Advertising and Consumer Psychology

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Preface

This book contains the eighteen papers presented at a workshop on advertising and consumer psychology, held in the spring of 1982. The workshop was sponsored by CREAMER INC and the Division of Consumer Psychology of the American Psychological Association.

These are particularly exciting times for students of advertising. Many traditional questions about advertising are being addressed from new perspectives. New theories, methodologies, models and analytic procedures are being applied to this area and are starting to yield valuable and, sometimes, confusing insights.

Among the most promising approaches are from cognitive psychology, neurophysiological psychology and the application of new multivariate techniques. These areas and many others are well covered in this book by some of the preeminent people in the field.

The workshop chairmen and editors of this book, Larry Percy and Arch Woodside, are to be commended for recognizing the need for this workshop and for diligently assembling this distinguished group of scholars. Similarly, we owe a debt to each of the authors for sharing some of their most recent work with us.

Leon B. Kaplan

Introduction

Larry Percy and
Arch G. Woodside

The link between psychology and communication has been forged in the crucible of social psychology over the last half-century. Yet while this link is the subject of an almost limitless literature, not until quite recently has the more-specific link between advertising as a form of communication and consumer psychology been developed. Nevertheless, by implication, much of the early work that has helped us better to understand effective communication has also formed the foundation for understanding how to stimulate effectively a desired response to advertising.

Perhaps the strongest association with today's notion of consumer psychology and its application to advertising that finds a historical foundation in the early development of social psychology is the study of attitude. During the 1920s and early 1930s, as social psychology began to make its presence felt, a strong interest became evident for attitude research. For the most part, this early activity was concerned with attitude-measurement issues. This was the era of descriptive advances in measurement and scaling procedures within the limits of inferential statistics. At the same time, definitions of attitude abounded until Allport (1935), in reviewing the massive outpouring of work in the area, boiled the definitions down to attitude as a learned predisposition to respond to an object or class of objects in a systematic and consistent manner.

During the period from the mid-1930s until the mid-1950s, little creative effort was applied to the study of attitude. This did not mean, however, that important work that was to have a significant influence upon future advertising research also was wanting. One of the most significant movements in learning theory was flourishing at Yale around 1940, with Hull and his stimulus-response learning theorists. This notion was expanded upon in the late 1940s by Lasswell (1948), a political scientist, as he added to what, in advertising terms, could be thought of as the message, the receiver, and its effect subsumed by the learning theorists. His now-famous dictum for describing communication, "Who says what to whom, with what effect?" significantly added the source to the communication process. All that remained was how, a representation of the medium or delivery system.

As the 1940s drew to an end, another series of research destined to have an important impact upon future advertising research was underway at Yale. Hovland and his colleagues were engaged in the Yale Communication Research Program, seeking to understand better human psychological processes by studying the effects that various communication stimuli have upon

attitudes and behavior. Broad investigations of this influence process were reported by Hovland, Janis, and Kelley (1953), followed by a series of monographs evaluating the mediating processes involved in attitude change.

The work set the stage for a resurgence in interest in the study of attitude not in terms of static relationships but more as a dynamic process of attitude changes and the factors that produced them. While there was no shortage of attitude-change theory resulting from this renewed study (for an excellent review, see Insko 1967), as once again attitudes became the major interest of social psychologists, it was perhaps not until McGuire's (1968a) seminal work on the nature of attitude change that a model for communication-induced attitude change began to emerge.

This model, if we may think about it as such, McGuire called an "information-processing paradigm," and with it the integration of response effects with processing effects became apparent. His original matrix of persuasive communication divided the communication process into a set of five independent variables, serving as row headings, analogous to Lasswell's understanding of the communication process: (1) source (who?), (2) message (says what?), (3) receiver (to whom?), (4) channel (how?), and (5) destination (with what effect?). The dependent variable of communication-induced attitude change then was refined from Doob's (1961) analysis as a stochastic process involving at least five behavioral steps: (1) attention, (2) comprehension, (3) yielding, (4) retention, and (5) action. McGuire's subsequent analysis examined the relationship between the independent communication variables and their impact upon each of the dependent attitude-change variables. He later applied this thinking specifically to advertising, taking an information-processing approach to understanding the development and evaluation of effective advertising (McGuire 1978).

