weld them into an intuitive framework which will direct without constricting subsequent advertising development.**

There are many ways in which a market can be broken down and categorised, using almost infinite combinations of variables concerning the ways people act, their beliefs, their images and attitudes, their personalities and demographic groups, and so on. Good research can highlight important relationships in the data, but ultimately it is for the manager to judge which are the decisive factors for this market, which are the key variables that define this target group. (p 75-78, 82-86)

It is also a matter of creative business judgement to define how the advertising should affect the chosen target group, again using research evidence where possible. The second part of the positioning statement (following the target group definition) all too often reads like this:

> "The advertising will seek to create a quality image for the brand, projecting the benefits of the brand in such a way as to increase its appeal to the target consumer."

This again says very little of practical use. We might more helpfully continue our positioning statement in terms like these:

> "We are aiming the brand at people with a particularly strong desire for high quality, which tends for them to mean that the brand must perform function X particularly well. The main aim of the advertising must therefore be to reinforce the belief that our brand performs well in this direction, a claim which can be supported by several features of the product.
>
> This belief is generally consistent with existing images of the brand, although some people need to be reassured that performance on function Y is also good. Since the people we are aiming at place a good deal of value on products of this type, and since they are prepared to pay slightly over the odds (perhaps even feeling it important to do so) we need not be afraid to seem fairly expensive. At the same time we should bear in mind that the people we are selling to are not generally prosperous, while this is a product category to which honest virtue is more appropriate than connotations of luxury or extravagance. It should be remembered also that prospects in our target group tend to show above average interest in the product, and to use advertising as a specific source of information. At the same time their general educational standard is not high."

Again this could be elaborated, but again it shows how the sort of job that the advertising has to do and the kind of background against which it has to work can be defined fairly closely without cramping the style of the creative people. The strategy positioning statement (taking the two parts together) defines what is to be achieved and against what background, **but it does not say what actually has to go into the ads at all**.
(p 75-78, 82-86)

What sort of research do you need to do to base a statement like this on? Again it depends on your market and your situation, and nobody could sensibly advise you in detail without studying these first.

Basically, however, you simply need to use the established tools of market research (qualitative and quantitative) intelligently and sensibly until you feel you have a clear picture of the sort of people you might be aiming at, and the way they behave, and the way they perceive your brand and its competitors.

In doing this you should not be afraid to tackle difficult questions – otherwise you will just scratch the surface of the problem – but at the same time you must be aware that there are decided limits to what research can tell you and points at which your judgement has to take over.

Do not be seduced by over-complex research techniques, underpinned though they may seem to be by the latest electronic technology. Let common sense be your guide. If you can't understand it, and the researcher can't explain it clearly and simply, it is very probably nonsense.

Above all look for understanding, not just for statistics. You will never fully understand your market (and nor will anyone else) because it is far too complex and because it changes while you study it. But as long as you go on intelligently trying you will make headway. **What you are after all the time is a better, more useful, more powerful way of looking at the market than your competitors have. That is what strategy planning is all about**. (p 57-60, 75-78, 87-90)

Research at the development stage

The second stage at which research can be useful is the stage when we start having actual advertising ideas. These can be exposed to consumers with a view to rejecting or modifying particular ideas or polishing up the way in which they are implemented.

The strategy should have been finalised before these ideas were produced, so that any research done at this stage should be designed to answer basic questions about what the advertising **ought** to be doing[1]; only about what particular ideas or approaches seem **likely** to do if exposed to the target consumer.

This kind of research can be very valuable if it is properly carried out and properly used. It can act as a kind of feedback mechanism or reality testing for the creative process.

One of the dangers inherent in the process of creating advertising is that it can become narcissistic and involved. To begin with advertising people tend to live in worlds whose values, behaviour and modes of expression are very far removed from those of the majority of the consumers at whom their messages must be directed. The same of course is true of advertising and marketing people in advertiser companies.

Quite apart from the narrowness and atypicality of any given individual's

[1]IBM

personal experience there is also often a degree of inwardness inherent in the creative process itself. Any good creative man will acknowledge that his ideas should ultimately be judged by their effectiveness and not by their intrinsic values as pieces of writing or sets of images. And yet, like anyone who produces an imaginative creation, their natural tendency is to fall in love with their own ideas, which they are then sometimes prepared to defend against outside reality. The fact that outside reality in advertising is difficult to define is one of the sources of conflict between the creators and their more prosaic account, marketing or research colleagues – or indeed their clients.

Putting advertising (and particularly creative) people in touch with real live consumers is perhaps one of the most important functions that direct research into creative material can have. (p 82-86)

But if this process of feedback is to be effective, several important preconditions must be met:

1. Research of this kind must be done very early in the creative development process, while ideas are still plastic in everyone's minds, and there is time and scope for proper development. How often do we still see creative research used only right at the end of the development of a new campaign when:

   • everybody has begun to take up entrenched positions: the creative man crouched to defend the ideas to which he gave birth; the client baulking at putting his money on a commercial which has got only a fourth decile score on his favourite testing service; and the account man who is quite convinced that he had a better idea several months back. The prospect under these conditions of getting any sensible development going to iron out the problems (always supposing that anyone is really clear what the actual problems are) is remote indeed.

   • there is in any case little time left before the new advertising is booked to appear. A few hasty and superficial modifications might perhaps be made, but there will rarely be time for a proper rethink, unless someone is prepared to declare a state of crisis and decide to go on with the old advertising until the new campaign is right.

   • quite a bit of money has already been spent in getting the work to a high level of finish for final testing, an investment which will not willingly be abandoned.

2. Research at the development stage must be **illuminating.** It must enrich everyone's **understanding** of the sort of responses which particular ideas and executions are likely to provoke in the market place. It must be seen as **learning** experience, not a **testing** process.

   This latter is an important point. We too often speak of **testing** advertising (a term which should be struck from all our vocabularies) as if we were submitting the piece of film or print to a testing machine (which happens to be made up of consumers) which will accept or reject it; just like the quality control process at the end of a production line which rejects items are over or under weight, or whatever it may.

   This is a very misleading way of looking at creative research, and one which I believe is responsible for a good deal of the misdirected activity which we find in this field. We are not testing the advertising since we do not have, and cannot have, any such machine. We are **studying consumers** in order to gain some better understanding of the way they are likely to react to stimuli of different kinds, the stimuli being advertisements or advertising ideas. Since both the stimuli and the repertoire of possible responses are highly complex (and since the research situation is a very unusual one) we know that we cannot make any precise and simple formulation of what a given advertisement will achieve – but we *can* improve our understanding to the point where we are better able to produce relevant and effective ideas and to judge when we have a campaign which is adequate for our purposes.

   Therefore advertising research should seek to enrich our **understanding** of the **way** a particular advertisement is likely to affect people. Much talk is heard about the difference between 'diagnostic' and 'evaluative' advertising research. Theoretically, what I am talking about here is 'diagnostic' since it is designed to help us see what are the possible strengths and weaknesses of a particular type of communication. In practice, however, what is often labelled as 'diagnostic' testing rarely takes us very far towards being able to do this. All too often diagnostic research relies on asking a few crude questions about whether an ad is thought 'believable', 'amusing', 'interesting' and so on – which adds very little indeed to our stock of understanding.

3. It is particularly important that this understanding is (and is seen to be) relevant and accessible to creative people. Unless they (in spite of their likely natural bias against reality testing) are prepared to use the research as a learning process its value will inevitably be limited. Good

research can help them to learn the properties of their ideas; and it should in turn help them to find ways of strengthening their ideas, or to create new and stronger ones.

Wherever possible creative people should be exposed at first hand to consumers in the research situation, sitting in on group discussions or depth interviews. Where this is not possible videotape can fulfil some measure of the same purpose. Creative people in my experience are interested in particular ideas rather than in generalities. Since research reports tend to serve up generalised findings creative people often take little out of them, even if the report contains a lot of useful material. They can often, however, be stimulated to new thoughts by observing one or two consumers actually making the sort of points which the research has picked up. And direct exposure of this sort should help them to get the feeling and the flavour of the way people operate and react in this particular market.

One of the problems in this is that creative people tend to be interested in unusual and original ideas without regard for the typicality or numerical importance. One of the functions of the research people should be to guard against their picking up stray impressions from oddball minorities. (p 57-60, 82-86)

Methods in creative development research

Again there is no golden road, which, if followed, leads on to certain glory. Sometimes qualitative research in the form of depth interviews or (more commonly) group discussions will best meet your needs. Sometimes larger and more structured quantified research with audiences of several hundreds will be more useful. There are some occasional problems with which tachistoscopes or other pieces of experimental hardware will help you.

At the earliest stages qualitative work will probably be most useful. It does tend to provide the sort of understanding, immediacy and colour that I have asked for, and it is the kind of thing which (properly done and reported) can help to stimulate rather than enervate your creative people.

As the development programme proceeds and particular problems begin to emerge on which you want a definite reading you may feel the need to go to larger audiences. These can give you statistically more reliable and less subjective readings, although it can sometimes be difficult in questionnaires to capture the kinds of nuance in which advertising effect so often lives.

It is sometimes useful to use semi-structured interviews, in which the numbers can be larger than in most group discussion programmes but in which the freedom of the discussion situation is not entirely lost.

In short the advertisement research toolkit should consist of a range of techniques, both qualitative and quantitative, and your research advisers should be capable of producing different tools to match different problems. Even the best chisel that money can buy will not do all the jobs that a carpenter may need to tackle.

All these techniques will have severe limitations. On the qualitative side the results can be subjective and atypical. On the quantitative side there is a great deal that you cannot usefully reduce to numbers, including many of the most important aspects of most pieces of advertising.

It is my belief, however, that if the choice of technique is made with the principles of the preceding pages in mind, then useful results are more likely to flow. (p 57-60, 66-75, 87-90)

Research at the evaluation stage

At some point in time (theoretically at least) someone has to decide whether a particular new ad or campaign is worth full media exposure.

Traditionally many companies have tried to obtain fairly direct research evidence on which to base this decision. This as led to the use of what are sometimes referred to as 'evaluative' pre-testing techniques.

Of course, any research is to some extent evaluative, in the sense that you are likely to use it to help you to form judgements about whether the subject of the research is or is not desirable. Here I am using the term to describe research which aims to test fairly directly whether or not an advertisement is a good one. In their extreme form such tests include some direct measure of changes in preference or purchase intention which (if it meant anything) could be read off directly as an index of effectiveness. In recent years less direct measures have been brought in. But we can fairly describe any test as evaluative in the sense intended if the main purpose of doing it is to find out **whether** or not the ad is a good one rather than finding out **what** is good or bad about it, and **why**.

There has for a long time been widespread cynicism about evaluative tests, certainly within the advertising research fraternity, but increasingly also among advertisers and their agencies.

A good deal of it is still done, however, largely because advertising is an uncertain business. It is not difficult to understand that a man who is responsible for spending a great of money on advertising should hesitate to do so on his unsupported judgement alone, particularly when his decision may come under criticism at later stages. How much more reassuring to have this decision supported by numbers, to have at least the illusion of solid evidence. (p 57-60)

The value companies get out of advertising research would be considerably enhanced, however, if they would come to terms with the fact that simple and direct evidence about the effectiveness of a given advertisement or campaign is just not a reliable guide to decision making, reassuring though it may superficially seem. This applies whether the measures concerned are direct attempts to measure sales (as with gift choice or preference questions), or to measure what are known as 'intervening variables' (things like recall, interest, believability etc.).

There are very many reasons why this is so, of which some of the more important are as follows:

1. In the real world advertising does not normally have all (or even most) of its effect after a single showing. The effects cumulate over a period of time to add to the value which the consumer attaches to the brand and to modify the store of impressions which make up the image on which the consumer will draw for his decision making. Any single-point-in-time test must inevitably favour short-term effects rather than the long-term build-up which is generally more important. Repeated showings of the commercial on the same occasion clearly do not solve this problem. (p 70-75)

2. Any test situation is likely to focus attention on the advertising in a way which is grossly untypical of normal viewing or reading. The whole process of questioning suggests and implants perspectives totally foreign to the viewer's normal way of viewing commercials in the home.

    I have argued that much of the effort of advertising comes at low levels of consciousness from repeated brief and inattentive exposures. This is quite the opposite of the way in which test judgements are made.

3. It is well known that the effect of answering a set of questions about a product or brand will 'change' people's attitudes (in the sense that repetition of the questions will produce a different balance of response) more effectively than showing a commercial or press ad. Thus the

measuring instruments are likely to contribute more to the result than the test stimulus itself.

