

Advertising Attitudes and Advertising Effectiveness

ABHILASHA MEHTA
Gallup & Robinson, Inc.

Print advertising performance is influenced by consumers' attitudes toward advertising in general. Respondents with more favorable attitudes toward advertising recalled a higher number of advertisements the day after exposure and were more persuaded by them. The implications are discussed here.

EXECUTIONAL AND MEDIA FACTORS significantly influence advertising performance. Substantial research is conducted to determine the most effective creative executions and media dollars allocations. Individual personality variables and attitudinal orientations as factors influencing advertising effectiveness have received less attention in the industry. While researchers have explored consumer attitudes to advertising in general, they have not evaluated how these attitudes affect response to specific advertising.

In the context of real-world copy testing, do general attitudes toward advertising influence advertising reactions? If so, in what ways? This study has been designed to answer these questions. The results should provide learning for advertisers and advertising researchers in creating as well as in evaluating advertising. In the print medium, the reading experience is controlled by the reader who decides the pace and time spent on any specific advertisement. A consumer's own pre-disposition toward advertising in general, either favorable or unfavorable, would influence how she or he would respond to any advertisement. Previous exploratory research at Gallup & Robinson showed that this may be the case (Mehta and Purvis, 1995).

G&R's Impact system for copy testing is designed to obtain multiple measures. Two key measures were selected for use as indicators of advertising effectiveness in this study: Intrusiveness, an indicator of attention-getting power and memorability of the advertising, and Persuasion, measured

as the favorable buying interest for the advertised products.

The main objectives of this research were to test the hypotheses that consumers with more favorable attitudes toward advertising in general would (1) recall more advertisements the day after exposure, and (2) be more persuaded by the advertisements.

THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

The influence of attitudes toward advertising in general on advertising effectiveness is an important area of study because the results have implications for the industry. Greyser (1972) discussed at length how consumers' overall perceptions of advertising impact the effectiveness of advertising and the role of advertisers. Moreover, the study of attitudes to advertising may be especially significant because it influences attitudes-toward-the-ad, an important antecedent of brand attitudes (e.g., Lutz, 1985; Mackenzie, Lutz, and Belch, 1986; Mackenzie and Lutz, 1989; Muehling, 1987; Shimp, 1981; Thorson, 1981). The influence of attitudes-toward-the-ad on brand attitudes has been found to be even more significant under low-involvement conditions and for emotionally based advertising. Further, findings of the ARF Copy Research Validity Project (Haley and Baldinger, 1991) also showed commercial liking (similar to attitudes-toward-the-ad) was among the strongest predictors of sales differences attributable to advertising for the cases studied. Recently, along similar lines, researchers have suggested there may be value in

Based on a presentation given at the Last Word in Print Workshop at the ARF Week of Workshops, October 1998.

abhymehta@aol.com

exploring the effect of attitudes-toward-the-website in evaluating the effectiveness of web advertising (Chen and Wells, 1999).

While many researchers have explored attitudes toward advertising in general among adult consumers (see Zanot, 1981; Mittal, 1994; Shavitt, Lowrey, and Haefner, 1998), student samples (Dubinsky and Hensel, 1984; Larkin, 1977; Muehling, 1987; Sandage and Leckenby, 1980; Petroschias, 1986), as well as evaluated cross-cultural differences (e.g., Andrews, Lyonski, and Durvasula, 1991; Santos, 1976), or media-specific advertising attitudes (e.g., Alwitt and Prabhaker, 1994), the influence of general advertising attitudes directly on advertising effectiveness has hardly been studied. Researchers have suggested that general attitudes to advertising need to be studied since these attitudes should have an impact on how consumers respond to advertising.

Among the few studies exploring this relationship, results of a study of outdoor (billboard) advertising suggest respondents who had a positive attitude toward advertising in general seemed to recall more outdoor advertisements than those who had a negative attitude (Donthu, Cherian, and Bhargava, 1993). In another study, James and Kover (1992) evaluated the impact of advertising in general on advertising "involvement," measured as the amount of time spent looking at print advertisements. Results suggest that those who felt advertising was not manipulative and was a good way to learn about products were more involved with the advertisements, that is, spent more time looking at the advertisements. On the other hand, those who said they were irritated by program interruptions (by commercials on television) and thought that products do not perform as well as advertisements claim were generally also *more* involved with the print advertisements. The au-

thors suggest this may be a result of a hunt for flaws, or a compensation for irritation with television advertising not shown when reading print advertisements which allows more respondent control. The authors suggest that overall advertising attitudes are likely to affect other aspects of advertising communications as well. Advertising intrusiveness and persuasiveness were explored in the present study.

