

Humanistic Advertising

A Holistic Cultural Perspective

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What do people do with advertising? This paper explores the implications of answering this question rather than the more traditional question: 'what does advertising do to people?'

Models of the advertising process that have influenced thinking about how advertising works, and thus led to the methods and techniques used to develop and pre-test advertising, have been based on attempts to answer the question 'What does advertising do to people?' This paper deals with the effects these models and the metaphors they represent have had on research practice. We suggest a new set of models and fresh metaphors to produce research that satisfies the needs of creative people and which more accurately reflect the ways consumers deal with advertising.

The appeal of conventional linear sequential models of the communication process stems largely from their utility to both market researchers wishing to apply scientific, controlled methodology and, more significantly, to conventional marketing organizations. Models that define measurable parameters so that research may be conducted and decisions made with maximum logic and minimum ambiguity are always attractive. Susceptibility to measurement provides, at the very least, a good explanation of their continuance. They have serious theoretical flaws in addition to the main practical flaw, which is that they have nothing to do with creativity and thus are of no value or even utility to those charged with making the advertisements.

If work until now asked the question 'What does advertising do to people', what happens if the question is turned on its head: 'What do people do with advertising?'

Exploration of this perspective leads to different models, different metaphors and language which we feel better reflects reality while at the same time providing a better stimulus to creative work. We suggest that anthropology, modern developments in person-centred psychology and the principles of phenomenology

are more fruitful sources of new thinking, and we describe a range of techniques appropriate to understanding consumers' realities and the uses they make of advertising. Finally we recognize the logical implications of this approach for organizational methods and procedures.

HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF MODELS OF THE ADVERTISING PROCESS

What does advertising do to people?

Writers and thinkers about advertising have always addressed themselves to the presumably straightforward and self-evident question: 'how does advertising work on people?' The assumption that advertising is acting in a more or less active way on people is inherent in the models and language of writers on the subject and in the everyday speech of marketing men, researchers and advertising people.

It is worth examining the assumptions inherent in the historical models of the persuasion process a little more closely, because these assumptions shape the way we think about the advertising process and determine the way we go about developing and researching advertising.

Linear sequential models: primitive but enduring

A more or less methodical body of literature began, not with the theorists or social scientists, but with the practitioners: Claude Hopkins, David Ogilvy, Rosser Reeves, James Webb Young. Some of the practitioners' models, notably those of Ogilvy and Young, have a simplicity and robust common sense about them that have considerable appeal and not inconsiderable wisdom. However, they found little real support amongst social scientists who took on the task of codifying the process, drawing largely on mass communication studies in order to set about researching the advertising process to bring science to business.

The models that have lingered longest and have had the most far-reaching effects are those applied directly from classical learning theory: theories that Gerald de Groot (1980) has labelled 'linear sequential'. They differ in precise terminology, but have in common the belief that, for a piece of advertising communication to be effective, it must go through a series of stages, with each stage being dependent, in some way, on the success of the previous stage, so that essentially a ladder-like sequence of mental events is posited. Daniel Starch formulated the earliest model for print advertising, claiming that an advertisement must be: seen; read; believed; remembered; acted upon. The AIDA model, another influential model in the United States in the 1950s and 1960s, postulated four steps: attention, interest, desire, action. Most influential of all was the book written by Russell Colley, *Defining Advertising Goals for Measured Advertising Results*, which became known as the DAGMAR theory and described the steps as: awareness, comprehension, conviction, action. In retrospect, it seems absurd that the controversy that these models generated was so heated since they seem essentially semantic quibbles.

It is not the purpose of this paper to detail the numerous theories and models

that social scientists and advertising researchers have devised for the consumption of marketing men, market researchers and advertising practitioners. Essentially they fall into three categories: 'hammer and nail' theories; 'conversion' theories; and 'hierarchy of effects' theories. A very clear and straightforward account of the range of models and their links with various psychological theories has been compiled elsewhere (Joyce, 1967; De Groot, 1980).

What is of interest here is why these models, which have been widely discredited, are still the source of the basic metaphor and thus the day-to-day language and the bulk of the research conducted with advertising material. In the UK at least, this language lingers despite the growth of qualitative research and the re-emergence of motivational research techniques and insights.