4. Before-and-after changes observed on quantitative tests are in any case rarely statistically significant. For reasons of economy the sample sizes are usually kept very small and the sorts of change customarily found are likely to have low probabilities of being genuine. Many commercial decisions have been taken on a basis which has about as much predictive validity as a coin-toss.

5. Many types of question assume that the objective of advertising is to switch people from one brand to another. In real life it is more likely to increase the **frequency** of buying the brand in a situation where the consumer goes on buying a number of different brands on different occasions.

6. 'Effectiveness' is not in any case the unilateral property of an advertisement. An ad is a commercial tool, and its effectiveness will depend very largely on its relevance to the job in hand. A hammer can be an extremely effective tool, but not when you need something for cutting wood. In the market place the ad will interact with other advertising and with the whole range of other market forces. Its 'effectiveness' is the product of this interaction, and not a property of the advertisement in isolation. (p 82-86)

7. 'Intervening variables' like recall, advertising awareness, interest, and so on have no necessary or constant relationships with sales effectiveness. These measures may or may not be useful in particular cases, but there is no reason whatever to suppose that they have any general predictive value. Anyone with experience of intelligent advertising research knows that people often receive and act on information which they did not appear to attend to at the time and which they are unable to reproduce coherently when asked. There is no reason to suppose that an interesting ad will necessarily sell any better than an uninteresting one; or that one which is well remembered has necessarily better selling power than one which is little remembered. (p 62-64, 64-66, 87-90)

8. Which leads to the point that different ads do and must 'work' in different ways, depending on their objectives, techniques, market backgrounds, target consumers and so on. Standardised or generalised measures of 'effectiveness' simply cannot encompass the range and diversity of objectives and techniques.

9. Simple and inexpensive tests rarely have the scope for sufficiently sophisticated measurements.

What all this boils down to is that there is no kind of reliable advertising quality control procedure to which proposed advertisements can be submitted with a view to filtering out the duds and passing only the winners. Whatever methods are tried there are too many unknown things and too many sources of distortion to make it possible to produce evidence which can say "here is a good ad and here is a bad one."

This has been realised by an increasingly wide circle of people. In fact throughout the history of advertising research there has been widespread doubt and cynicism about the value of many of the measures made. For example, if advertisers had ever **really** believed that the various advertising testing services were able to deliver the goods then they would (or should) have been prepared to spend more money on them. In fact few advertisers are prepared to spend serious sums of money on researching individual ads, which reflects the fact that they do not expect to get very much return for their expenditure. The limited funds made available impose a degree of crudity on the techniques which further increases scepticism about the value of the operation. So the business becomes increasingly one of minimal outlay for minimum return. Bogart, writing in the Journal of Advertising Research (op. cit.) spoke of the "constant search for cheap research answers to expensive business questions".

If this were all there would be no great harm to it. But the **illusion** of decision making importance still persists, largely because it can be uncomfortable and frightening to shed managerial crutches. So there is still a demand for evaluative testing, even though few people now have any real faith in it (whatever the methods used).

This demand tends to have undesirable side effects. First, it inhibits the serious use of creative development research. What is the point of working through a sophisticated development programme if the end result is going to be subjected to an over simplified and arbitrary screening process? Who, in any case is going to pay for it?* If there is to be an evaluative stage of testing then previous development research (which is much more useful) tends to be small-scale and lightweight.

The second side-effect of the demand for evaluation is its effect on the creative process itself. Imagination does not flourish when the fruits of

*There is incidentally a pernicious tendency for advertisers to expect their agencies to pay for testing on the quite spurious ground that it is improving the quality of agency's product. This is in the interest of neither party, and its main effect is enhance the atmosphere of cheeseparing cynicism of which I have complained.

imagination are seen to be arbitrarily discarded according to the results of a test which is not cognizant of, nor capable of taking account of, the aims for the particular advertisement or the needs of the particular market place. Small wonder that more creative people have a rooted distrust and dislike of advertising research when it has come simply to be a hurdle which all new campaigns must leap. How many potentially powerful advertising ideas have been aborted and how many mediocre and ineffectual campaigns have been okayed through the use of insensitive screening tests? (p 82-86)

In summary, dependence on some form of evaluative test tends to throw the weight of advertising content research too much to the end of the development phase. At this point there is often too little time and money and political scope left to modify the campaign if it is wrong, and moreover there is no form of advertising research as a learning feedback.

Solutions to the problems of evaluation

There is no simple and mechanical solution which will provide the sort of automatic reassurance that a lot of advertisers would like to see, and this fact is better recognised and openly accepted.

The solution comes, however, with a change of approach and perspective. Rather than hungering for last minute reassurance, those on whose shoulders the eventual decision falls should regard the development of a campaign as an evolutionary process and should take care to be involved in all the stages from earliest planning onwards. Creative content research should be carried out early on in the creative process. It should be rich and insightful. There should be willingness and encouragement to develop and modify ideas, with time and money being made available for this process. (p 82-86)

If the decision maker is himself involved in this process he will begin to develop confidence in the strength of the ideas as the process of research and modification proceeds. If he is unhappy he is in a position to make sure that his problems are overcome before reaching any kind of final confrontation situation. The individual pieces of research will not produce conclusive evidence about the merit of the commercial (they will suffer from the same kinds of ultimate limitation as those listed above for evaluative research). But they will enable the team to learn more about likely consumer responses. (p 82-86)

If this path is followed there is no longer a single moment when someone is suddenly confronted with a new advertisement and asked to decide

whether or not to back it. Judgement develops over a period, fed by pieces of basically diagnostic research as well as by the original market and advertising planning. By the end of this process advertising management is in a position to make a mature and informed commercial judgement about the proposed advertising. A judgement in the last analysis it must however remain. (p 82-86)

Thus the distinction which has been made between 'diagnostic' and 'evaluative' research ultimately breaks down. To attempt evaluate research as such is a mistake. Evaluative judgements about advertising can only to a limited extend be based on research; and the best and most useful basis comes from a proper programme of research which is 'diagnostic' in the sense that it attempts to heighten understanding rather than to provide a verdict.

Does this mean that we should never research an advertisement in its final form? Not at all. This can often be a very useful conclusion to an advertising development programme. There are many points at which the final execution of the advertisement may have failed even though its basic conception and methods are believed to be sound.

This is particularly important where the material used to feed into the development research has been substantially different in form from the final advertisement – either because of budget limitations in producing experimental material, or because of substantial changes suggested by the development research itself.

We may need to check on obvious points, like for example whether people seeing the ad will realise which brand is being advertised – this probably has been the downfall of a lot of otherwise good campaigns. We may need to make sure that the casting and production have faithfully captured the intended spirit and mood of the commercial. We may even need to make sure that words are audible and intelligible, and the message comprehensible.

However, research with these objectives should be seen as the full stop at the end of the sentence and most of the real work should have been done by this time. We should not regard the last piece of research in the series as one which bears the brunt of managerial decision making.

Campaign research following exposure

Once the campaign is running we can monitor its progress in the market place.

The most obvious reason for doing this is to see how effective the advertising is. In practice, however, it is generally almost as difficult to disentangle advertising effectiveness after the event as before.

That is to say it is difficult to find out what effect is due to a particular media campaign rather than to other causes.

To begin with the campaign is not working in a vacuum. The whole market will be in a state of flux. In order to see what our advertising is doing we must be prepared to make assumptions about what would otherwise have been happening. Advertising can often do a very handsome job by staving off a sales decline, or even just by lessening what would otherwise be a very steep decline. In circumstances such as these we shall not expect to be able to judge the effect of advertising by looking for positive benefits from it. (p 70-75)

Then of course advertising is unlikely to be the only way in which we are trying to affect the balance of forces in the market. The effects of advertising are generally impossible to disentangle from the effects of promotions, sales force activity, public relations, formulation, pack or price changes and so on.

Furthermore the intended effects of advertising are not always simple to measure. Quite often we wish to change features of a brand identity, and the degree of change our research registers may reflect the sensitivity of the questions we are using as much as anything else. And in any case, the effects we are looking for are often difficult enough to communicate among ourselves; how then can we be at all sure that the sort of blunt instrument that we are often offered by way of a research questionnaire is really capable of picking up the kind of nuance, inflection and tonality we are trying to work with in the advertising. (p 57-62)

One way of trying to get round these problems is to use carefully researched area tests, in which we operate differently in different areas, or try a new approach in one area alone.

These can be very useful, and a lot can be learned from them if they are properly set up.

However, even this does not usually provide a rigorous empirical way of isolating advertising effects. This is partly because there will be natural differences in level and trend of sales between the areas which are likely to be larger than the experimental effects we want to study; partly

because there are not enough meaningful and comparable areas to build a satisfactory experimental design; and partly because other accidental factors (like the resignation of the sales manager in the test region) often spoil the balance.

What all this amounts to is that questions like "exactly what value am I getting from my advertising pound?" are in reality likely to be unanswerable by direct measurement.

What **can** be usefully be done is to monitor the overall progress of the brand in the market place without necessarily trying to pin down the precise contribution of different spheres of marketing activity. This should be done by taking quantitative surveys fairly frequently and continuously if it is to be of any real use. Checks need to be taken once a quarter or more often. Each check does not necessarily have to be large enough to provide highly precise estimates on its own, and adjacent time periods can be grouped for more sophisticated analysis. But frequent checks allow continuous trend lines to be built up so that changes over a period of one or two years can be examined. If monitoring is carried out only on an annual basis several years are necessary to establish any sort of trend data. Of course the desirable frequency should depend on the speed with which the particular market is expected to change and the period over which results are expected. Nothing is more frustrating than looking at a long series of checks which imply that nothing is happening simply because they are too frequent relative to the reaction time of the market. Indeed I have known companies to be panicked into changing course long before they might reasonably have expected their advertising to bite simply because they were making very frequent measurements all registering no change.

On the other hand more companies make the opposite mistake and monitor too infrequently. They can tell whether things are better or worse than three or four years ago, but they have no idea whether their position is currently improving or deteriorating.

The subject matter of these checks must depend in detail on the market and on the general campaign strategy. They will usually need to include measures of brand awareness, general disposition towards the brand, brand and product images on relevant dimensions and purchasing and usage behaviour, with suitable demographic or other analysis measures. It will normally be important to cover the brand and its principal competition in the immediate product field, but it may often be useful to include brands or products from neighbouring product fields where there

is likely to be fairly direct competition with them – even though at first sight they may appear to be physically dissimilar and members of different product categories. For example, anyone monitoring a campaign for (say) potato crisps may well (in certain phases of market development) need to monitor confectionery consumption, which might at first not appear to be very closely related.

The monitoring questionnaire should certainly include questions which will enable the advertising target group to be taken out for separate analysis, and there will be occasions when the monitoring research can be confined to the target group alone.

It will also obviously need to include measures which relate directly to the intended effects of the advertising (or indeed to any feared and undesirable side effects).

Where the job of the advertising is to change the identity of the brand, for example, we shall need to have image measures covering the areas of change; and probably others covering some of the areas which may change unintentionally as a side effect of the campaign. (p 60-62)

One of the problems of measuring image changes is that our images are composed of subtle nuances and shades of meaning which may elude the gross measures we try to apply. Careful piloting research is called for, and also a willingness to tolerate a high level of apparent redundancy in our scales and question batteries. Meaning is elusive and language is clumsy and imprecise. We must be ready to have a number of scales covering very similar topics if we are to disentangle the difference between a brand being: inexpensive, a bargain, cheap and nasty, less expensive than expected, cheap in capital outlay, cheap in running costs, etc. (p 60-62, 75-82)

Something which is often measured with arguably more harmful than beneficial effects is advertising awareness or advertising recall. Unless there is some very good and specific reason for wanting to know this it is probably better not to do so. To begin with it takes up questionnaire space which can certainly be better devoted to something more profitable (anyone who finds he has spare space on a monitoring questionnaire has very probably not really thought out what he needs to measure). Secondly, really reliable measures of advertising awareness are very difficult, since people's general notions about which campaigns they have seen bear little relation to any kind of reality. There is a good deal of confusion between campaigns, a general tendency to imagine that one has seen

advertising for well-known brands, and so on. It is possible to try to 'prove' recall, but this is difficult and expensive if done properly, and in any case only removes a small proportion of the uncertainty.