Borrowing heavily from McGuire, Wyer (1974) built upon his two-factor model of persuadability, especially in the reception and integration of new information (McGuire 1968b), in looking at people as information processors. He provides a review of most of the theoretical and empirical issues involved up to that point in attitude-change theory and research. In this review, Wyer explores the manner in which beliefs and attitudes are developed and modified from the perspective of cognitive psychology. Taking this information-processing model and applying it to advertising, one looks at the receiver as capable of receiving information (attending to the message), operating upon it according to certain rules (processing the message), and then storing the results of this processing in long-term memory (response to the communication), altering the content of the receiver's cognitive structure where necessary (an attitude or belief change), and ultimately acting upon the results (a buyer response in the market).

Within this context, we go beyond the set of social-psychology principles with which McGuire dealt, adding primarily the areas of structure

and organization in memory. Wyer (1974) felt that an information-processing orientation to communication required the consideration of the effects of differences in the amount of information a receiver must process at any given time, plus the complexity of the cognitive rules required to process new information adequately. A receiver obviously is limited in the amount of information he or she can assimilate and process at one time. When the informational demands upon the receiver exceed these limits, he or she may attend only to that subset of information presented that seems relevant to his or her objectives, and frequently these will not necessarily be those of the advertiser. In addition, if the receiver does perceive an information overload, he or she may use different, simpler rules for integrating the message content than would be the case if there were more time available to decode and process it, or if there were less information to process. The implication here for modality in presentation is quite obvious: More complex messages should be avoided in broadcast.

With such a rich tradition upon which to draw, the late 1970s saw the emergence of a new body of literature and research that attempted to apply these relevant psychological principles to specific marketing and advertising questions. As mentioned, McGuire (1978) looked specifically at the consequences of psychological principles mediating advertising effectiveness. Lipstein and McGuire (1978) compiled an impressive bibliography of the communication process for the Advertising Research Foundation that relied heavily upon the literature of psychology—a bibliography of 7,000 entries classified in terms of input and output factors involved in advertising research.

Also in 1978, Britt provided a practical example of how 188 psychological principles are involved intimately in understanding marketing and consumer behavior. In his book Britt posits a new psychological model of marketing, one that revolves around individual rather than group behavior. He identified six stages in communicating, not unlike many other models presented in a variety of marketing texts: (1) exposing, (2) attending, (3) perceiving, (4) learning (and remembering), (5) motivating, and (6) persuading. His contribution, however, is in the application of the model and the psychological principles involved to marketing problems. In addition, Britt described five sets of mediating variables that affect the marketing communication process: (1) needs and wants, (2) sociocultural factors, (3) mental set, (4) personality factors, and (5) other internal and external stimuli. Unlike McGuire's independent variables (source, message, channel, receiver, and destination) that serve as a set of effects, these variables are outside the communicator's control. Because of this, understanding the likely impact of each upon the communication process is critical to more-effective marketing communication.

Where Britt covered the broad spectrum of marketing communication and the influence of consumer psychology, Percy and Rossiter (1980) looked

specifically at advertising, discussing it in terms of the mediating influence of consumer psychology upon strategic advertising decisions. They outlined the importance of message-processing effects and their impact upon communication responses, which usually are defined as cognitive in nature: awareness, beliefs, attitudes (affect), and intention.

The importance of understanding consumer psychology in making advertising decisions is underscored by the connection between the obvious need to process an advertisement's message (if only at a subcognitive level) and the various psychological principles that mediate the subsequent response. Processing usually is thought to occur in short-term memory, with appropriate processing responses established as traces in long-term memory. In most cases it is necessary to preserve these resulting communication effects over time before they mediate a buyer response; hence, the importance to advertising of understanding how processing leads to the desired communication effect.