First, however, what's wrong with these models? Two areas are misrepresented: how people respond to communication, and how people behave as consumers. A major oversight in all of these models is that they make little allowance for the participation of the receiver of the communication in the process. There is an assumption of a more or less *passive* receiver, a *tabula rasa* on which messages are printed. Yet one's personal experience, backed up by most of psychological literature (except classical learning theory!), would suggest the opposite: that people are active and participating receivers. Gestalt psychology emphasizes perception of totalities rather than a cataloguing of individual elements and the registration of the minimum detail necessary for classification; cognitive theorists stress resistance to change and fragmentation to avoid dissonance; mass communication theorists contribute 'uses and gratification' theories. The everyday experience of interviewers talking to people about advertising regularly demonstrates how people select, distort and create messages according to their personal perceptions.

Furthermore, in terms of consumer behaviour, they imply a more or less rational decision process, arguably characteristic of some consumer durables, but only in the sense of being relatively more thoughtful, not necessarily more rational in relationship to the stuff of daily life—food, household, drink, cosmetics, toiletries. We know these to be governed by factors far beyond function, as we discuss in more detail later.

If these models do not reflect the way people respond to persuasive communication or the world of consumer purchasing and usage as we understand it, what accounts for the persistence of these models of the advertising process? Several explanations occur.

1. The greatest strength in the appeal of the linear sequential mental process models is that they lend themselves so readily to measurement. At each stage of the process a piece of research can be designed to provide a measurement of the advertisement, embryonic or completed, in achieving some set of predetermined objectives. Lovell, Johns and Ramplly (1968) illustrate this in their Thomson Gold Medal paper (Figure 1).

This in turn lends itself to a methodical step by step development process, progressing from rough concept work developed through group discussions or other qualitative work to quantifications of alternatives: alternative

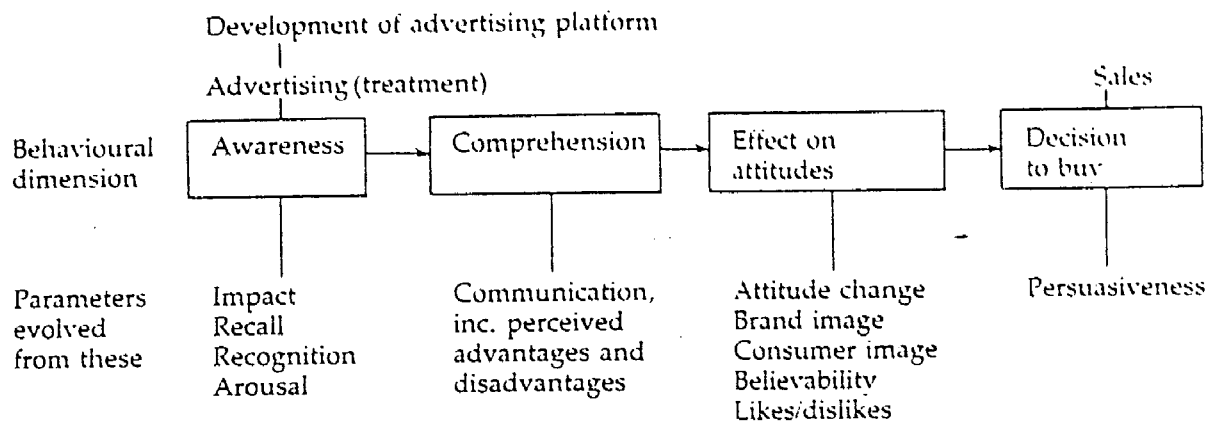


Figure 1 Diagram of the relationship between advertising, behaviour and parameters used in pre-test situations.

strategies or alternative executions of the same strategy. Characteristically qualitative data are allowable only at the very early stages; as things progress, the data need somehow to be harder and so more people are asked fewer, more superficial and less relevant questions.

Procedures like this are highly useful in the maintenance of organizational systems, despite the fact that they reflect a world reality (in contrast with an organizational reality) that few would recognize. It is a little like the man looking for his keys in the dark under a lamp-post, not because he dropped them there but because that's where the light is.

2. Another explanation, and a very convincing one for the endurance of these essentially rationally based models, is the success of the major US marketing companies in Europe—typically, exponents of this sort of thinking, as one might expect, given expansionist requirements of multinational consumer goods companies. The neatness is irresistible; so that the success of many of these companies (household cleaning products, in particular) is often cited as vindication.