The construct

Although it is generally agreed that attitude toward advertising in general can be defined as "a learned predisposition to respond in the consistently favorable or unfavorable manner to advertising in general" (Lutz, 1985), its scope and measurement has widely varied in the literature. Various measures of the construct have been used: from a measure of an "overall favorability or unfavorability" to a set of belief items related to positive and negative outcomes of advertising in the economic and social areas (Bauer and Greyser, 1968). Perceptions related to other aspects of advertising include informational value, entertainment, interruptive nature, sexual content and use of women, ethics, and deception and falsehood. These were later included in the belief set related to attitudes toward advertising by other researchers (Alwitt and Prabhaker, 1994; Haller, 1974; Durand and Lambert, 1985; James and Kover, 1992; Larkin, 1977; Lutz, 1985; Muehling, 1987). Media-specific advertising attitudes have also been studied and compared.

More recently, thought listings in reaction to the word "advertising" were used to measure attitudes toward advertising by categorizing them into areas such as function, affective response, practice, industry, and user-related, and general. By far, scaled statements about advertising have been most often used by researchers.

A battery of relevant attitudinal statements related to advertising in terms of its entertainment and informational value, trustworthiness, and impact on product quality were selected for use in the present study.

Methodology

G&R's Magazine Impact Research Systems (MIRS) methodology for print advertising testing was used to obtain data for the study. A total of 1,914 adult (18+ years of age) regular magazine readers from over 30 geographically dispersed markets nationwide participated in the study. Of these, 608 were men and 1,306 were women. Participants were recruited on the basis of their readership of four different types of magazines: general, news, women's general, and women's fashion. Readers qualified for the study if they read two out of the last four issues of selected magazines.

One of the key strengths of MIRS is that it is a real-world, in-magazine, at-home copy testing system. As such it is thought to approximate actual advertising response more closely than other designs such as forced exposure or portfolio testing. Respondents, naïve to the true purpose of the study, were recruited to participate in a magazine readership study. A phone interview was scheduled for the day after exposure to discuss the magazine editorial and content. Advertising effectiveness measures were obtained during this interview. 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

Attitudes toward advertising. Various attitudinal statements were used to measure

attitudes regarding advertising on an 11-point (0-10) scale where 10 denoted "strongly agree" and 0 was "strongly disagree." 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. Two of the statements were rotated and only one of the two was asked in any test.

Intrusiveness/recall. Fifteen selected advertisements in each test magazine were cued by brand name. Respondents who claimed to recall any of these advertisements were asked open-ended questions. The responses to these were used as evidence to prove that the particular advertisement was actually recalled. Proved recall is a more stringent measure of attention-getting power and memorability of an advertisement than claimed recall. The total number of advertisements that a particular respondent proved recalling, indexed to the sample mean recall of advertisements, was used as the measure of intrusiveness for analysis.

Persuasion/buying interest. Recallers of an advertisement who had not purchased the brand last were asked to indicate on a 5-point scale to what extent the particular advertisement increased their interest in buying the advertised product. The buying interest for each particular advertisement was indexed to its category average and averaged across all advertisements recalled by any respondent. This average buying interest index computed for each respondent was used as a measure of persuasion in further analysis.

Results

Attitudes toward advertising. While a substantial proportion of the respondents feel advertising keeps them up-to-date

TABLE 1
Attitudes toward Advertising in General

Statements	Attitudes toward Advertising*			Total ^a
	Agree (%)	Neutral (%)	Disagree (%)	
Advertising helps me keep up-to-date about products and services that I need or would like to have.	45	46	9	100
Too many products do not perform as well as the ads claim.	40	52	8	100
Advertising is more manipulative than it is informative.	37	52	11	100 ^b
Much of advertising is way too annoying.	37	49	14	100 ^c
I like to look at advertising.	37	46	17	100
On average, brands that are advertised are better in quality than brands that are not advertised.	21	55	24	100

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

^aBase size 1,914 for all statements except as noted.