Following Osgood, Suci, and Tannenbaum (1957), Percy and Rossiter (1980) have suggested that the successful processing of an advertising message (as with almost any form of communication) requires three steps: (1) attention, (2) decoding, and (3) encoding. This assumes, of course, that the receiver has been exposed in some fashion to the advertising—for example, by reading through a magazine in which an advertisement appears or watching a television show within which a commercial appears. Typically, this initial decision by the receiver as to whether or not to expose himself or herself is a decision about the medium, not about the message or even about the individual vehicle (Berelson 1949; McLuhan 1964; Ehrenberg 1968; Wells 1969). The receiver may choose to subscribe to a particular magazine or not; he or she may develop a viewing habit or not. It then follows that once the media habit is established, the likelihood of the receiver's exposing himself or herself to a particular message increases. Unfortunately, as Pool (1973) points out, no easy measure of exposure exists. Usually the only way to know whether or not a receiver has been exposed is to ask him. If this is done on the spot, it may distort the situation; if it is done later, exposure becomes confounded with recall.

Assuming exposure has taken place, attention to advertising may be either reflexive or selective, and a great deal has been written in the psychology literature on both subjects. In the case of reflexive attention, there is little more than physiological reaction to a change in external stimuli within a receiver's immediate environment, such as a switch from editorial to pictorial content in a magazine or story line to commercial on television. Selective attention requires some prior thought that actively seeks information toward a relevant goal, an extreme example being the use of the *Yellow Pages*.

Following attention, decoding is an awareness that what the receiver is attending to is advertising. It reflects a denotative or literal understanding

of the substance of the message, but it does not imply an attitude formation. As Rossiter and Percy (forthcoming) point out, this requires successful encoding—that is, a transmission of connotative or evaluative meaning. Historically, the encoding process has been called "acceptance" by Hovland and his colleagues and "yielding" by McGuire. More recently, however, encoding has been embraced by cognitive-response theory (compare Perloff and Brock 1980; Wright 1974) and in this form has enjoyed a great deal of success in explaining persuasion based upon attitudes. While it is normally necessary for attention, decoding, and encoding to occur prior to successful communication, this is not always the case. As Rossiter and Percy have discussed, in certain instances when only role learning is involved, attention and decoding may be sufficient. Zajonc (1980) has speculated that affect and cognition are under the control of separate and partially independent systems that can influence each other in a variety of ways and that both constitute independent sources of effects in information processing. This idea suggests that decoding may not be necessary or that decoding may not always occur before encoding prior to successful communication. Attitude formation (encoding) could be made in the total absence of recognition memory (a measure of decoding).

As mentioned earlier, Percy and Rossiter (1980) have suggested that response to advertising can be classified into four effects: awareness, beliefs, attitudes, and intention. This is a logical extension of McGuire's information-processing paradigm, and while it implies a hierarchy of effects, such a model is not necessary to the effective application of those goals. In fact, any number of buyer repsonse models such as Ehrenberg's (1974), Krugman's (1967), or even Festinger's (1957) theory of dissonance/attribution tend to be compatible with this notion of objectives for the response to advertising. This is an important distinction and one that positions the psychology of the receiver for advertising independent of any psychological mediation of buyer response in the market (much of which has been detailed by Britt).

Percy and Rossiter (1980) also build upon McGuire's matrix of communication by discussing in depth the psychological principles important to the strategic development of advertising. Specifically, they detail source (who?), message (says what?), receiver (to whom?), media (how?), and postcommunication effects (to what effect?)—again, consistent with Lasswell. While these principles are very similar to the independent variables of McGuire, they are related specifically to advertising effects. In fact, these five variables are perhaps the most critical concerns for advertising not simply because they are so fully involved in the process of developing strategy but because they are in fact those variables the advertiser controls. He decides upon the target audience (receivers), how to position the brand (source), what to say in a particular advertisement or commercial (message),

where to place the advertising (media), and what response is desired (post-communication effect). The importance of understanding the relationship among these variables and the appropriate psychological principles involved cannot be minimized.

In the early 1970s, McGuire (1973) suggested that the then-current flourishing of research in persuasive communication probably had reached its zenith. He expected that sometime around 1985 another resurgence would occur when exciting leads would develop out of the undercurrent of residual work in the area, providing insight that would attract a new generation of enthusiastic researchers. The evidence from this book suggests that we are perhaps enjoying that new flourishing now, as we break away from recall-based measures of advertising response, explore more deeply cognitive response to advertising, attempt to correlate physiological measures like brain waves with more-traditional psychological measures, explore more deeply the psychology of the words and pictures in advertising, and look for new and more-effective measuring instruments.

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