Proctor and Gamble, for example, is a widely respected marketing company in research and development, quality control, pricing and distribution and has much to teach European marketers in these areas. Consumers continue to buy the company's products because they offer excellent quality, and, indeed, because a great deal of money has been spent on their launch ('It must be good or they wouldn't spend all this money introducing it', many housewives quite sensibly infer). It could be argued that product excellence maintains sales *despite* a style of advertising known to be disliked these days by women who are sensitive to being hectored, patronized and portrayed firmly tied to the kitchen sink.

3. A more subtle explanation is simple conditioning: that the set of advertising conventions associated with these models—presenter, slice of life, conversations in kitchens, etc.—crude and old-fashioned though they may be in a modern advertising context, are associated so firmly with consistently high quality products that the relationship is simply associative and mechanical in women's minds.

However, it is interesting to note that Persil, the Unilever brand leader in the UK, broke the mould of washing powder conventions several years ago by using modern, lively breakfast cereal style conventions reflecting modern ideals of family life, and subsequently increased its brand share. There is a sense here in which women are buying the advertising.

4. Finally, perhaps the simplest reason, and that is that the language of the linear sequential models is close to the imperative language of symbolic war that characterizes marketing: 'moving into markets'; 'mapping out strategies'; 'devising tactics'—competitive, purposive, logical, military. Is it not natural that advertising as a tool of marketing should use the same set of phrases and metaphors?

That systems, techniques and modes of thought are adapted to serve the needs of the institution in maintaining itself, rather than to reflect either some higher or larger truth, or serve a more relevant set of needs, is hardly unique to advertising and marketing: the Civil Service, all bureaucracies, especially local government, all offer rich examples of self-serving systems and procedures. What does seem necessary, however, is to recognize that much pre-testing thinking and practice is of this order, and we need more consciously to detach the language of advertising from the language of marketing, and to do this requires more appropriate theories which carry with them new and fresh metaphors: language and concepts more in tune with the intuitive and mystical creative process than the rational, logical organizational process. If we think of research that primarily serves the needs of creative people and, we would add, consumers, we shall be producing different sorts of research and, most significantly, different sorts of advertising.

America vs Europe: different thinking?

In a review essay, Carey (1975) writes 'European and American [communications] work derives from quite different kinds of intellectual puzzles and is grounded in two different metaphors for communication'. He describes the preponderant thought in American communication studies as a *transmission or transportation* view of communication: a process of transmitting messages at a distance for the purpose of control, of which advertising is only a small part—the focus being government propaganda of one form or another. The appeal of the use of the words 'transmission' and 'transportation' is the similarity to the nineteenth-century desire to use communication and transportation to extend influence and control, and exert power over greater populations. It is from this work that advertising theorists drew, consciously or unconsciously, most of their ideas. Hence the concentration on overt persuasion, attitude change and behaviour modification. In turn, this metaphor is probably based upon deep-seated US images of manifest destiny and forceful concepts of expansionism, power and control.

The identification of the transportation model as specifically American *in contrast* to a European model is an interesting thought. Carey describes the European communication metaphor as embodied in *myth and ritual* (what we might call 'holistic cultural') so that communication is seen as a process through

which a shared culture is created, modified and transformed. Here is a very much richer metaphor for the communication process and one that is much more closely linked to specifically European intellectual traditions: structuralism, semiotics, phenomenology. By this view, advertising carries its culture with it 'just as a wave carries the whole sea'.

This also seems to come rather closer to one's experience, if not of European advertising in general, at least of English advertising in particular. The appeal and indeed mystery and source of incomprehension, not to say irritation, with English advertising, as has been commented on by foreign observers, is that it is so English. It draws intuitively on shared cultural experience to a very great extent. Successful advertising and, perhaps most significantly, brand leader advertising in many markets illustrates this vividly: After Eight uses the myth of the upper class, an enduring archetype; Hovis uses the myth of industrial working-class sentimentalities combined with Yorkshire stubbornness; Mr. Kipling Cakes are made by an imaginary prototypical bespoke master baker living in a calendar art cottage; John Smith's Bitter has invented an exquisitely eccentric character; Courage recreates the pub of the 1920s/1930s as the preserve of the working-class male; Campari uses a modern Eliza Doolittle figure, and so on.

The understated humour, the highly visual (in contrast to verbal) content and the apparent absence of advertising 'sell' are all linked very closely with features of specifically English life, and thus readily understandable to English consumers. In turn they are drawn from the written and oral traditions of England, updated by our media.