Finally, it is very difficult to know what to **do** with advertising awareness measures when you have them. How high would you expect them to be? Does it matter much whether they are high or low? Are you trying to get people to remember your advertising, or to buy your product? To devise advertising which people will remember is child's play. To devise advertising which will help to sell products is more difficult. Are we not interested in the latter rather than the former? In practice measures of advertising awareness are either ignored or give rise to quite irrelevant worries which are prone to divert attention from the real problems.

Much the same applies to shorter-term advertising recall or 'impact' measures – 24-hour or 7 day studies of supposed advertising impact. Again these should only be used if there is a real problem which their use can help with, and not in a general attempt to 'take the temperature' of the advertising. (p 62-64)

Commentary

It could be argued that this chapter represents the real meat of this book in that it discusses the issues surrounding the implementation of advertising research as well as the processes and methodologies involved. The author has a clarity of approach that is refreshing even today. There are clear distinctions made between the different potential objectives of advertising research: the researching of strategy, of campaign ideas, of yes/no research to aid decision making and research to evaluate what the advertising has achieved. Careful emphasis is put on the cyclical nature of research, the need for the fourth stage to feed back into the beginning of the process, the strategy setting.

The plea in this book is one that has been taken up by most advertising agencies, namely the importance for research at an early stage and the need to analyse rigorously the market and the brand so that the strategy is right before any advertising development takes place. Interestingly the author also talks about the value of understanding the type of company for whom the advertising is being developed and this was written long before the real discussions of company cultures and their importance in the advertising process[1].

[1]*Global advertising that wirks locally: The IBM subtitles campaign.* Wayne R. McCullough. Journal of Advertising Research. May/June 1996.

What is most helpful in this chapter is the clear description of the development process; the fact that the development of the advertising starts with the positioning statement: "the seed from which advertising grows", and continues with a real but interesting description of the target and an analysis of the expected effects of the advertising. This may seem pretty basic but agencies and clients still trip over definitions, the differences between positionings, propositions and brand descriptions and frequently forget to ask themselves exactly how is the advertising going to persuade or to affect behaviour.

The other important plea in this chapter is the desire for research to be illuminating, to build understanding, to be a learning process and not to be reflective of a testing philosophy. It is here that the famous quote is written: "We are not testing the advertising since we do not have, and cannot have such a machine." Research is an aid to judgement not a substitute.

There is a down to earth tone in this writing which many may find particularly pleasing, the fact that common sense remains important and the warning to beware of any research methodology that is so over complicated that it becomes incomprehensible.

The chapter outlines the various methodologies available to the advertisers for testing advertising. If anything in this book was going to be out of date then surely this would be the section. Indeed there are methodologies available today that are not mentioned, for example the development of tracking studies had not happened so methods that link in to predicting the tracking results had not emerged either. Also much of the development of persuasion shift testing appears to be relatively recent so the reader might not expect this to be covered. In fact the concept of persuasion shift testing has been around since the 1950s so this is touched upon by the author and is robustly criticised.

The philosophy put forward in this booklet is based on a belief in the fragile nature of creativity, of the continued need to learn and understand, not to discourage the creative process nor to expect research to give all the answers. It is a philosophy that many practitioners will agree with today. However, the arguments to support this philosophy were written at a particular point in time and they should be combined with some additional reading to provide a fuller picture.[1]

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[1] See: (i) Testing to oblivion or testing to win. Mike Hall, Admap April 1997.
(ii) How good research can foster that creative flair. Graham Booth. Research Plus September 1997.

Miscellaneous essays and notes

On qualities and quantities

Unstructured interviewing using group discussions or individual interviews in depth is one of the most useful tools available for coming to an understanding of the consumer and of his likely reactions to your advertising, at any stage. It has a directness and immediacy which most other kinds of research tend to lack. It is possible to get a degree of participation and interest from creative people and from advertising management which is again difficult to inspire with less direct research forms. It is not (or does not need to be) the slave of anyone's prejudices or preconceptions. It is, in other words, apt on occasions to produce unexpected findings. It is capable of dealing with richer and more illuminating material than is generally possible with structured questionnaire research. Finally it is attractively quick and inexpensive to carry out, so that discussion projects can often be reported before anyone has had time to forget what they are supposed to find out.

With such a catalogue of virtues need we look further? Indeed we must, because qualitative research also has problems and limitations.

The most important of these are:

1. samples are inevitably small (if costs are not to escalate prohibitively). A typical project might involve forty or fifty people and a very large one still less than a hundred. There is some risk that responses will be atypical.

2. numerical estimates cannot be made. Information tends to be of the "some think this, others think that" kind and we cannot put numbers to the different viewpoints. This is partly due to the small samples involved and partly to the unsystematic nature of the information collected.

3. although the accessibility of qualitative data and ease of participation by non-research people are important advantages they are not without dangers as well. It is easy to jump to conclusions from hearing one or two people state a particular view, even if it is very untypical (indeed in a

sense the more unusual the view the more likely it is to seem 'interesting').

4. furthermore, the very speed, cheapness and simplicity of "running a few groups" is likely to make their use seductively appealing, even where some other form of research is reallyrequired. Companies who have been bitten through carrying out vast and complicated survey projects which they have then been unable to make any real practical use of are easily tempted to go to the other extreme and devote their research budgets to streams of individually inexpensive group discussion projects which can be commissioned with few qualms and little thought; each of which have small but direct and immediate payoffs; but which do not collectively provide a proper planning framework because they cannot be assessed into a single coherent set of organisable data.

Some of these problems (like the last two) can be simply avoided by proper management of the research programme. The problems of quantification and sample size matter more in some situations than others, and again they can to a large extent be avoided by choosing the right tool for the right job. Where numerical estimates are genuinely required one should clearly either:

1. not use qualitative research at all, or

2. if there is some other reason for using qualitative techniques, make sure that these are accompanied or followed up by proper quantification.

It is, however, easy to succumb to the lure of large numbers and feel that precise measurements need to be made where in reality they are either unnecessary or impossible to procure. In fact there is a positive danger in insisting on quantified evidence about matters which by nature cannot be properly quantified.

Attempts to pre test advertising quantitatively are good examples of this. It is easy to see why an advertiser spending large sums of money on his advertising should look for reassurance that his money will be wisely spent before he actually spends it. What he would really like to have is some simple way of measuring advertising effectiveness which he could apply to each new advertisement before it appeared. Since he may have to justify or explain his decision to his colleagues or superiors he wants numbers (which have a kind of hard and unarguable feel about them) however meaningless they may be and he wants them simple and unambiguous.

The advertising researcher tells him that such measurements cannot really be made, and that any measurements he **does** make will bear an unknown and probably very tenuous relationship to the problem of effectiveness.

Unfortunately many managers have opted to have **some** kind of measurement, however doubtful, rather than facing up to the undoubted challenge of accepting that advertising effectiveness is essentially not capable of being measured simply and directly in advance of market place exposure.

In general it is probably from qualitative research that we are likely to get the most stimulation, understanding and insight in the realms of advertisement research, although we must be continually on our guard against the problems of scale and subjectivity. We should never be content with just "running couple of groups".

This does not mean, however, that there is no place for quantitative research. There are often circumstances where no one can pin down fairly precisely what one needs to know about an advertisement, perhaps because it has already been researched in ways which highlight particular problems. If these are capable of being covered in a questionnaire format it may well be worth getting the reactions of a larger audience in numerical form.

Suppose, for example, there are worries as to whether a press ad which seems generally to perform well will in fact register its brand name clearly enough in people's minds. This is a type of problem which group discussions are entirely unfitted to consider. Then again we may want to know what proportion of viewers will be able to grasp the sequence of usage instructions in a demonstration commercial after one viewing, and we may want to look separately at the responses of people who have never used products of this type before. Or we might be worried that people had not understood a particular sequence. These again are probably best treated by quantitative research.

Before we decide whether to use quantitative or qualitative methods in a particular situation we should ask ourselves very clearly what we are trying to achieve by the research and then choose the best technique for the purpose, conscious of the severe limitations of all our tools in this field. Above all we must avoid the assumption that the mere fact of getting some numbers constitutes an objective assessment of the quality and effectiveness of the ad.

What is an image?

The term 'image' is one of the most commonly used in the advertising world. Everyone knows in a general sense what it means, but it is very difficult to define precisely. Long semantic debates can be held in which the precise meanings of words like 'attitude', 'belief', 'value' and so on are dissected and formulated. In this book I have used the word 'identity' to refer to the whole corpus of images relating to a brand.

For most of us, images are the things measured by image research – whether the brand is seen as 'expensive' or 'cheap'; whether it is 'for older people' or 'for younger people'. This often leads us to a narrow, mechanical and dangerously specific view of the nature of images.

Few people seem to have gone to the consumer end of the telescope to ask themselves what images are **for**, and in what sort of ways they operate.

I have suggested that it would be impossible to take all the consumer decisions which confront us by systematically evaluating the options, having processed and sifted all the available information. The task is manifestly impossible, and the attempt would lead rapidly to breakdown.

Fortunately the human brain does not work like a digital computer, using deterministic paths within logically designed frameworks. It is capable of scanning unsystematically a vast range of stored input and constructing very generalised pictures or images. Faced with a decision which there is no time, or no need, or no information to evaluate systematically the brain can simply produce a set of broad pictures of the various options which can be instantaneously compared as a basis for choice.

The pictures are not held constantly intact and unvarying in some massive mental filing system, however. They are drawn as needed from a vast and inchoate mass of impressions and bits of information which the brain stores.

The picture or image which the brain produces in respect of a given product will not necessarily be the same on two different occasions. To begin with, there is a vast range of impressions which the individual may draw on for this picture of a particular product. The situation may call for a different kind of image to be produced so that different sorts of features may be compared. Then again, images may change over time as fresh impressions are added.

However, although different situations may call different aspects of the image into prominence; and although an image may contain contradictory elements; and although images change over time, there is nevertheless a tendency to make stable, rounded and coherent pictures, since these are most useful in decision management. If the outcome of a decision is considered relatively unimportant, it is probably better to risk acting 'wrongly' rather than making the decision more difficult by worrying about the accuracy of the mental picture on which it is based.

Images are formed from the total stock of impressions which relate or can be related to the product, brand or object in question. In part these images derive from the more generalised images which are held in the culture or sub-culture to which the individual belongs. Thus the image of a Rolls Royce is not independently arrived at by each member of the population. There is a kind of 'folk-image' which is common to the majority of people in the culture, and which is constantly reflected and reinforced by the media and by interpersonal contacts within the society.

Since most individuals will thus come into contact with the folk-image this will tend to pass into their own repertoire of impressions (although they may choose to reject it or otherwise refrain from sharing it). In addition, however, each individual has his own more personal set of impressions. These derive from:

- direct experience

- contact with other people's experience

- advertising or promotions (including pack, pack copy etc)

- other forms of mediated communication (reviews, *Which*, editorial, fiction etc)

The public image and the private image interact with each other. If the product changes, a lot of people's personal experiences of it may change. If these changes are incompatible with the folk-image the latter may change or evolve to accommodate the new repertoire of personal impressions.

A particular stock of impressions may include pieces of factual information; general feelings of benevolence or hostility; miscellaneous sets of beliefs and attitudes, and so on. They are not hard, sharp, separate and definable, but a sort of rich soup full of nuances and subtle flavours. To pursue the analogy, some impressions may be fairly solid, factual and identifiable, like chunks of

meat in the soup – but like the meat they have absorbed the flavour of the soup and give the soup their own flavour in return.

'Impact' in advertising

In one limited sense it is of course self-evident that advertising needs 'impact'. That is to say one wants advertising to affect the situation in favourable ways, and not to disappear without altering anything. But this is like saying that advertising does not work unless it works.

People often use the word impact in a different and more specific way, however, usually to refer to the conscious perception and recall of advertising messages.

Does an ad need to be 'noticed' in order to work? Clearly it must be 'seen' (or at the very least 'glimpsed') in order to have any effect – unless of course we rely on advertising being passed on by word-of-mouth.

But whether or not an ad is seen depends on media planning and buying rather than on creative content, providing that we refer only to its having been physically exposed to the gaze.

Creative content can of course affect whether or not the ad is 'noticed' or 'remembered' by those who have 'seen it'. It is noticing and remembering which tends to reflect in recall studies.

Now it sounds as if it might be common sense to say that only ads which are consciously noticed (and probably remembered) are likely to work but unfortunately there is no evidence to prove that this is true. Nor does it in fact seem quite so inevitable if you examine the question a bit more closely.

The assumption rests on the belief that advertising communicates at the conscious and rational level, and that anything which is not the subject of conscious attention will not be taken in. Consumers are like children learning from a teacher; if they don't pay attention the lesson won't sink in. I won't deny that **some** advertising works at this level; or that some part of many ads does so. But that is certainly not all there is to it (it is not all there is to education either for that matter, but that is beside the point).