^bBase size 1,046.

^cBase size 853.

about products and services in the marketplace, as shown in Table 1, a high proportion of respondents also believe products do not perform as well as advertisements claim. Similarly, although many readers enjoy looking at advertising, many also feel much of advertising is annoying and more manipulative than informative. Relatively few (only about one in five) respondents agreed that advertised brands are better than those brands that are not advertised.

These results are generally in line with past research: although the vast research literature on the subject shows a variety of measurement and analysis methods, making comparisons difficult, the research generally shows similar positive reactions to the informational value of advertising and more negative responses to its manipulative, intrusive, and deceptive na-

ture (see Shavitt, Lowrey, and Haefner, 1998). Mittal (1994) found that attitudes toward TV advertising were significantly less positive than those toward print advertising.

Results for the impact of advertising attitudes on intrusiveness and persuasion are presented in Tables 2 and 3. No sex differences were found and results have been presented for the full sample.

Intrusiveness/recall. The total number of advertisements recalled was significantly influenced by three out of the six advertising attitudes studied: those related to liking to look at advertising, the informational value of advertising, and the perception regarding advertising being more manipulative than informational (see Table 2). It appears that respondents who like advertising and feel advertising pro-

TABLE 2
Intrusiveness by Attitudes toward Advertising

Statements	Mean Recall Index by	
	Agree	Disagree
Advertising helps me keep up-to-date about products and services that I need or would like to have.	109**	67
I like to look at advertising.	105**	73
Much of advertising is way too annoying.	104	117
On average, brands that are advertised are better in quality than brands that are not advertised.	97	94
Too many products do not perform as well as the ads claim.	94	92
Advertising is more manipulative than it is informative.	86	101*

**Significantly higher at 99% Confidence Level ($p < .001$).

*Significantly higher at 90% Confidence Level ($p < .01$).

vides useful information also notice and recall more advertisements than those who do not feel this way.

Overall, the results reported here are similar to those reported by Donthu, Cherian, and Bhargava (1993) in their study of outdoor advertising. Our results are also partially similar to those of the James and Kover (1992) study who found that time spent looking at print advertisements ("involvement") was influenced by similar attitudes. Their results, however, also showed that those who thought products do not perform as well as advertisements claim spent *more* time looking at print advertisements, whereas the results of this study do not show a difference in recall of advertisements. If hunt for flaws is the reason for spending more time looking at the advertisements by the former group of respondents, as suggested by James and Kover, it appears that this does not translate to better memory of brands in advertisements seen by these respondents. It should be noted that there were other methodological differences in the two studies (directed exposure to series of advertisements versus in-magazine advertis-

ing exposure with recall measures obtained the day after advertising exposure).

Persuasion/buying interest. Buying interest was significantly influenced by five of the six tested attitudinal statements, as shown in Table 3. It appears that reactions toward advertising related to liking to

look at advertising, its informational value as well as perceptions regarding how truthful or manipulative advertising is all impact how persuaded respondents will generally be by an advertisement.

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The above findings clearly show that individual attitudinal factors related to advertising in general do influence how a respondent reacts to any particular advertisement, reinforcing expectations by other researchers previously. Specifically, the results of the study show that the amount of attention that respondents will pay to magazine advertisements, measured as recall of the brand in the advertisement the day after exposure, is influenced by how much they like to look at advertising, believe advertising helps them stay informed about developments in the marketplace, and see it as not being manipulative.

Further, individual advertising orientation is significantly important in determining how persuasive respondents find advertising. Buying interest was found to

TABLE 3
Persuasion by Attitudes toward Advertising

Statements	Mean Persuasion Index by	
	Agree	Disagree
Advertising helps me keep up-to-date about products and services that I need or would like to have.	105**	97
On average, brands that are advertised are better in quality than brands that are not advertised.	105**	100
I like to look at advertising.	104**	97
Too many products do not perform as well as the ads claim.	101	107**
Much of advertising is way too annoying.	99	106**
Advertising is more manipulative than it is informative.	99	102

**Significantly higher at 99% Confidence Level ($p < .001$).

be influenced by five of the six advertising beliefs explored in this study, including liking to look at advertisements, the value advertising has for the brands advertised, and how informative or truthful advertising is perceived.

