A Model For Predictive Measurements of Advertising Effectiveness

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The development and selection of research designs too often reflects thinking which is technique-oriented. This article looks at advertising research from another viewpoint.

It starts with the questions: What is advertising supposed to do? What are its functions? The authors then show the implications of these questions in relation to measurements of the effectiveness of proposed advertisements.

WHAT ARE THE functions of advertising? Obviously the ultimate function is to help produce sales. But all advertising is not, should not, and cannot be designed to produce immediate purchases on the part of all who are exposed to it. Immediate sales results (even if measurable) are, at best, an incomplete criterion of advertising effectiveness.

In other words, the effects of much advertising are "long-term." This is sometimes taken to imply that all one can really do is wait and see—ultimately the campaign will or will not produce.

However, if something is to happen in the long run, something must be happening in the short run, something that will ultimately lead to eventual sales results. And this process must be measured in order to provide anything approaching a comprehensive evaluation of the effectiveness of the advertising.

Ultimate consumers normally do not switch from disinterested individuals to convinced purchasers in one instantaneous step. Rather, they approach the ultimate purchase through a process or series of steps in which the actual purchase is but the final threshold.

Seven Steps

Advertising may be thought of as a force, which must move people up a series of steps:

1. Near the bottom of the steps stand potential purchasers who are completely unaware of the existence of the product or service in question.
2. Closer to purchasing, but still a long way from the cash register, are those who are merely aware of its existence.
3. Up a step are prospects who know what the product has to offer.
4. Still closer to purchasing are those who have favorable attitudes toward the product—those who like the product.
5. Those whose favorable attitudes have developed to the point of preference over all other possibilities are up still another step.
6. Even closer to purchasing are consumers who couple preference with a desire to buy and the conviction that the purchase would be wise.
7. Finally, of course, is the step which translates this attitude into actual purchase.
Research to evaluate the effectiveness of advertisements can be designed to provide measures of movement on such a flight of steps.

The various steps are not necessarily equidistant. In some instances the “distance” from awareness to preference may be very slight, while the distance from preference to purchase is extremely large. In other cases, the reverse may be true. Furthermore, a potential purchaser sometimes may move up several steps simultaneously.

Consider the following hypotheses. The greater the psychological and/or economic commitment involved in the purchase of a particular product, the longer it will take to bring consumers up these steps, and the more important the individual steps will be. Contrariwise, the less serious the commitment, the more likely it is that some consumers will go almost “immediately” to the top of the steps.

An impulse purchase might be consummated with no previous awareness, knowledge, liking, or conviction with respect to the product. On the other hand, an industrial good or an important consumer product ordinarily will not be purchased in such a manner.

Different Objectives

Products differ markedly in terms of the role of advertising as related to the various positions on the steps. A great deal of advertising is designed to move people up the final steps toward purchase. At an extreme is the “Buy Now” ad, designed to stimulate immediate overt action. Contrast this with industrial advertising, much of which is not intended to stimulate immediate purchase in and of itself. Instead, it is designed to help pave the way for the salesman by making the prospects aware of his company and products, thus giving them knowledge and favorable attitudes about the ways in which those products or services might be of value. This, of course, involves movement up the lower and intermediate steps.

Even within a particular product category, or with a specific product, different advertisements or campaigns may be aimed primarily at different steps in the purchase process—and rightly so. For example, advertising for new automobiles is likely to place considerable emphasis on the lower steps when new models are first brought out. The advertiser recognizes that his first job is to make the potential customer aware of the new product, and to give him knowledge and favorable attitudes about the product. As the year progresses, advertising emphasis tends to move up the steps. Finally, at the end of the “model year” much emphasis is placed on the final step—the attempt to stimulate immediate purchase among prospects who are assumed, by then, to have information about the car.

The simple model assumes that potential purchasers all “start from scratch.” However, some may have developed negative attitudes about the product, which place them even further from purchasing the product than those completely unaware of it. The first job, then, is to get them off the negative steps—before they can move up the additional steps which lead to purchase.

Three Functions of Advertising

The six steps outlined, beginning with “aware,” indicate three major functions of advertising. (1) The first two, awareness and knowledge, relate to information or ideas. (2) The second two steps, liking and preference, have to do with favorable attitudes or feelings toward the product. (3) The final two steps, conviction and purchase, are to produce action—the acquisition of the product.

These three advertising functions are directly related to a classic psychological model which divides behavior into three components or dimensions:

1. The cognitive component—the intellectual, mental, or “rational” states.
2. The affective component—the “emotional” or “feeling” states.
3. The conative or motivational component—the “striving” states, relating to the tendency to treat objects as positive or negative goals.

This is more than a semantic issue, because the actions that need to be taken to stimulate or channel motivation may be quite different from those that produce knowledge. And these, in turn, may differ
from actions designed to produce favorable attitudes toward something.

FUNCTIONS OF ADVERTISING RESEARCH

Among the first problems in any advertising evaluation program are to:
1. Determine what steps are most critical in a particular case, that is, what the steps leading to purchase are for most consumers.
2. Determine how many people are, at the moment, on which steps.
3. Determine which people on which steps it is most important to reach.