I have pointed out several times in the course of this book that human beings can pick up a good deal of information from a large number of signals exposed in rapid sequence and for a very short time. Anyone who

has been on a rapid reading course is amazed how easily he can take in and remember quite a long sentence flashed on a screen for such a short exposure that he can hardly see it. A wealth of impression can be derived from a very quick glance at a picture, since visual and pictorial symbols give up their meaning very readily.

I have also pointed out that there is far more advertising than anyone can reasonably be expected to attend to, and that interest is likely to be fairly low for most product fields.

This provides the advertiser with a dilemma. Does he work on the assumption that his main task is to get conscious attention, to do which he has to outpace the majority of other ads on the market (particularly if he is not in a high interest field)? Or does he recognise that most of the time his ad will get only skimmed or inattentively viewed, and design it so that it communicates even at that level?

Both courses have their dangers, and the right one must depend on the nature of the market and of the advertising message. Some important types of message are almost impossible to put over **except** to an attentive audience.

However the natural bias is in favour of conscious and attentive communication, because it is easier to think about and to measure (although even there it is not actually as easy to measure as it looks). There is something worrying about spending your money on advertising which you do not particularly expect people to notice and study.

Nevertheless in today's crowded media we see many ads performing extraordinary contortions in order to get noticed. In many cases the quest for superficial impact has come to dominate the essential message content. If an ad has to work so hard to get itself noticed how hard can it work in delivering its message? Is there not a danger that the attention-getting device actually becomes the message?

So perhaps advertisers should concentrate harder on getting advertising which communicates rapidly at a low level of attention rather than striving to get noticed at all costs. The sort of things which may enable an ad to communicate rapidly are:

- communication through pictures rather than words

- brevity in verbal messages

- attention to the total gestalt and not merely the detailed parts

- clear use of logos, symbols and other coded signals

- continuity of theme

Perhaps sometimes our advertising research should examine the impressions created by fleeting or inattentive exposures rather than (as is generally the case at present) by prolonged exposures or focused attention. This is not easy, however, since one single exposure of this kind taken in isolation is not likely to have much discernible effect at all (and I have argued that this would also be the case in the real-life situation). 'Massive dose' exposure, on the other hand, is unrealistic, even if attention is focused away from the ads (by burying them, for example, in a programme of other matter).

In many ways the clinical psychiatrist and the student of the psychology of the abnormal have an easier time of it than advertising researchers do. They are at least dealing with matters which are important to their subjects; whereas it is the transience and triviality of the consumer's relationship with advertising which makes it difficult to study. As soon as you hold it up to look at it you are removing it from its essential context.

However, the fact that it is **difficult** to measure or study inattentive communication must not blind us to the fact that this is where the real action is in most cases; or to the fact that the kind of reactions we get in our group discussions or cinema tests are a good long way away from it.

Some points about communication

One might define communication as the transmission of information from one entity to another. Many books could be (and indeed have been) written about it. I simply want to pick out some points which seem important for advertising but which are sometimes overlooked.

A particular communication may or may not be intended by the person transmitting it (in the case of human communications which is what interests us here). For example, two women meet. One is very expensively dressed, is proud of her clothes, and refers frequently to them in conversation. She intends that the other woman should be impressed with her taste, her wealth and her appearance. The other woman on the contrary goes away thinking that she has been talking to an ostentatious snob whose clothes she personally would not want to be seen dead in.

This is not a case of miscommunication in the sense that the second woman did not hear or understand what the first was saying; nor indeed that she disbelieved what she heard. But she was receiving lots of messages from the way her companion looked and spoke which (taken perhaps into conjunction with her preconceptions about the woman) over-rode the intended communication.

This anecdote also brings out the point that communications are not only often unintended, but they are also not necessarily explicit. There are many ways of conveying meaning other than by saying something straightforwardly or in words or pictures. When you talk to someone the tone of your voice, your gestures, your facial expressions, your eye movements, the phrases and cadences of your speech will all convey meanings at least as potent as your actual words; and your choice of words may sometimes convey a good deal more than their purely semantic content. These non-verbal and non-explicit communications may of course be intentional or unintentional – poets and artists convey broad and powerful messages deliberately through largely indirect means.

If we want to convey facts, detailed arguments and logical propositions we need to express them directly through verbal or pictorial means. If we want to convey feelings and emotions we need to work very largely through indirect communications.

Communication can take place at very low levels of consciousness, and everyone is continuously receiving a vast number of communications from his environment, both from other people and from things.

People can receive and process vast masses of signals at any one moment. It would take several pages of words to give even a brief outline of a small number of the more important communications received and acted on by the driver of a car approaching a busy junction, even within a few seconds. In fact, quite clearly people can take in a vast amount of information, screen out what is irrelevant for the purpose in hand, and process the remainder as a basis for action in a very short space of time indeed. But very little of this information needs to be **consciously** received or handled.
If the driver had to work out ab initio what each signal meant and what he should do about it he would quickly become paralysed with information overload and consequent indecision. This is incidentally one of the main problems facing people first learning to drive when coming into heavy traffic. They have not learnt to recognise broad patterns of signals and to habituate their responses to them.

These brief notes on the communication process are meant to suggest that:

(a) unintended communications can sometimes be louder than intended communications, and implicit ones stronger than explicit.

(b) people are capable of receiving vast numbers of signals which can be handled at a low level of consciousness. It is at this level that much advertising communication necessarily has to work.

How people deal with conflicting ideas

A school of thought in psychology which has had some influence on advertising commentators says that people work to preserve balance in their beliefs and attitudes. The theory of cognitive dissonance says that people reject ideas which are violently at odds with their preconceptions. The theory of selective perception says that people may simply screen out impressions which are at variance with their existing beliefs.

There is obviously a lot of truth in these viewpoints. It is uncomfortable and unhelpful to hold conflicting views about one object. One way of avoiding it is simply to reject any new information which conflicts with existing opinions.

Simple observation tells us that this happens some of the time. Common sense tells us it cannot happen **all** of the time. If this were not so people would never change their minds about anything. Since the way people deal with new information is obviously important to advertising it is worth looking further at the way people receive and use dissonant impressions.

It may be supposed that there are different types of situation in which dissonant communication is more and less likely to be accepted. It depends on the nature of the information (and perhaps of its source and medium); on **how** dissonant it is and in what ways; and on the nature of the existing views with which it is dissonant. For example, it may well be that someone with entrenched right wing views will refuse to believe any good thing which is reported to him about Soviet Russia (or vice versa for left wing views). He will either ignore opinions which do not match his preconceptions, or he will refute them, try to rationalise them or explain them away. Not to do so would require major readjustment of whole sets of beliefs and attitudes fundamental to his way of life. People will in most circumstances protect the basic belief around which they have built their lives.

On the other hand peripheral and isolated beliefs will generally be easier to discard or modify. Someone who has been under the impression that

plastic clothes pegs last longer than wooden ones is likely to be ready to change his mind if presented with convincing evidence that plastic pegs crack before wooden ones rot. He will not ignore or distort the conflicting evidence because (unless he is some kind of clothes peg fetishist) the new information will not violate any important system of beliefs or values.

At the same time, to push the analogy a little further, he is unlikely to have gone out to test the validity of his beliefs about pegs by actively seeking information. In a situation where the relative durability of the two materials is likely to appear of trivial importance, it is much easier *not* to disturb your existing image even though there is a possibility that it may be misleading, rather than seeking out information which may cause you to go to the trouble of changing your mind for very little practical benefit.

Thus people will tend to avoid deliberately provoking situations of possible dissonance unless there seems to be some possible benefit to them in doing so. Generally it is simpler and more useful to act on your existing beliefs unless something happens to challenge their validity.

But the environment does some times present clearly dissonant messages. Let us suppose that a man believes that a particular make of car is superior in reliability. He can receive dissonant messages in a number of ways:

- he buys one and it breaks down

- his neighbour's model proves unreliable

- he is exposed to an advertising campaign for a rival model which makes strong claims of superior performance

- he reads an article by a motoring journalist with adverse criticisms

- the RAC carries out checks on reliability which reflect poorly on his favoured marque

- most of the other men in the pub disagree with him when the subject comes up conversation

He may react to these dissonances in various ways:

1. he may totally accept the new evidence and reverse his previous view. On the above reasoning this is more likely to happen where the view in question is not tied in to important value or belief systems.

2. he may retain his former view but in a weakened form, more vulnerable in the future to repetitions of contrary evidence.

3. he may retain his belief unaffected.

4. he may retain his former belief in a strengthened form, building his defences against unpalatable ideas.

5. he may simultaneously retain two conflicting impressions without trying to reconcile them. This is an important possibility, which all us can recognise in daily life, but which we all try to pretend does not happen when we consider human behaviour and motivations. Research people are particularly guilty of trying to tidy up consumers' minds as if everyone was allowed to hold only one coherent set of views on any given subject. In fact all of us have heads stuffed with contradictions, which may well embrace values as well as beliefs. We seem to have a great capacity for sealing off different compartments of our experience so that potential conflicts between different pieces of information or different feelings are prevented from ever breaking out. If we did not have this facility we should be torn apart by the perpetual struggle to reconcile the irreconcilable. Ordinary life and the management of mundane decisions would become impossible.

Market research will have to learn to come to terms with ambivalence and inconsistency. When someone gives two inconsistent answers about a given brand in a piece of research we worry and fret and ask ourselves which is the 'real' attitudes. Looking for a kind of monolithic truth underneath it all is unrealistic, and is perhaps the source of a good deal of the mechanical and oversimplified thinking which aborts many research projects long before they reach the point of being really useful in the development of advertising.

While people can easily hold contradictory views however, it is difficult to maintain the unaltered once their contradictions are juxtaposed and made manifest. This is where dissonance is really likely to occur, when someone who has two incompatible beliefs is forced suddenly into a position where their opposition cannot be overlooked and where a reconciliation is necessary. Even then one has many tricks for evading the conflict – "It's the exception that proves the rule", "You can't generalise from..." and so on.

It seems quite likely that dissonant advertising messages will at times be rejected*, and this must be one of the dangers in making a frontal attack on ingrained prejudice. Anyone who wishes to reject advertising arguments will not find it difficult to find grounds for doing so.

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* On the other hand mildly dissonant messages can be intriguing, and can sometimes produce a slight tension which is more fruitful than a completely bland sense of agreement.

However it also seems likely that more advertising fails to register because it is ignored as irrelevant than because it is rejected as dissonant. The mechanisms of selective perception enable us to select out sets of signals from the environment because they seem relevant or important or interesting. A good deal of advertising may misfire because it contains nothing which makes it seem relevant enough to beat the screens which protect the mind from being swamped by random noise.

However, although people can screen out or reject irrelevant or dangerous signals there will be a general tendency for people's images and impressions to evolve loosely into a state of better correspondence with outside reality, and also into a state of better internal balance. Although a high degree of conflict and contraction in beliefs can be tolerated, and although the job of stopping to make a thorough sort out of views on any topic is not something to be undertaken lightly, it is also dangerous and inefficient to get too far out of step with the world outside. Evidence of various kinds will gradually filter in and views will be rearranged (unsystematically) as it seems convenient or useful to do so. This process is likely to go on in most areas, except those where the individual has a particular interest in maintaining his position at all costs (strongly held political or religious beliefs, basic value systems etc.).

It seems unlikely that much of the effect of advertising comes through continually feeding this longer-term evolution of views rather than in effecting lighting conversions.

It might well be possible after proper study to try to classify the types of situation which would tend to produce each of the five reactions listed – although this would need vastly more sophisticated research than any that has yet been attempted in this field. For the present I would simply make the following summary of what I have said:

- people can ignore or distort messages they receive if these are unacceptable to them. They are most likely to do this if the messages they receive are in conflict with some important or basic system of beliefs, attitudes or values; or if the messages seem irrelevant or unimportant.

- in the main advertising messages are more likely to be ignored for irrelevance than suppressed for reasons of conflict.

- except in important or interesting fields it is easier and therefore more satisfactory to stick with your existing beliefs than to go on

actively and continually reformulating your images.

- people have a great capacity for inconsistency and ambivalence and do not have tidy, ordered and coherent systems of beliefs or attitudes.

- nevertheless there will tend to be a gradual, unsystematic evolution of images in the direction of   (i) consistency and balance
                                       (ii) conformity with external reality.