It is not surprising to find a strong influence on persuasion of the perception that advertising helps consumers stay in-

formed about products and services in the marketplace. Those who believe this are the ones who not only pay attention to the advertisements but are also more persuaded by advertisements. They look to advertising for information regarding available choices and respond favorably. Similarly, those who like to look at advertising are more persuaded by advertising. Few respondents disagree that advertising is more manipulative than informative, but those who do tend to have a higher advertising recall level.

Research reminds us that, to be effective, advertising is something people should like looking at, believe, and find utility with keeping them up-to-date about products and services.

Other advertising attitudes influenced buying interest but not recall: persuasion levels are significantly lower among those who believe that advertising is annoying and that advertised brands are often not as good as advertisements claim. Not unfairly, consumers must believe that the advertising is truthful. Further, those consumers who believe advertised brands are better than unadvertised brands are significantly more interested in buying the advertised products.

As mentioned earlier, the reader controls advertising exposure in the print me-

diuum: he or she decides how much time is spent on a specific advertisement and may simply choose to turn the page. These results show that one of the factors that influences how much attention will be paid to an advertisement, whether it will be remembered and to what extent the consumers will be persuaded by it, is the attitude toward advertising in general. This is not to dismiss or even downplay the creative aspects of advertising that must be used to help break through the clutter in the overloaded media environment and provide useful messages that can influence consumers to be interested in the advertised product or service. Regardless of how one may feel about advertising in general, it is not possible to respond to all advertising stimuli. Creative and strategic aspects remain crucial in determining the success of an advertisement in both gaining attention and adding to its memorability, and in persuading the consumer to be interested in the advertised product. Individual attitudes toward advertising in general can, however, influence the way a consumer will respond to any particular advertising.

IMPLICATIONS

The above findings have significant implications for advertisers, agencies, and advertising researchers. First, the research reminds us that, to be effective, advertising is something people should like looking at, believe, and find utility with keep-

ing them up-to-date about products and services. Advertising that is entertaining, informative, and truthful promotes consumers to like advertising in general and believe in its value. Overall positive attitudes to advertising, in turn, render specific advertising messages to be better received and more effective among consumers. By keeping this in mind as they develop new executions, advertisers and agencies will combat negative attitudes toward advertising and improve response to *all* advertising.

In the meantime, since the results of the study show that different types of people view advertising differently, and on different dimensions than conventional demographic or usership criteria, they focus attention on the complexity of the interaction that takes place between the advertising stimuli and its audiences. They demonstrate from yet another perspective the value that research can play in helping gauge the nature of that response. **JAR**

ABBY MEHTA is director of research at Gallup & Robinson Inc., Pennington, New Jersey. Before joining G&R in 1993, Abby was assistant professor of advertising at the Newhouse School of Public Communications, Syracuse University. Her research interests include advertising processing and consumer psychology. She has published widely and is an active speaker at industry as well as academic conferences. Recent publications include work on advertising response modeling and celebrity advertising. Dr. Mehta holds a Ph.D. in social psychology from Syracuse University.

REFERENCES

- ALWITT, LINDA F., and PAUL R. PRABHAKER. "Identifying Who Dislikes Television Advertising: Not by Demographics Alone." *Journal of Advertising Research* 34, 6 (1994): 17-29.

