WILLIAM F. GREENE
GALLUP & ROBINSON, INC.

OBSERVATIONS: WHAT DRIVES COMMERCIAL LIKING?

AN EXPLORATION OF ENTERTAINMENT VS. COMMUNICATION

The recent ARF Copy Research Validation project has emphasized the role of "liking" a commercial as an important evaluative measurement (Haley and Baldinger, 1991). One question raised by this research is: What drives commercial liking? Is it entertainment value, or is it the content, the communication of the advertising? This paper reports some results on the relationship of commercial liking with other accepted evaluative measures, reviews some initial findings on what we believe drives commercial liking, and illustrates these conclusions with a research example.

Research Technique

The evidence reported is based on a new television copy-testing approach called InTeleTest. In the system, test commercials are included in an unreleased pilot program. The program on VCR cassettes is distributed door-to-door for in-home viewing. After a 24-hour period, participants are contacted by telephone for a standard 24-hour-delay recall interview. Following this, test commercials are reexposed without program environment. Immediately afterward, participants are asked questions about recognition, the ARF measures for brand rating and commercial liking, an adjective checklist of 18 items describing specific attitudes about the commercials

plus questions about attitudes and communication. (A full description of the test program will be supplied on request to the author.)

In this study, we tested commercial for six brands; commercial for two brands were split sampled. The split-sample pairs were selected based on prior measurements of recall and persuasion to serve as high-low opposites. Commercials tested were:

- beverage (2 commercials, split-run)
- corporate advertiser (2 commercials, split-run)
- automobile
- frozen dinner
- spark plugs
- rum cooler

General Findings

In this study, we found commercials liking to be highly correlated with persuasion, particularly Brand Rating, the strongest of the ARF persuasion measures. The positive correlation of + .66 was consistent with the findings of the ARF research. This suggested to us that the two questions, liking and Brand Rating, may measure similar phenomena, traditionally thought of as affect.

Second, adjectives associated with positive commercial liking were generally those associated with *information* rather than the entertainment dimension of the commercial. The remainder of

this article explores the way we arrived at this finding. The key to this analysis is the 18 adjectives used by participants to describe the commercials viewed.

These adjectives were subjectively grouped into four clusters as follows:

Communication/persuasion

- effective
- believable
- informative
- worth remembering
- convincing

Emotional

- true to life
- warm
- sensitive

Entertainment

- fast moving
- imaginative
- lively
- Amusing

Negative

- too ordinary
- seen too much
- phony
- silly
- dull
- irritating

In order to examine our groupings more objectively, we did a respondent-by-respondent principle components factor analysis (varimax rotation). Although no one commercial elicited precisely the same factors, across all commercials, nine of the eighteen adjectives formed two major factors which together accounted for almost two-thirds of the variance (see Table 1). Of these two factors, one (Factor 1) was concerned with communications variables; the second factor included items identified provisionally as negative and having

Table 1
Factor Analysis of 18 Adjectives (Eight Commercial Average)

Factor 1	Factor 2	
■ Believable	■ Dull	
■ Convincing	■ Irritating	
■ Effective	■ Phony	
■ True to life	■ Silly	
■ Worth remembering		
8 commercial Average		
Eigenvalue	3.29	1.55
Variance explained	43%	20%

to do more with negative entertainment value rather than communication value. The other factors ranged all over the lot, suggesting no remaining commonalty across different commercials.

Illustration

To illustrate our analysis, let us turn to the two beverage commercials included in the pilot study. One commercial, "Grandad," featured a warm relationship between a grandfather and grandson in which the brand played an important role. The second commercial, "Rock

'n' Roll," featured a female rock group and was so full of quick cuts that it was hard to grasp the story line. Most people in our industry, including creatives, now know how difficult such an executional approach can be.

There was extremely different audience reaction to the two different beverage commercials. The degree of liking was much more positive to "Grandad" (see Table 2).

How did these two commercials do on the adjective checklists? Table 3 shows that "Grandad" was the "winner" for positive adjectives and particularly those that the factor analysis indicated were associated with communication ability. "Rock 'n' Roll" elicited selection of adjectives concerned with (negative) entertainment values.