- however, only in exceptional circumstances will this evolution operate through purposive and systematic search procedures.

Advertising as wallpaper

I have cautioned at several places in this book against considering advertising in vacuo without relating it closely to the market place context. Advertising is part of a general background to product purchase, and consumers will rarely have occasion to separate it from the background as a whole.

Traditionally we have tended to think of an advertisement as something whose properties and powers are intrinsic to itself and capable of being studied quite in isolation.

In reality the way an advertisement is perceived and the kind of influence it has will depend intimately on a whole host of other factors external to the advertising itself.

Take a typical housewife and her relations with (say) the floor polish market. Let us trace her contacts with this market through an imaginary week, not forgetting that this is just one tiny thread among thousands, which I am drawing out and magnifying for purposes of illustration. The housewife herself would certainly not have it in sharp focus.

Let us suppose that this market (for simplicity) contains only three brands. Let us imagine they are called Lewis's, Whistle and Glo. New Glo is our brand.

The lady starts the week with an inherited bundle of impressions of floor cleaning and of the three brands. She has some Lewis's in her cupboard. She has also used Whistle on odd occasions, but she has never tried Glo. Her impressions which are vague and hazy in the main, are a compound of her own experience, odd remarks from neighbours, past advertising seen or half seen, the look of the products and their packages, a fact or two

from a *Which?* report she once started to read, some bits of lore learnt at her mother's knee, the names of brands, the reputations of their makers, and who knows what else.

Monday is her regular floor cleaning day. She gets out the Lewis's and sets to work. She sees the pack. She doesn't really look at it, it is so familiar, but perhaps just the way it looks reinforces a tiny particle of an impression. She doesn't read the words on the pack (maybe she did years ago, when she first bought it, perhaps not even then), but perhaps she half notices an odd word, and another flake of meaning joins the mixture in her mind.

Even after all these years of using Lewis's she enjoys the smell of it, it reminds her of the way her mother's floor used to smell. She thinks about her childhood home; polishing the while. She hardly notices how long it takes her to get a really good shine to the floor. After all, Lewis's gets you good results, but you have to be prepared to work at it. Another image crystallises a fraction.

She puts the polish away, noticing that the pot is nearly empty, and making a mental note to get some more.

At lunchtime, flicking through a women's mag, her gaze wanders over an ad for Whistle for a few seconds. She doesn't think about it, but somewhere her mind ticks up the impression that she has heard a lot about Whistle recently. A bit further on in the mag, there is an article about labour-saving types of flooring. She wonders for a moment whether all this polishing is really worth it, when you come down to it. A tiny curl of displeasure winds around the Lewis's she has been using.

Later that afternoon she goes shopping. On the way she passes one of our new Glo posters. She doesn't even glance at it, although later in the week she will notice the Glo on the supermarket shelf and wonder for a split second where she saw it before. The poster shows a beautiful, highly polished wooden floor, and a pack of Glo.

In the supermarket she checks off her shopping fairly methodically, although she forgets she is running out of floor polish. She even passes the polish shelves without the penny dropping. There is a good long facing of Whistle in that eye-catching new pack. If you asked her leaving the shop she wouldn't remember seeing it, but that is the second time already today that it has flashed in front of her eyes.

There is that familiar old Lewis's pack on the shelves too. She doesn't look at that either – why would she? But every time she catches sight of it, it reinforces that familiar old image. It looks so old-fashioned, but so good. Satisfying, somehow.

There are some of our Glo packs there too, although not many – the trade promotion hasn't really got off the ground yet. But we've done a good job with the pack – even at a glance you feel that here is a modern brand which will really get results good enough for the fussiest. But the lady doesn't look. She is worrying about the meat and keeping an eye on the time for meeting the kids from school.

That night, watching the television, she sees two of our ten-second launch commercials for Glo. When the first one comes on she is trying to shoo the children off to bed. Second time round she's still laughing at the show she's just seen. If you rang her that evening and asked her what ads she had seen she wouldn't mention Glo, that's for sure. But by the end of the evening her latent interest in the brand is a little higher than it would have been that morning. She has no occasion to think about it yet, but when she does she will find that she has a few small and elusive impressions tucked away.

In the morning she opens the hall cupboard to get out her dustpan and her eyes slide over that familiar old Lewis's pack. On the way to the shops she passes the Glo poster again. In the housewares store she visits for some clothes pegs there are big stacks of Whistle right inside the door, and some kind of competition. She doesn't look at them.

In the afternoon she goes to her sister's for a cup of tea. Leafing through a magazine she passes the Whistle ad again. She recognises the pack in the ad... where has she seen that recently? And stops for a couple of seconds to look at it. Mmmm, might be worth trying, looks a bit easier, like a sort of spray. But she passes on without reading the copy. Her sister comes in with the tea. Later she notices a can of Whistle on her sister's windowsill. She picks it up and looks at it. She glances at the instructions on the pack. It **does** sound easy to use. She puts it down and turns to look at the new snaps of her sister's children.

On the front of the bus that takes her home is an ad which tells the world that Whistle is the cheapest floor polish on the market. She doesn't notice it, but a faint impression slithers into her mind.

The bus passes a store with a big stack of that attractive Whistle pack in

the window. It goes past a Glo poster. She doesn't look at either, not more than a passing glance, anyway.

That evening she sees a commercial for Glo again, and one Whistle. The Lewis's pack is still there when she opens the cupboard.

In the morning she remembers she needs polish. When she arrives at the store (passing but not noticing the Glo poster), she goes in due course to the polish shelves, where she reaches instinctively for the Lewis's. Her eyes pass the Whistle display, and slide back to it. She picks up a Whistle pack, reflectively, and looks at the instructions again. She looks at the Lewis's pack, indecisive. No doubt about it, that's the one for results. You can't beat the old stuff really. But this does look a bit easier – and probably cheaper. Her mind runs over the article on labour-saving floors. She looks at the price. It is heavily cut. She shrugs and drops it into her basket. Her brow furrows. Can she **really** afford the steak she was planning? Mustn't forget mother's birthday card...

At home she unloads her purchases. She doesn't remember having passed the Glo poster again on the way home. She holds the Whistle in her hands for a second as she puts it in the cupboard. She looks at the Lewis's pack. She shakes her head. There's really no substitute for the good old stuff. This new stuff just doesn't **look** like proper polish. She begins to feel a little sorry she bought the Whistle. She pulls out the Hoover and forgets all about polishing floors. Catching sight of the magazine she was looking at on Monday, she wonders for an instant as the memory darts through her mind if she could persuade her husband to lay out for some floor coverings that don't need polishing. Still, the wood looks nicer really. She compares her home with her sister's, which is a bit plastic. She hoovers on.

The week goes by. She passes heedlessly the Glo poster a dozen times. She flicks past press ads for all three brands. When she notices a Whistle ad she stops to look at it, remembering that she has a can waiting in the cupboard. She reads the copy idly, reading of the low price, the miracle ingredients, the special high-gloss finish and the ease of use. She frowns absently. Not like a real polish. Still she could do with saving a bit of time. She passes on. She sees at least half-a-dozen commercials for the various brands. She half-notices the Whistle ad and nods agreement at the mention of cheapness. She doesn't give it a second thought. Every time she opens her cupboard she sees the Whistle and Lewis's packs but she has lost interest in them – although seeing them half-a-dozen times

gradually reinforces the polarisation in her mind. She sees other displays around.

On Monday she opens the cupboard to get the polish out. For a microsecond she wonders whether to finish the Lewis's first, but she is a bit curious to see whether that Whistle is as easy as they say it is. She glances at the half-remembered instructions and misapplies the polish. It's easy to put on, bit hard to get off. She looks at the instructions again, and corrects the procedure. Well, it **is** quite easy. It polishes all right... but it's not the same really. There's not the same sort of feeling about it. She probably won't buy it again.

Her mother calls while she is finishing the polishing. Her eyebrows rise at the sight of the Whistle. Their brief conversation confirms the housewife's tentative resolution to go back to good old Lewis's, after all, that's what polishing's really about, isn't it.

That afternoon she goes to the shops again, once more passing the Glo poster without a glance. In the supermarket she is walking past the polish shelves when she notices the display of Glo, slightly bigger than last week. She doesn't stop – she has a lot to get, and she won't need any more polish for a month or so yet. Her brief flicker of interest in new polishes has died. Well, more or less died anyway. As her eye lights on the Glo the thought crosses her mind that she has heard good reports of it. With that one you really **would** get a finish you could be proud of. Now, where did I see those tomatoes.

She has this vague feeling about Glo now (which strengthens a tiny bit as she passes the Glo poster on the way home, and gives it a quick sideways glance as she wonders whether the last shop short-changed her). It comes partly from the look of the pack, which has a kind of traditional polishy feel about it; and partly from that beautiful shiny floor she keeps passing on the Glo poster without apparent recognition; and maybe even partly from the brand name, who knows. The lady herself certainly doesn't – and wouldn't care much if she did. After all, it's only polish.

Maybe if this seed of an idea germinates and is properly nourished she will buy Glo next time round – or the time after that. Maybe she will just go back to good old Lewis's (she knows where she is with that one). It all depends what happens next week – and the week after that – as the same processes go on and on.

Even this long account has had to be concentrated and dramatised, and the real-life processes are probably even more diffuse and casual than those depicted, for many markets at least. Advertising is certainly less prominent than I have made it sound.

What I have been trying to make clear in this fictitious account is how interdependent our advertising is with the advertising of our competitors, and with the nature of the products, the packs, promotions, names, past experience, hearsay, editorial matter directly or indirectly related to the product field, and so on.

In my example the stimulus which really opened the lady's mind to the idea of a new polish was an article about labour-saving flooring, nothing directly to do with polish at all.

Then again her reception of our messages about Glo might very well have been quite differently interpreted if it had not been for her recent flirtation with Whistle, and her rejection of an important part of the Whistle copy platform (the bit about getting good results).

I hope the foregoing passage also makes it clear what I mean about advertising having its effect gradually, and largely at lower levels of consciousness. It would be very difficult to put one's finger on the precise point at which our housewife really decided to give Whistle a try, or the precise influence which tipped her into doing it.

Finally it should show just how difficult it is to separate the influences of advertising, promotions, distribution, packaging, naming, public relations, product formulation and so on; and conversely, just how important it is to see advertising as just one manifestation of the product which needs to work in harmony with all its other manifestations in order to be truly effective.

On target groups and segmentation

I have suggested earlier in this book that defining a target group for advertising is one of the critical steps in deciding how to position the brand; and that it is the job of planning research to help produce as relevant a definition as possible.

There is a temptation to avoid making restrictive and exclusive definitions for fear that one will simply reduce the size of the potential market. This is undoubtedly true up to a point, although it can easily lead to the

adoption of bland and generalised appeals. If you can identify a reasonably large group of people who are for some reason judged to be more likely to respond to your brand's appeal, and if you can make your brand speak loudly and clearly to them, then you are likely to appeal more strongly than if you try to be all things to all people.

One can draw a parallel with lighting. For a given input of energy you can choose to throw an intense light on a small area or a less intense light on a wider area; so in advertising content.

Your decision on this must depend on a number of factors, one of which is your current and expected market share. Clearly if you have or aspire to 70% of the market there is not likely to be much point in restricting your appeal to a group who form only 30% of the relevant population – unless of course the weight of consumption is very heavily skewed towards that group, which might sometimes be the case.

Another factor is the extent to which the market is homogeneous or heterogeneous. In some markets it is possible to distinguish different sub-groups within the market who have different needs, different aspirations, different uses for the brand, or basically different approaches to purchasing and using the products concerned. In other markets these 'differents' are unimportant or slight.

We might find, for example, that the car polish market could be broken into two basic groups:

- those who take a positive pleasure in making their cars look nice, and are prepared to spend time, money and effort on the process, and

- those who feel socially obliged to keep their cars clean and begrudge the time and money they have to spend.

This is a hypothetical and oversimplified example, but it is not difficult to see that two such groups would be likely to respond to different kinds of product benefit and different types of brand identity and appeal.

The target group should be chosen with regard to a number of factors:

1. The desirability of attracting the particular group (which includes the size, value and importance of the group).

2. The prospects of attracting the group. This depends in turn on:

- the objective nature and existing identity of your brand and,

- the needs, aspirations and interests of the people in the group.

Either of the factors listed under (b) can be modified through advertising, but a reasonable match is generally important if the task of advertising is not to be unduly large and long-term.

To revert to our car polish example we should need to see how people in both groups currently perceive our brand (and it competitors), and to consider whether the brand has any other promotable virtues which might appeal to either group.