- ANDREWS, CRAIG J., STEVEN LYSONSKI, and SRINIVAS DURVASULA. "Understanding Cross-Cultural Student Perceptions of Advertising in General: Implications for Advertising Educators and Practitioners." *Journal of Advertising* 20, 2 (1991): 15-28.
- BAUER, R. A., and S. A. GREYSER. *Advertising in America: The Consumer View*. Boston: Harvard University, Graduate School of Business Administration, Division of Research, 1968.
- CHEN, QIMEI, and WILLIAM D. WELLS. "Attitude toward the Site." *Journal of Advertising Research* 39, 5 (1999): 27-37.
- DONTHU, NAVEEN, JOSEPH CHERIAN, and MUKESH BHARGAVA. "Factors Influencing Recall of Outdoor Advertising." *Journal of Advertising Research* 33, 3 (1993): 64-72.
- DUBINSKY, ALAN J., and PAUL J. HENSEL. "Marketing Student Attitudes Toward Advertising: Implications for Marketing Educators." *Journal of Marketing Research* 21, 3 (1984): 22-26.
- DURAND, R., and Z. LAMBERT. "Alienation and Criticisms of Advertising." *Journal of Advertising* 14, 3 (1985): 9-17.
- GREYSER, STEPHEN A. "Advertising: Attacks and Counters." *Harvard Business Review* 50, 2 (1972): 22-28/141-146.
- HALBY, RUSSELL I., and ALLAN L. BALDINGER. "The ARF Copy Research Project." *Journal of Advertising Research* 31, 2 (1991): 11-32.
- HALLER, THOMAS F. "What Students Think of Advertising." *Journal of Advertising Research* 14, 1 (1974): 33-43.
- JAMES, WILLIAM L., and ARTHUR KOVER. "Do Overall Attitudes toward Advertising Affect Involvement with Specific Advertisements?" *Journal of Advertising Research* 32, 5 (1992): 78-83.
- LARKIN, ERNEST F. "A Factor Analysis of College Student Attitudes Toward Advertising." *Journal of Advertising* 6, 2 (1977): 42-46.
- LUTZ, RICHARD J. "Affective and Cognitive Antecedents of Attitude toward the Ad: A Conceptual Framework." In *Psychological Processes and Advertising Effects: Theory, Research, and Applications*, Linda Alwitt and Andrew Mitchell, eds. Hillsdale, NJ: Erlbaum, 1985.
- MACKENZIE, SCOTT B., and RICHARD J. LUTZ. "An Empirical Examination of Attitude Toward the Ad in an Advertising Pretest Context." *Journal of Marketing* 53, 2 (1989): 48-65.
- , ———, and GEORGE E. BELCH. "The Role of Attitude Toward the Ad as a Mediator of Advertising Effectiveness: A Test of Competing Explanations." *Journal of Marketing Research* 23, 2 (1986): 130-43.
- MEHTA, ABHILASHA, and SCOTT C. PURVIS. "When Attitudes Toward Advertising in General Influence Advertising Success." In *Proceedings of the 1995 Annual Conference of the American Academy of Advertising*, Charles S. Madden, ed. Waco, TX: Baylor University, 1995.
- MITTAL, BANWARI. "Public Assessment of TV Advertising: Faint Praise and Harsh Criticism." *Journal of Advertising Research* 34, 1 (1994): 35-53.
- MUEHLING, DARREL D. "An Investigation of Factors Underlying Attitudes-Toward-Advertising-In-General." *Journal of Advertising* 16, 1 (1987): 32-40.
- PETROSHIAS, SUSAN M. "An Assessment of Business Students' Attitudes Toward Advertising." In *1986 AMA Educator's Proceedings*, Terence A. Shimp et al., eds. Chicago, IL: American Marketing Association, 1986.
- SANDAGE, C. H., and JOHN D. LECKENBY. "Student Attitudes Toward Advertising: Institution vs. Instruments." *Journal of Advertising* 9, 2 (1980): 29-32.
- SANTOS, S. "Latin and American Students' View of Advertising." *Journal of Advertising* 5, 3 (1976): 35-39.
- SHAVITT, SHARON, PAMELA LOWERY, and JAMES HAEFNER. "Public Attitudes Toward Advertising: More Favorable Than You Might Think." *Journal of Advertising Research* 38, 4 (1998): 7-22.
- SHIMP, TERENCE A. "Attitude Toward the Ad as a Mediator of Consumer Brand Choice." *Journal of Advertising* 10, 2 (1981): 9-15.
- THORSON, ESTHER. "Likability: 10 Years of Academic Research." In *Transcript Proceedings: Eighth Annual Advertising Research Foundation Copy Research Workshop*. New York: Advertising Research Foundation, 1981.
- ZANOT, E. "Public Attitudes Toward Advertising." In *Advertising in a New Age—AAA Proceedings*, H. Keith Hunt, ed. Provo, UT: American Academy of Advertising, 1981.