

**WHEN ATTITUDES TOWARDS ADVERTISING IN GENERAL
INFLUENCE ADVERTISING SUCCESS**

by

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Abstract

Attitudes towards advertising in general were found to influence the effectiveness of specific ads. Copy test results from 860 magazine readers in geographically dispersed markets around the country showed respondents' general attitudes towards advertising affected measures of advertising intrusiveness and persuasion. Implications and directions for future research are discussed.

Introduction

Attitudes towards advertising in general were expected to influence the success of any particular advertising. It seemed reasonable to anticipate a person's predisposition to respond consistently towards advertising in general, either favorably or unfavorably, would mediate the effectiveness of any given ad.

Interest in the attitudes-towards-advertising-in-general construct gained momentum as researchers showed it was an important underlying determinant of attitude-towards-the-ad (Aad, Lutz, 1985). Aad affects advertising effectiveness since it was found to be an important antecedent of brand attitudes (e.g., Lutz, 1985; Mackenzie, Lutz, & Belch, 1986; Mackenzie & Lutz, 1989; Mehta, 1994; Muehling, 1987; Shimp, 1981; Thorson, 1981). The influence of Aad on brand attitudes is even more significant under low involvement conditions, and for emotionally-based transformational advertising. Further, the recent ARF Copy Research Validity Project (Haley & Baldinger, 1991) showed commercial liking (similar to Aad) was among the strongest predictors of sales differences attributable to advertising. Consequently, the influence of attitudes towards advertising in general on advertising effectiveness may be significant.

Over the years, researchers have tried to measure attitudes towards advertising among adult consumers (see Zanot, 1981; Mittal, 1994) and among student samples (Dubinsky & Hensel, 1984; Larkin, 1977; Muehling, 1987; Petroschias, 1986; Sandage & Leckenby, 1980), and these attitudes have been the focus of comparisons on a cross-cultural basis (e.g., Andrews, Lysonski and Durvasula, 1991; Santos, 1976). However, the influence of advertising attitudes on reactions to any particular advertising has been less commonly studied. In the real world of copy testing, do attitudes towards advertising influence advertising reactions? What are the implications for advertisers?

Study Objectives

The present paper is an attempt to answer these questions. It explores the influence of consumers' attitudes towards advertising in general on advertising success. Advertising success was evaluated at two levels: intrusiveness and persuasion. To be effective or successful in the context of today's media environment, commercials or ads need to break through the clutter and get noticed, gain attention. Once attention has been gained, the advertising should persuade the respondent. G&R's Impact systems for copy testing are based on this theoretical framework and designed to obtain multiple measures. Two of the major measures include intrusiveness, an indicator of attention-getting power and memorability of the advertising, and persuasion, measured as the favorable buying interest for products (and favorable attitudes for companies and services).

In the context of applied copy testing, it was expected that consumers with more favorable attitudes towards advertising in general would:

- (1) Recall more ads the day after exposure; and
- (2) Be more persuaded by the ads.

The Construct

Attitude towards advertising has been defined as "a learned predisposition to respond in the consistently favorable or unfavorable manner to advertising in general" (Lutz, 1985, pg. 53). Earlier studies (until the early 1960s) measured general advertising attitudes as an "overall favorability or unfavorability" factor. Bauer and Greyser (1968) suggested advertising had important economic and social effects, and developed a set of belief items related to positive and negative outcomes of advertising in these two specific areas. Other researchers expanded the belief inventory to include perceptions related to other aspects of advertising, for example, informational value, sexual content and use of women, ethics, deception and falsehood (Alwitt & Prabhaker, 1994; Haller, 1974; Durand & Lambert, 1985; Larkin, 1977; Lutz, 1985; Muehling, 1987). More recently, thought listings in reaction to the word "advertising" were categorized into areas such as function, affective response, practice, industry, and user-related, to measure attitudes towards advertising in general (Andrews, Lysonski, & Durvasulu, 1991). Mittal (1994) used customized rating scales to measure attitudes specifically towards television advertising. Alwitt and Prabhaker (1994) explored reasons for disliking television advertising.

The purpose of the present study was to explore how attitudes about advertising may mediate advertising effectiveness rather than to gauge consumer attitudes towards advertising in its entirety from an academic or sociological standpoint. As a result, a battery of 5 relevant attitudinal statements were selected for use. These included areas such as those related to the enjoyment of advertising, belief in claims made in the advertising, perceptions of advertised and unadvertised brands, and the informational value of advertising.