We should need to study both groups to see how far our brand's identity or objective qualities might fit in with their needs and interests.

On this basis we might decide that we would promote mainly to one of the two groups. We should need to check whether that group was sufficiently large and important to make a good market for us.

We should then concentrate (firmly but not obsessively) on making sure that everything we did in advertising, in sales promotion, in pricing policy, in package development, and in public relations was geared to (or at the very least not inconsistent with) the known views and requirements of this group.

Not the least advantage of this kind of approach is that it provides a coherent peg to hang all these disparate activities on, so that the brand identity is expressed through all our contacts with the consumer. We do not then just have to think of consumer promotion which will work in its own right. We have to think of one which will work **for people of the type we have defined**, whose habits, interests, personalities and wants we have (or should have) charted fairly comprehensively.

This approach is commonly known as market segmentation. In suitable cases it can be a very powerful tool.

Of course there may be very many ways of defining a target group in any given market. You could define it in terms of traditional variables like age, social class, etc. You could base it on product or brand usage patterns. You could select out people who already have certain attitudes to your brand. You might try to pick out people with certain types of personality. Then you could try attitudes to the product group and to use of the products. And so on, including combinations of all these variables.

There is certainly no magic definition which will fit all markets. Even within a particular market there is no single definition which is right while all others are wrong. The trick is to pick out the definition which is **most relevant to the market and most useful to you**. The American researcher Yankelovitch has spoken of this as the "decisive mode of segmentation".

If you have managed to target your marketing effort in this way it should be remembered when you are carrying out further research. In advertisement research, in particular, it is important that the samples of consumers involved should reflect the target group. To take a delicately targeted piece of advertising and try it out on a straight population cross-section of consumers is apt to be asking for trouble.

Do attitudes affect behaviour?

One of the debates which has smouldered on in the research world for some years is whether attitude changes precede or follow changes in behaviour. Many people had supposed that before any change in purchasing behaviour took place it had to be preceded by a change in attitude. Some researchers then unveiled studies in which behaviour had certainly changed but in which attitudes remained obstinately stable; or in which attitude changes followed rather than preceded the new behaviour patterns.

This debate has particular appeal to those 'Mickey Mouse' minds who believe it possible to pin down the fundamental springs of human motivation in a neat cracker-barrel formulation. Clearly it is felt that attitude change must **either** precede behaviour change **or** it must follow it.

The simple fact, observable to anyone not blinkered by his own techniques is that:

- sometimes changed attitudes lead to changed behaviour

- sometimes changed behaviour leads to changed attitudes

- sometimes attitudes change but behaviour does not

- sometimes behaviour changes but attitudes do not

I am sorry if this complicates matters, but it has the unfortunate merit of being true. To complicate things even further it is perfectly possible for changes in attitude to take place without necessarily registering on your brand image survey, so that **observed** changes in attitude are not necessarily equatable with **actual** changes in attitude.

Let me justify these outrageous statements. A woman may come to feel or think differently about a particular brand of canned stewing steak in ways which make her feel more disposed to buy it. She will not necessarily make a radical or immediate change in behaviour, but she will increase the frequency with which she buys the brand. Here we may say that changed attitudes have led to changed behaviour. In this case the attitudes which have changed have been ones which relate closely to her purchasing motivations.

Alternatively her favourite outlet may cease to stock her favourite brand of steak (or the brand may be withdrawn). She then increases her frequency of purchasing a competitive brand, to which she has not in the past been particularly well disposed. Now that she buys this brand frequently she feels it necessary to justify her action, and she revises her opinion to fit her new habits. Possibly she does actually find unexpected merits in the new brand. Perhaps she is more sensitive to advertising for the brand, and more disposed to absorb its messages, now that she is herself a member of the club. In this case behaviour change has clearly preceded and largely caused attitude change.

Then again she may be convinced (perhaps by advertising) that a competing brand is not as shoddy as she had always thought. However, she is perfectly happy with the brand or brands she normally buys, which she still feels are rather more suitable for her purposes. Perhaps she still has other worries about the competitive brand which have not been reassured. Attitude change has taken place, perhaps even removing an important objection to the brand, but it has not affected her behaviour because it has not affected all the relevant factors which determine her behaviour. In other words the advertising has not got at all the **right** attitude changes, and attitude change in this case neither precedes nor follows behaviour change.

In a different situation she may buy a number of brands of canned steak with similar frequency, shopping about to get price advantages and lacking very powerful images of the various brands to propel her towards particular purchasing patterns. She has always thought that one of the brands was in a vague sort of way better quality and more meaty than the others, but the belief has never been clear or strong enough to overcome the lure of this week's cut-prices.

Interviewed in an image survey, however, even her weak images would reflect in the absence of any other strong views. A well aimed advertising campaign has the effect of strengthening and sharpening up her vague

notions, and what was previously a dormant belief now becomes an active agent pushing her towards purchase of the brand. Such a change would either not be visible in an image survey, or would reflect only as an intensification of existing attitudes and not as a change. This would then be an example of behaviour change unassociated with either precedent or subsequent changes in attitudes.

In any case we must be very careful of not falling into the trap of assuming that because we have "done an image survey" we have therefore fully surveyed, dissected and measured the entire corpus of possible images. Image surveys can suffer from two important problems:

1.   They cannot cover all the possible dimensions of image, so that we are in fact measuring a **selection** of the things which people might feel or think about the brands under investigation. Unless this selection is made with the greatest care we may well be missing out critical dimensions. If behaviour changes but images do not this **may** simply reflect limitations in your choice of image scales.

There is no certain way round this problem, but there are three measures which minimise its likelihood:

- careful preliminary work based on qualitative exploration.

- careful statement of the objectives of the advertising, described as fully as possible, together with an appraisal of the likely spin-offs or side effects

- reasonably full lists of dimensions. There is a dangerous tendency to believe that a set of six scale questions repeated on an omnibus survey constitutes continuous image measurement. If you do this sort of thing you have no right to be surprised if you do not find useful correspondences between image and behaviour.

2.   The 'grain' of the images is often dangerously coarse. The sort of changes which affect behaviour are often quite subtle, yet our measuring instruments are generally crude. The important images (to switch metaphors) can easily slide away like small fish slithering through a net with overlarge mesh.

This is true even without getting on to the tricky ground of moods and atmospheres. Take what seems to be a fairly simple and cut-and-dried dimension, like 'expensiveness'. To say that something is 'expensive' can be a term of praise or blame (or simply a neutral statement) depending on the

context. It can mean overpriced. It can mean costing a lot but worth the money because good in quality. It can simply mean that the capital outlay is large, whether or not the investment would be justified. It can mean generically costly. It can mean of high status value. And so on. Therefore one needs perhaps four or five (or even more if it is very important) different sub-dimensions in order accurately to pin down even this one simple-seeming characteristic – because the differences in meaning referred to are not merely hair-splitting nuances; they are fundamental differences easily large enough to affect purchasing decisions.

In recent years the approach to image scaling in many quarters has been to try to remove 'redundant' scales in order to shorten and simplify the list to be covered. This is usually done by the simple process of chucking out anything which correlates highly with something else. The process is sometimes made to seem more respectable (or at least more complicated) by basing it on a factor analysis, for the purpose of which a large pilot survey is carried out. What the proponents of this approach fail to see is that the most significant areas of human communication (particularly where feelings are being conveyed) **demand** a high level of redundancy, and by reducing this you are simply grinding out all the sensitivity leaving yourself merely with the dry bones of meaning. It is analogous to try to write advertising copy when restricted to a basic English vocabulary or a couple of hundred words.

The only solution to the problem of coarseness in image measurements are:

- once more, careful exploratory work

- keeping a long enough list of images to be able to distinguish shades of meaning

- avoiding over-dependence on purely mechanical methods of analysis

- interrelating attitudes with behaviour and other variables. Sometimes image data by **itself** does not explain the situation adequately. It needs to be related to behaviour, to personality or to demographic variables to be interpreted properly.

In summary, we may safely say that attitudes and behaviour are interconnected, but not in any simple and deterministic way. Each will affect the other. Advertising tends to work on attitudes, and by affecting them to modify behaviour. However, this can happen by reinforcement of existing attitudes as well as by attitude change. Attitude changes tend to be subtle rather than gross, and careful and detailed measurements will be needed if the results of our research are to provide any useful reflection of what is happening in people's minds.

Luck, games and creativity

Successful campaigns have many ingredients. One of the most important, it must candidly be admitted, is simply luck.

If anyone presents you a case history which shows how his company or agency developed some famously successful campaign by smooth rational inexorable steps which led irresistibly to brand leadership inside twelve months you may be fairly confident that what you have heard is at least three-fifths post-rationalisation, and that a happy gloss has been put over the muddles, the tensions, the indecision, the blunders and the sheer uncertainties which are an inseparable part of the development of any new campaign. Which agency can really spot its winners in advance? Which advertiser, however methodical and well endowed with research, really knows before it actually happens which of his campaigns is going to help push up sales and which will leave the sales graph dipping? There is nothing so powerful as hindsight for predicting sales success.

Does this mean that we can burn the marketing books, buy a set of dice and let the Fates take over? Not at all. If three-fifths of a success story is pure rationalisation simple arithmetic suggests that two-fifths must be real*. Even though chance plays a large part, and even though real life is far too untidy to permit the situation to be dissected quite as neatly as the presentation charts suggest, intelligent analysis, sound evidence and good planning will certainly increase the chances of success, which is really what marketing is all about.

But **chances** of success is what they nevertheless remain. Anyone who demands certainty and places overmuch reliance on reassurance is in the wrong business – he should have gone into banking or accountancy, not into marketing. Marketing is essentially a competitive activity. It is a game between a number of competitors. As in all competitive games the best moves at any point depend almost entirely on the state of play and on the moves of the competitors. As in most games the other competitors' moves cannot be known for certain until they have made them.

But since the success of one's own moves is inevitably affected by competitive moves there must equally inevitably be a large element of uncertainty from this source alone (leaving aside the many imponderables about consumer reactions to all the moves).

It is remarkable how little this competitive element actually enters into

* I hasten to add that these proportions are entirely notional

discussions about advertising. The model which underlies most planning discussions is not that of a game with many players, but one in which the advertiser and his agency are competing unilaterally against a static and inert system whose responses are (or should be) knowable and predictable. The best picture I can think of to describe this is a trial-of-strength machine in a fairground. If you hit the peg hard enough the bell will ring and you will get a prize. If you develop your muscles and master the tricks of controlling the hammer you will ring the bell every time; if you don't ring the bell every time it must be because you have not got the knack or the muscle, since the machine itself does not vary.

This patently unrealistic view is common presumably because it is simple. It helps to explain why so many people seem to feel that 'effectiveness' is an inbuilt and theoretically measurable property of the advertising (just as 'strength' and 'knack' are intrinsic and theoretically measurable properties of the arm wielding the hammer) rather than being the outcome of a complex interaction between the advertising and the wider market context (which of course includes the advertising of competitors).

Like other forms of game activity the business battle is a kind of continual striving in which each competitor makes a series of different moves in an attempt to win advantages over his competitors.

No single move is decisive by itself, the outcome of the game being the cumulative effect of long periods of toing and froing, the advantage passing backwards and forwards from side to side.

In all games of skill and strategy players seek to improve their performance and competitive position by studying and analysing their position and by strategic planning. This is true even of a high-speed physical sport like soccer. A team which is not capable of planning its play and adapting its strategies to the run of the game is unlikely to be successful, however skilful its individual players might be.

On the other hand it is not to be expected that the outcome of different moves or plays can be predicted with any level of certainty. Any competitor who was only prepared to move if research showed that his move was unlikely to fail would be inviting defeat. The essence of competitive activity is a willingness to take reasonable risks. In precisely the same way the man who manages a marketing enterprise must be prepared to exercise and back his judgement in a state of limited knowledge. He must plan carefully, analyse his situation, collect and

appraise evidence. But in order to win he must be prepared to act swiftly, decisively and imaginatively.

Even so in the management of advertising, sound planning, good evidence about the consumer is essential. The situation must be carefully and intelligently analysed and the role of advertising defined as clearly as possible. But having done this the manager is ultimately thrown back on his own commercial judgement. Is the advertising not merely good within its own terms of reference as a piece of communication, but is it **right**? Right for this brand, for this company, for this particular state of the game, for this type of consumer, for this market?