Advertising research can then be designed to evaluate the extent to which the advertising succeeds in moving the specified "target" audience(s) up the critical purchase steps.

Table 1 summarizes the stair-step model, and illustrates how several common advertising and research approaches may be organized according to their various "functions."

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Related behavioral dimensions</th>
<th>Movement toward purchase</th>
<th>Examples of types of promotion or advertising relevant to various steps</th>
<th>Examples of research approaches related to steps of greatest applicability</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>CONATIVE— the realm of motives. Ads stimulate or direct desires.</td>
<td>PURCHASE</td>
<td>Point-of-purchase Retail store ads Deals &quot;Last-chance&quot; offers Price appeals Testimonials</td>
<td>Market or sales tests Split-run tests</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>CONVICTION</td>
<td></td>
<td>Intention to purchase Projective techniques</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AFFECTIVE— the realm of emotions. Ads change attitudes and feelings.</td>
<td>PREFERENCE</td>
<td>Competitive ads Argumentative copy “Image” ads Status, glamor appeals</td>
<td>Rank order of preference for brands Rating scales Image measurements, including check lists and semantic differentials Projective techniques</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>LIKING</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>COGNITIVE— the realm of thoughts. Ads provide information and facts.</td>
<td>KNOWLEDGE</td>
<td>Announcements Descriptive copy Classified ads Slogans Jingles Sky writing Teaser campaigns</td>
<td>Information questions Play-back analyses Brand awareness surveys Aided recall</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>AWARENESS</td>
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Over-all and Component Measurements

With regard to most any product there are an infinite number of additional “sub-flights” which can be helpful in moving a prospect up the main steps. For example, awareness, knowledge, and development of favorable attitudes toward a specific product feature may be helpful in building a preference for the line of products. This leads to the concept of other steps, subdividing or "feeding" into the purchase steps, but concerned solely with more specific product features or attitudes.

Advertising effectiveness measurements may, then, be categorized into:
1. Over-all or “global” measurements, concerned with measuring the results—the consumers' positions and movement on the purchase steps.
2. Segment or component measurements, concerned with measuring the relative effectiveness of various means of moving people up the pur-
Chase steps—the consumers’ positions on ancillary flights of steps, and the relative importance of these flights.

**Measuring Movement on the Steps**

Many common measurements of advertising effectiveness have been concerned with movement up either the first steps or the final step on the primary purchase flight. Examples include surveys to determine the extent of brand awareness and information and measures of purchase and repeat purchase among “exposed” versus “unexposed” groups.

Self-administered instruments, such as adaptations of the “semantic differential” and adjective check lists, are particularly helpful in providing the desired measurements of movement up or down the middle steps. The semantic differential provides a means of scaling attitudes with regard to a number of different issues in a manner which facilitates gathering the information on an efficient quantitative basis. Adjective lists, used in various ways, serve the same general purpose.

Such devices can provide relatively spontaneous, rather than “considered,” responses. They are also quickly administered and can contain enough elements to make recall of specific responses by the test participant difficult, especially if the order of items is changed. This helps in minimizing “consistency” biases in various comparative uses of such measurement tools.

Efficiency of these self-administered devices makes it practical to obtain responses to large numbers of items. This facilitates measurement of elements or components differing only slightly, though importantly, from each other.

Carefully constructed adjective check lists, for example, have shown remarkable discrimination between terms differing only in subtle shades of meaning. One product may be seen as “rich,” “plush,” and “expensive,” while another one is “plush,” “gaudy,” and “cheap.”

Such instruments make it possible to secure simultaneous measurements of both global attitudes and specific image components. These can be correlated with each other and directly related to the content of the advertising messages tested.

Does the advertising change the thinking of the respondents with regard to specific product attributes, characteristics or features, including not only physical characteristics but also various image elements such as “status”? Are these changes commercially significant?

The measuring instruments mentioned are helpful in answering these questions. They provide a means for correlating changes in specific attitudes concerning image components with changes in global attitudes or position on the primary purchase steps.

**Testing the Model**

When groups of consumers are studied over time, do those who show more movement on the measured steps eventually purchase the product in greater proportions or quantities? Accumulation of data utilizing the stair-step model provides an opportunity to test the assumptions underlying the model by answering this question.

**THREE CONCEPTS**

This approach to the measurement of advertising has evolved from three concepts:

1. Realistic measurements of advertising effectiveness must be related to an understanding of the functions of advertising. It is helpful to think in terms of a model where advertising is likened to a force which, if successful, moves people up a series of steps toward purchase.

2. Measurements of the effectiveness of the advertising should provide measurements of changes at all levels on these steps—not just at the levels of the development of product or feature awareness and the stimulation of actual purchase.

3. Changes in attitudes as to specific image components can be evaluated together with changes in over-all images, to determine the extent to which changes in the image components are related to movement on the primary purchase steps.
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