In spite of the interest in attitudes towards advertising and its impact on Aad, little empirical research exists in relation to the moderating effect of advertising attitudes on advertising intrusiveness or persuasion in an applied, practical context. Among the few studies is a recent study of outdoor (billboard) advertising which found respondents who had a positive attitude towards advertising seemed to recall more outdoor ads than those who had a negative attitude (Donthu, Cherian, & Bhargava, 1993). In the present study, the influence of advertising attitudes on advertising success was studied in the context of print (magazine) advertising.

Methodology

Sample

Eight hundred and sixty (860) regular magazine readers (18+ years of age) from 15 geographically-dispersed, selected markets around the country participated in the study. Of these, 584 were female and 276 were male readers.

Procedure

The data was collected via G&R's Magazine Impact Research Service for print ads. It is a contextual-based system: in-magazine, in-market, at-home. Participants were recruited on the basis of their readership of four different types of magazines (general, news, women's general, women's fashion).

Regular readership constituted having read two out of the four last issues (but not the current issue) of the magazine. Respondents believed they were participating in a readership study and were asked to read the current issue (which was given to them), as they naturally would such a magazine. A phone interview was scheduled for the day after to discuss the magazine editorial and content.

Interviewers contacted respondents at the scheduled time, and after establishing readership of the test magazine, proceeded to question respondents about particular advertising in the issue. Intrusiveness/recall measures were first taken, followed by idea communication and persuasion measures. Then demographic information was collected. Finally, the attitudes toward advertising battery was administered.

Measures

Intrusiveness/Recall. Respondents were asked about 15 selected ads in the test magazine by using brand cue. Respondents who claimed to recall any of these ads, were asked open-ended questions. These responses were used as evidence to prove that the particular ad being tested was actually recalled. Proved recall is believed to be a more stringent measure of attention-getting power and memorability of an ad than claimed recall. The number of total ads that a particular individual respondent could prove recalling was used as the measure of intrusiveness for further analysis.

Persuasion/Buying Interest. Those who were able to recall the advertising were asked to what extent the particular ad increased their interest in buying the advertised product. The measure was taken on a 5-point scale. The buying interest for each particular ad was indexed to its category average, and averaged across all ads recalled by any respondent. This average buying interest index computed for each respondent was used as a measure of persuasion in

further analysis.

Attitudes towards Advertising. A 5-item battery was used to measure positive and negative perceptions regarding advertising on an 11-point (0 to 10) scale where 10 denoted "strongly agree" and 0 was "strongly disagree." Various aspects of advertising were measured by these statements (see Table 1 for statements). While researchers have often combined scores across various attitudinal statements to compute an overall attitude to advertising score, correlations among these statements were generally low ($r = .03$ to $.42$) since each item dealt with a different aspect of advertising. As a result, an aggregated score for attitude towards advertising was not calculated. Instead, it was felt more appropriate to analyze the results of each of the attitudinal statements independently for its influence on ad recall and persuasion.

For each attitudinal statement, respondents were grouped as those who "agree" (8-10), those who were "neutral" (4-7), and those who "disagree" (0-3) for further analysis.

Results

Advertising Attitudes. Table 1 shows the results for the attitudinal statements. As is clear from the table, although many more readers than not claimed to like to look at advertising and felt it keeps them up-to-date about products in the marketplace, a high proportion of respondents also believed products do not perform as well as ads claim. At the same time, many also felt much of advertising is way too annoying. Generally, only about one in six respondents agreed that advertised brands are better than those brands that are not advertised.

To study the influence of these beliefs on intrusiveness and persuasion, Chi-Square tests were conducted. The results are presented below.

Intrusiveness/Recall. About one in four respondents recalled 3 or more ads. Another 25% recalled 2 ads each while about 30% recalled one ad. The remaining 20% could not recall any ad. For further analyses, respondents were grouped as those recalling no ads, those recalling 1 or 2 ads, and those recalling 3 or more ads.

The total number of ads recalled was significantly influenced by 2 out of the 5 advertising attitudes: those related to the enjoyment of advertising and the informational value of advertising. Significantly more respondents who claimed to like to look at advertising recalled more ads (25%) than those who do not like to look at ads (17%, $X^2 = 26.8$, $p < .001$). As shown in Table 2, 34% of those who do not like to look at advertising recalled no ads compared to only 14% among those who like to look at advertising and could not recall any ads.

Additionally, as shown in Table 3, significantly more respondents who agreed (27%) than those who disagreed (12%) that advertising helps keep them up-to-date about the marketplace recalled 3 or more ads ($X^2 = 10.5$, $p < .03$). Similarly, the proportion of respondents recalling no ads was higher among those who disagreed (28%) with this statement than those who agreed (18%).