We were tempted to use the factor analyses to develop factor scores and then see how well they predicted commercial liking. But the differences in factor analyses for each commercial convinced us that a stepwise multiple regression for each of the 18 adjectives would provide a less subjective analysis.

Table 2
Liking of Two Commercials for Nationally Distributed Beverage

	Percent Agreeing	
Commercial liking	"Grandad" [93] (%)	"Rock 'n' Roll" [92] (%)
I liked it very much.	58	10
I liked it.	30	29
I neither liked nor disliked it.	12	46
I disliked it.	0	10
I disliked it very much.	0	3
DK/NA/Ref.	0	2
Total	100	100

Table 3
Adjectives Checked As Applying to Commercials Seen

Adjectives	"Grandad" [93] (%)	"Rock 'n' Roll" [92] (%)
Positive		
Warm	71	6
Believable (Factor 1)	67	14
Amusing	63	28
Effective (Factor 1)	60	27
Imaginative	60	27
True to life (Factor 1)	57	13
Worth remembering (Factor 1)	56	14
Sensitive	40	5
Convincing (Factor 1)	36	8
Lively	34	54
Fast moving	26	61
Informative	8	6
Negative		
Silly (Factor 2)	5	30
Phony (Factor 2)	2	25
Seen too much	11	23
Too ordinary	2	18
Irritating (Factor 2)	1	14
Dull (Factor 2)	2	10

Note: Factor 1 and Factor 2 refer to adjectives found in the factor analysis performed across all eight commercials.

Table 4 shows the results of this analysis. The first "step" for "Grandad" indicated that changes in "worth remembering" is the strongest predictor of change in commercial liking for this commercial. The beta-weight for this accounted for over one-third of the variance in this regression. Other adjectives added significantly to the variance explained but did not, in our opinions, add meaningfully.

For "Rock 'n' Roll," "irritating" was the one adjective most responsible for *decreased* commercial liking, accounting for over one-quarter of the variance.

Even though only 14 percent of the people seeing "Rock 'n' Roll" described the commercial as irritating, none of those people gave the commercial anything higher than a neutral score on the 5-point commercial liking scale. (Further details of the stepwise regression will be supplied upon request.)

Implications

This research offers an interesting implication for the meaning of "liking." It is not a *finding* but rather an implication

that further research should investigate.

We in the advertising business are almost preconditioned to think of "likability" as "entertainment." But this runs counter to the idea that a merely entertaining commercial can be the most sales effective commercial.

Certainly the concept of commercial liking has been around for a long time, with a checkered past. At G&R, we have routinely reported commercial favor/disfavor but only as a diagnostic to understand commercial intrusiveness rather than as a meaningful surrogate for sales efficacy.

This finding suggests that "likability" may have little to do with the traditional concept of entertainment. Viewers seem to respond to the question about liking more in terms of communication and persuasiveness than for entertainment value. The specific adjectives that accompany a positive commercial liking response are generally associated with a commercial's content rather than its form.

Remember that each of the five commercial pairs in the ARF Copy Validation Study were matched in executional genre. That is, both commercials for the same brand were humorous or rational or emotional in content. In our view, this experiment can add to the ARF findings in that we have looked at advertising

Table 4
Stepwise Multiple Correlation Adjectives Related to Liking

Adjective	Multiple R
Worth remembering	"Grandad"/0.59
Irritating	"Rock 'n' Roll"/(−.54)

Note: Only first step in multiple regression shown; some other steps produced significant but not meaningful relationships.

for the same brand that *did* differ in executional style. And we found in this case that differences in liking could be imputed to communications ability rather than entertainment. Of course, this is one case, an implication, a hypothesis; but we feel that insights of this sort can accumulate to help refine both the ARF research and the use of copy research in general. ■

Reference

Haley, Russell I., and Allan L. Baldinger. "The ARF Copy Research Validation Project." *Journal of Advertising Research* 31, 2 (1991): 11–32.