It may be wondered how I have managed to write several pages about the creation of successful advertising without so far mentioning the creative act itself. It is not because I feel that creativity in advertising is unimportant – it is important, vitally so – but because I have been anxious to examine first the context within which advertising has to operate. I have pictured marketing and advertising within it as a competitive game activity in which chance elements and the flux of the game play a very large part. I have suggested that the manager of marketing and advertising activity therefore needs to be able to use his judgement in situations of imperfect information and act swiftly, decisively and imaginatively. 'Imaginatively' is a key word here. Analysis and research alone will never take one anything like the whole way. Business opportunities do not (except very rarely and by accident) hop unaided out of pages of research information or sales statistics. It takes an act of creative imagination to see new possibilities and to visualise different strategic options; and it takes further acts of creative imagination to follow these up and exploit them in advertising (or in other areas of marketing activity).

One of the problems of the advertising business is that it has tried to institutionalise creativity by assigning it to a particular department.

The 'creative' function as it is traditionally seen in the agency consists of two essentially separate types of resource:

(a) There are specific skills: skills in writing; in graphic design; in television production; and so on. The effective exercise of these skills requires both innate talent and craft based on experience and training. Part of the talent required is undoubtedly imagination – the ability to visualise different ways of achieving a given effect through the use of words, symbols, pictures, moving images, or whatever.

(b) There is a high-order conceptual imagination; the ability to perceive important relationships between apparently unrelated events or pieces of information; to see the possibilities of a situation; to select intuitively the few facts from a whole mass of data which really hold the key to a situation.

Just because people have the sort of skills listed in (a) does not necessarily mean they are good at (b). Some people will be strong in both spheres; such people are as valuable as they are rare. But most agency 'creatives' excel at type (a) rather than type (b) activities. For this reason many attempts to involve creative people in the early stages of advertising planning fail because their instinct is to get as quickly as possible to a position where they can exercise their skills for producing particular sets of words or images, and we see ads being lovingly roughed out before anyone has really worked out where they ought to be going.

At the same time where creative people are *not* involved in early planning two things commonly follow:

1. planning itself often becomes a sterile and boring exercise in which the obvious research data is worked over with the aid of a (written or mental) marketing check list and some dull and mechanical formula emerges which lacks any genuinely fresh and creative look at the market or at the strategic options for the brand.

2. the creative people who are handed this unhelpful and uninspiring brief happily ignore it and throw up their own unrelated ideas for ad; partly because they are not personally involved in the planning process or committed to its output, and partly because the output is simply not useful to them.

The solution to this problem is not a simple one but it lies in the direction of realising that:

1. it is not healthy to hive-off the prerogative of original thought to one particular part of an organisation.

2. marketing and advertising planning (and indeed research) are every bit as much in need of creative thought as is the design of advertisements.

3. that success is likely to come from a proper **blend** of imagination and analysis, of creativity and research, and not from excessive reliance on either end of the spectrum alone.

The contribution of empirical social science to advertising and advertising research

The contribution of empirical social science to advertising and advertising research has been (and is likely to remain) remarkably small. It is not unduly cynical to say that the main role of each new discovery has been breaking down the misconceptions which arose from the last wave of fashionable theory.

There are several reasons for this, important and worth noting:

1. Human beings are remarkably complex and unpredictable organisms. This being so it is well nigh impossible to produce satisfactory experimental conditions to make rigorous proof of even the simplest and most self-evident features of human behaviour. In order to reduce human behaviour to laboratory proportions it is necessary to reduce it to such over-simple proportions that the results have no useful generality at all.

2. The interests and orientations of most experimenters has little relevance to the interests of advertisers. Psychologists tend (for good and obvious reasons) to be concerned with significant, fundamental or abnormal facets of human experience. Decision theory tends to deal with important decisions taken in conditions of high perceived risk. Academic communications research tends to experiment with socially significant communications (about race, politics, war or sex). Clinical psychiatry deals with people who (by definition) do not behave normally. In advertising we are interested in a sector of human behaviour (man the consumer) which may well connect only loosely with the aspects of humanity normally studied by academics.

3. Much academic research* is done on a shoestring and with such small and untypical samples or people (social science students very often) as to make even the quickest-and-dirtiest commercial market research practitioner blush.

For these reasons the reader will not find the pages of this book peppered with usual ritual references to academic research. This does not in any sense mean that I think it unimportant to study the way people think and behave and the influences which affect their actions. But it will more profitable to advertising to study man the consumer. It is incidentally amazing how little good information there is about generalised purchasing

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* See *"The psychodynamics of cognitive assonance"* K H Fleischfuss (unpublished doctoral thesis) Poughkeepsie Institute of Social Sciences, 1937.

and consumption behaviour – and probably most profitable of all to study people in relation to the particular markets with which we are concerned.

On testing concepts and propositions

One school of thought in advertising research led to the testing of advertising ideas expressed as propositions or concepts. This is rather less fashionable than it once was, but it is an area fraught with hazards. It is worth considering it briefly in order to highlight some of the hazards.

There is no generally agreed definition of either the word 'proposition' or the word 'concept'. Both are inclined to refer to the content of advertising messages rather than the form through which the content was expressed.

The term 'proposition testing' tended to be applied to a technique whereby a number of verbal propositions were shown to consumers in pairs or sets or lists so that they could choose the ones they preferred, or were most likely to buy.

The propositions themselves were usually simple sentences or phrases expressing (or intended to express) the essence of an advertising idea. Thus one might have had in the margarine market a set of propositions like this:

- a margarine that spreads more easily

- a margarine that contains butter

- a margarine that tastes more like butter

- a margarine that is less expensive to buy

- a margarine that is especially good for cooking etc.

Choices from such a list could certainly be interesting – in fact the technique is used in many attitude surveys, the difference being that here it is used alone and out of context.

There is nothing wrong with the technique as such, provided that you are clearly aware of its limitations, which I shall list in a moment. The trouble was that it came to be believed in some quarters that you could actually choose between different types of advertising appeal on the basis of a horse race test of this kind.

The snags are fairly obvious. First of all, although short sentences like these may be useful to an advertiser or agency as shorthand expressions

for complicated sets of ideas which they have discussed and thought about at length, they do not have equivalent richness of expression to the consumer. They are simply bald statements robbed of all the overtones they might have in real advertising – where it might well be the overtones that do the selling and not the stark semantic content of the ad. For example, a margarine might be advertised as containing butter in such a way that it was associated with richness, with country life, with naturalness, with milk and honey, with goodness, and with all sorts of other things which might be projected as secondary associations of butter. The butter content then would merely be the justification for and symbol of all these other qualities, but it would be the associations and not the butter itself which would actually hold the selling appeal.

None of this would register on even the most imaginative consumer from seeing the bald phrase "a margarine that contains butter". Unless the containing of butter was seen as being **intrinsically** important, such a statement would be downrated, although a powerful advertising campaign might have been based on it.

It may of course be argued that the advertising message in that case is really concerned with goodness and naturalness and not with butter at all. This is at least partly right, and it exposes the second weakness of the technique – it can only deal with simple statements of fact or limited rational arguments. if you put "a margarine that is good and natural" in the list this would achieve nothing. To begin with it begs all sorts of questions of degree and credibility – how good? how natural? who says so? And then it still does not come anywhere near creating the **feelings** of goodness and naturalness which would really make the ad work.

I suppose I am really saying that a lot of the best and most effective advertising has to do with feelings and not with facts. The weakness of verbal proposition testing is that it can only cope with factual or quasi-factual material. It derived, in fact, from the Rosser Reeves/ USP approach to advertising which assumed that there was some factual or apparently factual **thing** about a product which, if communicated, would lead on to sales.

It would be fascinating to see what would happen if you included the phrase 'a mint with a hole' in a proposition test designed to evaluate possible claims for peppermints. The intrinsic appeal of this claim would not seem on judgement likely to be high. Yet in the context of Polo it has an entirely pleasing uniqueness and quirkiness suitable to the brand and the field.

Proposition testing of this kind has largely died out now, and few will mourn its passing. The essential sterility of the verbal propositions became gradually apparent.

The new word was 'concept'. To some people 'concept' was just a more modern way of saying 'proposition', but generally the term came to mean a more rounded and complex expression, usually involving pictures instead of words, and sometimes bringing in package designs or even rough commercials to get the idea across.

This gets us (if it is well done) much closer to home. We can bring in at least some of the richness, subtlety and nuance of expression that advertising lives on. We can in fact learn a great deal by looking at consumer reactions to material of this kind. You can show an ad for your buttered margarine, rich with country associations. You can design a package, golden and pure, to go with it. You can describe it in radio-commercial-type sound-tracks. You can shoot video commercials about goodness and naturalness. Then you are saying something like what you might be saying in the market place if you adopted that strategy. And you can learn a good deal from seeing the sorts of consumer reaction which it provokes.

But it is still only 'something like' what you would be showing in real-life, and unless you have spent a very great deal of money on production you cannot really equate its effectiveness with the effectiveness of final advertising developed on the same theme. Even if you could you still cannot simply assess the effectiveness of advertising in laboratory testing for all the reasons I have spelt out earlier in this book.

Thus although concept research of this kind can be very illuminating and useful it should not be set up as a horse race between contenders with a view to picking a winner by simple arithmetic. Nor should it substitute for proper planning research into the market. We should know a lot about people's assessment of margarines, and about the extend of worries about naturalness and goodness before we start developing advertising themes even in rough 'concept' form.

'Indecision theory'

I have suggested that the bulk of consumer decisions are, and have to be, relegated to a fairly low level of consciousness.

This is of course not true of all consuming decision. Some, particularly where larger durable items are concerned are objectively important and

involve large sums or money. Others have high degree of intrinsic interest, or some other feature that single them out as fields in which people may be prepared to spend time, trouble and attention on their purchasing and consumption decisions.

By definition, however, **only a few** fields can be singled out for any substantial degree of attention. The rest have to be processed at a pretty routine level and at great speed.

Habituation is one of the main techniques here. We learn at a very early age to habituate all processes which do not demand or merit conscious attention. It is only this process of habituation which stops us all from sitting gibbering on the sides of our beds wondering which shoe lace to tie first (assuming we had first managed to overcome the terrifying problem of deciding which side of bed to get out of, or which leg to swing first).

At the lowest level we may habituate purchasing in some markets to the level of shoelace-tying. We may see neither interest nor purpose in reviewing our behaviour in these fields, and may develop almost unvarying patterns of purchasing or use. In practice this removes that particular behaviour altogether from day-to-day decision making.

An alternative to adopting fixed patterns of behaviour in this situation is to randomise the behaviour in response to the options offered. This is less easy than it sounds, since it is generally much simpler to choose the same one each time than to make a random selection. Human minds do not seem to take happily to random choosing, and generally prefer to bring structure and pattern to otherwise unstructured situations.

On the other hand there are circumstances where it is possible to **delegate** the choice to someone else. In a bar, for example, a man ordering a glass of whisky is likely to leave the choice of brand to the barman, unless he has pretensions to connoisseurship or social status to express through the purchase (in which case he would not be habituating the purchase in the sense described). He can thus delegate his brand decisions, having concluded them to be unimportant.

This delegation process is not possible in many markets, however. In order to buy cigarettes it is generally necessary to make a first-hand choice. Try asking a tobacconist for "twenty cheap tipped cigarettes" and see where it gets you.

Areas of purchasing and use which are by one or another of these means

relegated to low levels of consciousness are perhaps the most difficult to influence through advertising. This is paradoxical. They have been relegated precisely because they are seen to be insufficiently important to warrant attention. Since they are unimportant, there will probably be no strong **intrinsic** resistance to adopting some other form of behaviour.

However, the dislocation this would cause to carefully balanced equilibria is just not balanced by any possible gains which might be made by adjusting one's pattern of choices.

Let us take an example. A woman frequently buys plain biscuits. She does not believe that one brand of these is appreciably different from another, and she is not sufficiently concerned about them to worry. Years ago (for reasons she cannot even remember) she decided to buy Podgers' rather than other brands. Since Podgers' are widely available and reasonably priced she buys these with complete regularity and without ever considering other brands. If asked she would probably say she prefers them, but she really has no firm views about them at all. She doesn't really give them a second thought. She just buys them. Since she really feels that all such biscuits are much the same, one might suppose that it would be easy to persuade her to buy Crumblers' instead of Podgers'. So, in a way, it would; just as easy as it would be to decide to tie the left shoelace first after a lifetime of starting with the right one.

The problem in this sort of circumstance is, how do you get people to take interest in something which they have managed to tuck conveniently away where it does not bother them?