Persuasion/Buying Interest. Based on the buying interest index, respondents were classed into three groups: Those with "below average" buying interest (index levels at or below 90), those with "average" buying interest (index levels of 91 through 110), and those with "above average" buying interest (index higher than 110). About one in four magazine readers had an above-average buying interest compared to more than one in three (36%) with below-average buying interest. The remaining 40% showed average buying interest.

Buying interest was significantly influenced by all of the advertising belief statements (using a 10% confidence level). Tables 4 to 8 show the distribution of scores that consistently indicate

that the more positive the feelings towards advertising, the higher the proportion of respondents with above-average buying interest, and vice versa.

For example, among those who claimed to like to look at advertising, 30% respondents had above-average buying interest as compared to only 18% and 20% among other groups ($X^2 = 17.1$, $p < .001$, see Table 4). Similarly, as shown in Table 5, only 19% of those who agree that much of advertising is way too annoying had above-average buying interest as compared to 43% who had below-average buying interest in the same group ($X^2 = 12.3$, $p < .02$).

A similar though less pronounced trend was found for the statement that too many products do not perform as well as ads claim ($X^2 = 8.6$, $p < .07$, see Table 6). The effects for the belief that advertised brands were generally better in quality than brands that are not advertised were stronger ($X^2 = 15.4$, $p < .01$). As shown in Table 7, among those who agree with this statement, over one in three respondents had an above-average buying interest as compared to only 19% to 25% among the other groups.

The influence of the belief that advertising has informational value was also very strong. As set out in Table 8, significantly higher proportions of respondents who agreed that advertising keeps them up to date about products and services they want or need had above-average buying interest (32%) than those who disagreed with the statement (7%, $X^2 = 41.5$, $p < .001$).

Discussion

The above findings suggest that studying individual attitudinal factors related to advertising in general should help in understanding advertising effects more fully. While a vast amount of research has been done, and is ongoing, to try to better understand what strategic and executional factors in advertising influence attention-getting power and persuasion, relatively little research has been devoted to understanding the consumer-related factors that may influence advertising success.

The results of this study show that the extent to which individuals like to look at advertising and feel advertising generally helps them stay informed about developments in the marketplace, affects how much attention they pay to advertising in magazines. Advertising exposure in the print medium is controlled by the readers: They choose the pace, and decide how much time is spent on a specific ad and may simply choose to turn the page. It appears that one of the factors that influences how much attention will be paid to an ad is the attitude towards advertising in general. This is not to dismiss or even downplay the creative aspects of advertising that are used to help break through the clutter, gain attention and add to the memorability of the ad. With the advertising overload facing each reader, only selective attention can be paid to advertising, and only some ads can be attended to and remembered even though a consumer may be generally interested in advertising. Thus, creative aspects remain crucial in determining the success of any given ad.

Consumer-related factors are, however, also important when evaluating how persuasive the advertising is. Buying interest was found to be influenced by all of the advertising beliefs explored in this study, including the enjoyment of looking at ads, the value advertising has for the brands advertised, and how informative or truthful advertising is perceived to be.

Specifically, those who claimed to like to look at advertising were more persuaded by advertising. Buying interest was also found to be influenced by the belief that much of advertising is too annoying, and to some extent by the perception that often advertised brands are not as good as ads claim them to be. Although only about one in six respondents believed advertised brands were better than unadvertised brands, these consumers were significantly more interested

in buying the advertised products.

The strong influence on persuasion of the belief that advertising helps respondents stay informed about the marketplace is not surprising. Those that believe this are the ones who not only pay attention to the ads, but are also more persuaded by advertising. They look to advertising for available choices and respond favorably to the advertising.

Implications, Limitations and Future Research

The above findings suggest there may be value in pursuing consumer-related factors such as attitudes towards advertising in general for better understanding advertising effects. In addition to strategic and executional variables, external consumer-related variables such as these help gain insight into the advertising process.

At the industry level, these results have important implications. Results of this study show that the more positive the respondents' feelings about advertising in general, the more attention they pay to advertising, and the more they are persuaded by it. To the extent that advertisements themselves shape overall attitudes towards advertising, efforts aimed at (1) helping consumers better understand the role of advertising in the marketplace, and (2) running advertising that is honest, fresh, entertaining and informative, will make advertising a more viable part of the marketing mix.

Only print (magazine) ads were studied here. The effect of advertising attitudes on television commercials may be somewhat different. Related to that, future research should study whether advertising attitudes are equally important under low and high involvement conditions and when advertising is predominantly rational or emotional.

Further, demographic differences - especially sex differences - need to be more fully studied. Although no systematic differences were found for sex in this study and therefore not discussed, they need to be tested on an a-priori basis, especially in relation to various product categories.