Rigid habituation is often an unsatisfactory process, however, for one thing it is prone to dislocation. The lady who has fixed her behaviour on Podgers' biscuits in order to save the bother of making up her mind will not be very successful if the brand is frequently unavailable. She will then be forced either to think out an alternative solution, or to take possibly elaborate steps to track down a supply. The process of habituation, designed to minimise effort, has then broken down.

Secondly, a rigid habit pattern cuts out the possibility of taking advantage of tactical circumstances. If she really thinks there is no difference between Podgers' and Crumblers' biscuits, why not take advantage of the fact that Crumblers' are offered at 25% off at the local supermarket during a particular week. If she is irrevocably fixed on Podgers', she closes her eyes to such opportunities. More often, then we shall probably find

people adopting what we might call 'flexible strategies' for dealing with recurrent decisions or types of decision.

The word 'strategy' is a dangerous one to use in context, suggesting as it does the painstaking and systematic working out of complex problems. Consumer buying strategies will more often be loose sets of rules of thumb, and general approaches. Sometimes they will, at least in part, be thought out. More often, however, people will simply drift into them or evolve them loosely over a period of time.

We can regard the type of rigid habit described above as a particular type of strategy. So also is the sort of delegation of decision-making referred to.

Another simple type of strategy might well be "I will always buy the cheapest on offer". This would involve a brief search on each occasion, but against simple and automatic criteria.

A slightly more complex variant of the same approach would be: "I always buy the cheapest of the *OK* brands on offer". Here there might be a group of brands which are perceived to be acceptable, between which little distinction is made. Other brands would be automatically rejected, leaving a simple price-search as in the previous example.

The examples of strategies given so far have been concerned with situations in which there is little or no perceived difference between the alternative brands. More complex strategies are generally needed in other cases.

One common approach is to select a set of brands which are all more-or-less equally acceptable and to buy within those according to price, availability or mood.

There are some markets in which, although one brand may not necessarily be seen as preferable to the others in an absolute sense, there are nevertheless differences between the available brands. In some cases the market may have an inbuilt demand for variety. This would be found, for example, in the confectionery market, where variations in purchasing behaviour may be desirable in their own right, not as part of some quest for 'better' products, but simply because contrast and change is enjoyable for that kind of product. This is unlikely to apply to (say) washing-up liquid, where the housewife may be perfectly content to go on using the same product provided that it performs adequately and seems economic.

In markets where variety is important the identification of a 'selection' around which choice can cycle may be an important component in buying strategy.

Then again there are markets where choices are to some extent socially or situationally determined. The alcoholic drink market is one such, at least for most people. Although there are some people who drink nothing but draught bitter, most people would find this too limiting a strategy. It may not always be available, and in any case it does not leave room for choosing different types of drink to fit the company, the occasion or the physical need. Here a more flexible strategy is called for. A man may decide that when he is hot and thirsty he will have drinks A, B, or C; when he wants to let go and tie one on he will drink D or E; and when he wishes to impress smart companions he will have an X, Y or Z. The relationships between drinks and situations may be finely graded and dependent on social nuances which are difficult to codify. For example, a man may feel that a Campari is appropriate to one kind of social situation and a gin and tonic to another. He may have a strong and clear perception of this distinction, but he might find it difficult to analyse exactly what the difference between the two situations consisted in. Our code of manners and sense of the fitness of things is very subtle but very powerful – and this is true whether you are talking about a working men's club, a Mayfair cocktail bar or a rugger clubhouse.

One could go on elaborating examples of strategies which help people to take satisfactory decisions without strain, effort or time being devoted to them. The above should give some idea of the kinds of way in which markets may be approached. In my view a good deal could be learned by studying in individual markets how decisions are taken, and how the decision making load is effectively shed.

At first glance this chapter appears to be a pot pourri of random pieces which did not find a home elsewhere in the book. It would be a great shame if this were to deter the reader, for in this chapter is contained much of the base material on which Hedges has drawn his conclusions about how consumers use advertising.

Because he is working from observation and first principles, and using large quantities of common sense, little of what he has to say feels dated or seems to have been overturned by subsequent empirical research.

Perhaps the real tour de force is the section entitled 'advertising as wallpaper' which turns out to be an almost minute-by-minute account of three days in the life of a 'typical housewife' in relation to her choice of floor polish. This remains an absolutely essential read for anyone who has any pretensions to understand consumers, though it must also be acknowledged that, probably more than any other section in the book, it does have a somewhat period feel to it. This 'typical housewife' is a female, non-waged house person, who goes shopping every day, by bus, who doesn't appear to have a hand in the household's financial decision making but who appears to have sole responsibility for its chores. Still, she does shop at a supermarket and does see commercials on TV.

The enduring message, however, is that during these three days she is exposed to thousands of impressions (a fraction of which are from advertising) about floors, floor cleaning and brands of polish. The effect of these is gradual, inter-related and cumulative, and largely at lower levels of consciousness. As Hedges points out, "it would be very difficult to put one's finger on the precise point at which our housewife really decided to give Whistle a try, or the precise influence which tipped her into doing it".

Another rewarding section is entitled 'what is an image?'. True to his consumer orientation, Hedges suggests that in order to understand the meaning of this word we should look through "the consumer end of the telescope" and ask ourselves what images are for and where they come from.

He proceeds to give some very good explanations, familiar in their point but illuminating in their detail. In particular, he distinguishes between the private and public image, and reminds us of the influence of 'folk images' in building the images we hold privately.

At heart, he concludes, images are generalised sets of impressions and beliefs and exist because they offer convenient short-cuts in the human brain's decision

making process. Without these images, humans would be unable to make the volume of decisions necessary for them to operate as humans. There is a tendency to make stable, rounded and coherent images, since these are most useful in the decision making process. If the decision is relatively unimportant, it is probably better to risk making the 'wrong' decision than to spend time on interrogating or re-evaluating the image on which it is based.

Of course, these days we would tend to substitute the word 'brand' for that of image, and this piece is a useful reminder that by looking through the "brand owner's end of telescope" as has become the tendency, we are sometimes guilty of over-estimating the role that brands play in people's lives. We would do well to remember that in many cases people use brands simply as a convenience.

Recommended Reading

1974

During the course of preparing this book I read a large number of earlier books and papers on the subject.

None of them comes anywhere near being definitive, which is not surprising (to me at any rate) in view of the nature of the field.

I list below a series of books and papers which I would recommend to anyone who wants to be stimulated to further thought. I do not agree with everything in these references, but they are generally thoughtful and provocative. Some of them bear only obliquely on advertising research, but are helpful in treating some of the underlying issues.

Bogart, L.	*Where does advertising research go from here?* JAR Vol. 9 No.1
Brody & Cunningham.	*Personality variables and the consumer decision process.* JMR February 1968
Chapman, W.	*A diagnostic approach to testing and effectiveness.* MRS conference paper 1970.
Grubb & Grathwell.	*Consumer self-concept, symbolism & market behaviour* Journal of Mktg. October 1967.
Harmar Brown, F.	*How does advertising work?* (unpublished, S.H.Benson 1967).
Harmar Brown, F.	*How advertising research can be made relevant.* Campaign, August 6th 1971.
Hedges & Macarte.	*A new approach to advertising research.* Advertising Quarterly Spring 1970.
King, S.H.M.	*Relationships between researchers and creative people.* ESOMAR seminar paper 1966.
King, S.H.M.	*Can research evaluate the creative content of advertising?* MRS conference paper 1967.

King, S.H.M.   *Advertising research for new brands.*
                        JMRS, July 1968.

Leman, G.   *Who needs promotions?*
                        BBTA Bulletin, April 1970.

Lovell & Lannon.   *Difficulties with recall.*
                        ESOMAR paper 1967.

Lowe Watson, D.   *Advertising and the buyer seller relationship.*
                        IPA Forum, July 1968.

Lucas & Britt.   *Measuring advertising effectiveness.*
                        McGraw Hill, 1963.

McDonald, C.   *Should attitudes change behaviour?*
                        Admap, December 1969

Stidsen, B.   *Some thoughts on the advertising process.*
                        Journal of Mktg. January 1970.

Vickers, Sir G.   *Value systems and social process.*
                        Penguin (book)

Yankelovitch, D.   *Planning advertising strategy - a theory of
                        consumer research.*
                        ESOMAR seminar paper 1996.

Yankelovitch, D.   *What new life styles mean to market planners.*
                        Marketing/Communications, June 1971.

1997

Following on from the recommended reading in 1974, we have put together a list of books and papers which we consider will stimulate further thought for the interested reader.

Advertising Works Volumes 1-10, Institute of Practitioners in Advertising.

Barry, T.E & Howard, D.J. *A review and critique of hierarchy of effects in advertising.*
IJA, Vol 19 No 2 1990.

Biel, A. *American developments in advertisement pre-testing.*
Admap, April 1995.

Blackston, M. *Can advertising pre-tests predict the longevity of advertising effects?*
Marketing and Research Today, February 1996.

Booth, G. *How good research can foster that creative flair.*
MRS Research Plus, September 1997

Brown, G. *Findings from advertising tracking : advertising awareness, persuasion and sales.*
ESOMAR Congress, Montreux, 1989.

Brown, G & Farr, A. *Market Research: Rephrasing the question.*
MRS Conference 1994.

Broadbent, S.R. *Best practice in campaign evaluation.*
IPA booklet published in 1995.

Broadbent, S.R. *456 Views of how advertising works.*
Published 1992.

Buttle, F. *What do people do with advertising.*
IJA, Vol. 10, No. 2 1991.

Corlett, T. *How can we monitor the influences of advertising campaigns on consumer's purchasing behaviour.*
MRS Conference 1977.

Ehrenburg, A.S.C. *How do consumers come to buy a new brand.*
Admap, March 1997.

ESOMAR.	*How advertising works and how promotions work.* Seminar, Amsterdam, April 1991.
ESOMAR.	*Market Researchers Look at Advertising.* Seminar, Barcelona 1978.
Feldwick, P.	*When 'accountability' becomes a problem.* Admap, September 1994.
Feldwick, P.	*What should we measure?* Admap, April 1990.
Feldwick, P.	*The use (and abuse) of market research in the evaluation of advertising effect.* MRS Conference, 1989.
Feldwick, P.	*The four ages of ad evaluation.* Admap, April 1996.
Gordon, W & Ryan, C.	*How do consumers feel advertising works?* MRS Conference, 1983.
Gordon, W.	*Is the right research being used? Out of the goldfish bowl: can advertising research ever replicate reality?* Admap, February 1997.
Gordon, W.	*Advertisement pre-testing works – or does it?* Admap, March 1995.
Hall, M.	*Testing to oblivion or testing to win.* Admap, April 1997
Hall, M & Maclay, D.	*How does research practice match advertising theory.* MRS Conference 1991.
Hedges A.	*Campaign Planning: Testing to Destruction Revisited.* Admap, February 1985.
King, S.H.M.	*Practical progress from a theory of advertisements.* Admap, October 1975.
Jones, J.P.	*Over promise under delivery.* ESOMAR Seminar, April 1991.
Lannon, J.	*New techniques for understanding consumer reactions to advertising.* JAR, August-September 1986.

Lannon, J.   *Advertising research: New ways of seeing.*
                        Admap, October 1975.

Lannon, T & Cooper, P. *Humanistic advertising.*
                        IJA, July-September 1983.

McCullough, W.R.   *Global advertising that works locally: The IBM
                        Subtitles campaign.*
                        Journal of Advertising Research, May-June 1996.

McDonald, C.   *Myths, evidence and evaluation.*
                        Admap, November 1980.

McDonald, C.   *Advertising effectiveness revisited.*
                        Admap, April 1986.

McDonald, C.   *Pre-testing and evaluating advertising.*
                        Admap, July/August 1987.

McDonald, C.   *How advertising works.*
                        Book, published 1996.

McDonald, C.   *Monitoring advertising performance.*
                        Admap Monograph 1997.

McQueen, J.   *The different ways ads work.*
                        JAR Research Currents, August-September 1990.

Meadows, R.   *They consume advertising too.*
                        Admap, July-August 1983.

Prue, T.   *Where's the scientific method in the measurement
                        of advertising effect.*
                        Admap, December 1987.

Prue, T.   *Recall or response. Ad effectiveness monitoring: The
                        real issues.*
                        Admap, June 1991.

Stewart, D.   *Measures, methods and models in advertising
                        research.*
                        JAR, June-July 1989.

Twyman, T.   *Progress in advertising research: a critical review of
                        some issues.*
                        AMA/ESOMAR Conference, March/April 1981.