Nevertheless, the results of this study show that in the real world, the role of advertising attitudes in influencing advertising success appears to be important and should help gain insight into the advertising process.

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Table 1
Attitudes Towards Advertising in General

Statements	Attitudes Towards Advertising *			Total %
	Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %	
I like to look at advertising	18	48	34	100
Much of advertising is way too annoying	14	49	37	100
Too many products do not perform as well as the ads claim	8	52	40	100
On average, brands that are advertised are better in quality than brands that are not advertised	27	56	17	100
Advertising helps me keep up-to-date about products and services that I need or would like to have	9	45	46	100
(Base=860)				

* Range: 0 to 10 where 0 is Disagree Strongly and 10 is Agree Strongly; Disagree = 0-3; Neutral = 4-7; Agree = 8-10.

Table 2
Total Ads Recalled by Liking to
Look at Ads

Total Ads Recalled	"I like to look at advertising" *		
	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
	%	%	%
0	34	19	14
1-2	49	54	61
3+	17	27	25
	<hr/> 100	<hr/> 100	<hr/> 100
(Base)	(157)	(407)	(287)

* Disagree: Ratings 0-3; Neutral 4-7;
 Agree 8-10.

$\chi^2 = 26.8, p < .001$

Table 3
Total Ads Recalled by Ads are
Informational

"Advertising helps me keep up to date about products and services..." *			
Total Ads Recalled	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
	%	%	%
0	28	22	18
1-2	60	54	55
3+	12	24	27
	<hr/> 100	<hr/> 100	<hr/> 100
(Base)	(74)	(384)	(394)

* Disagree: Ratings 0-3; Neutral 4-7;
 Agree 8-10.

$\chi^2 = 10.5, p < .03$

Table 4
Buying Interest by Enjoyment of
Advertising

Total Ads Recalled	"I like to look at advertising" *		
	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
	%	%	%
Below Average	42	40	27
Average	40	40	43
Above Average	18	20	30
	<hr/> 100	<hr/> 100	<hr/> 100
(Base)	(104)	(328)	(246)

* Disagree: Ratings 0-3; Neutral 4-7; Agree 8-10.

$\chi^2 = 17.1, p < .001$

Table 5
Buying Interest by Annoyance of
Advertising

Total Ads Recalled	"Much of Advertising is way too Annoying" *		
	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
	%	%	%
Below Average	28	32	43
Average	41	43	38
Above Average	31	25	19
	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>
(Base)	(94)	(342)	(243)

* Disagree: Ratings 0-3; Neutral 4-7; Agree 8-10.

$\chi^2 = 12.3, p < .02$

Table 6**Buying Interest by Advertising Claims**

"Too many products do not perform as well as the ads claim" *			
Total Ads Recalled	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
	%	%	%
Below Average	26	38	35
Average	35	42	40
Above Average	39	20	25
	<hr/> 100	<hr/> 100	<hr/> 100
(Base)	(49)	(362)	(260)

* Disagree: Ratings 0-3; Neutral 4-7; Agree 8-10.

$\chi^2 = 8.6$, $p < .07$

Table 7

"Buying Interest by Quality of Advertised Products

"On average, brands that are advertised are better in quality than brands that are not advertised" *			
Total Ads Recalled	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
	%	%	%
Below Average	40	36	25
Average	35	45	40
Above Average	25	19	35
	100	100	100
(Base)	(166)	(379)	(116)

* Disagree: Ratings 0-3; Neutral 4-7; Agree 8-10.

$\chi^2 = 15.4$, $p < .01$

Table 8

By Interest by Informational Value of Advertising

"Advertising helps me keep up to date about products and services..." *			
Total Ads Recalled	Disagree	Neutral	Agree
	%	%	%
Below Average	42	45	26
Average	51	38	42
Above Average	7	17	32
	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>	<u>100</u>
(Base)	(53)	(301)	(325)

* Disagree: Ratings 0-3; Neutral 4-7; Agree 8-10.

$\chi^2 = 41.5, p < .001$

Table 9
Attitudes Towards Advertising in General

Statements	Attitudes Towards Advertising *		
	Disagree %	Neutral %	Agree %
I like to look at advertising	18	48	34
Much of advertising is way too annoying	14	49	37
Too many products do not perform as well as the ads claim	8	52	40
On average, brands that are advertised are better in quality than brands that are not advertised	27	56	17
Advertising helps me keep up-to-date about products and services that I need or would like to have	9	45	46
(Base=860)			

* Range: 0 to 10 where 0 is Disagree Strongly and 10 is Agree Strongly; Disagree = 0-3; Neutral = 4-7; Agree = 8-10.