An explanation for the differences in these basic communications metaphors, also touched on by Professor Carey, is the separation of mass communication, and, for the purposes of this argument, advertising, from the study of culture in general. Traditional social scientists have classified communication studies (US terminology) or mass communications (UK terminology) as a class of social science but entirely separate from the other social sciences—anthropology, sociology and psychology. Largely as a function of the highly compartmentalized US educational system, this separation still exists. But recently in the UK the social sciences are gradually being gathered together and looked at holistically as a multidisciplinary approach to understanding culture. Thus anthropologists, for example, are turning their attention from their traditional subjects of inquiry—primitive cultures—to see to what extent their principles apply to contemporary society. Although popular anthropologists, such as Desmond Morris, have been around for a long time, the most serious anthropologist in this examination has been Mary Douglas (1982a) who virtually alone amongst academics is trying to explain advertising's function in modern culture:

'Modern industrial man needs goods for the same reason as the tribesman: to involve other fellow consumers in his consumption rituals . . . Goods are for mobilising people.'

Thus she recognizes advertising as one of the means of contributing meaning and value to inanimate objects—meaning and values that are necessary and useful to people in structuring their lives, their social relationships, their rituals.

Theodore Levitt (1970) put this thought another way when he summed up the utility of advertising as: 'the object of consumption is to solve a problem'.

That advertising does something to *products* is a significant link between marketing and the social sciences. But to develop and operationalize the concepts of brand personality and added values, we need fresh metaphors and new language carried further than conventional advertising pre-testing thinking has taken us up till now.

New knowledge or new questions: the consumer's view

Another characteristic of the conventional models of how advertising works is the relatively low value placed on consumers' views of the advertising itself. Consumers were considered fairly ignorant of the process, subjects to be dealt with as in a laboratory rather than listened to creatively.

However, in Britain over the last few years, there has been a great deal of attention paid to what has become known as the sophisticated consumer. And by this we mean not the consumer as sophisticated shopper, less easily conned, more acutely aware of value for money, although this may well be true. What we are talking about is the sophisticated consumer of advertising. It is a profound shift in emphasis because it enriches the concepts of the consumer as *active* participator in communication by recognizing more fully the validity of some of the data supplied by consumers about the form of the advertising itself.

It is a moot point whether consumers are more knowledgeable about advertising or whether it is merely a shift in perspective of the questioners. We never routinely bothered to ask before, and if we did, filed what we got away under 'consumer as advertising expert', a category of eccentric, idiosyncratic and largely irrelevant responses. Nonetheless, having bothered to ask, we discover a rich vein of beliefs and feelings which bear importantly on how we interpret responses and even more importantly on how we brief our creative people and indeed how we even think about the problem. Do we really think we are fooling anyone?; what does belief mean?; how literally should any stimulus be taken?; and so forth.

Over the last two decades, the Advertising Association in Britain has been asking a large population sample the same set of questions, relating to 'liking' of advertising. The most significant finding—that increasing numbers of people say they 'like' television advertising—is fascinating, not to say unique (Table 1). Similar studies in the United States and France show increasing dislike of advertising, as irritating, insulting and intrusive. There are some interesting speculations as to why this may be the case in Britain. When asked to compare advertisements these days with advertisements in the past, respondents will typically say that ads these days are 'more entertaining, more cleverly devised, more original, less insulting, less patronizing, more imaginative'. Furthermore,

Table 1 *Percentage who say they 'like' or 'quite like' television commercials*

Sept 1961	Aug 1966	Apr 1972	Mar 1976	Sept 1981
35	33	43	48	50

Source: Advertising Association.

respondents have become familiar with marketing language: they know what advertisements are for. Added to which, the more widely understood role of the Advertising Standards Authority as a watchdog further legitimizes enjoyment of advertising and sharpens skills at judging it.

So if we change our perspective from advertising using *people* to *people* using advertising, what implications does this have for research thinking and methodology?

HUMANISTIC VIEW OF THE PROCESS

The practical and the symbolic

Our starting point is that consumers endow the products and brands they buy and use with meanings, over and above their sheer functional value. It is the creative task to communicate these meanings in ways which motivate and reinforce. Research is to unlock them and make them available to the creative process. We are then making a clear distinction between the *ostensive* or face-value aspects of brands, and their *latent* or symbolic values. This distinction, of course, is not restricted to buying brands, but applies to any act (Harre, 1979). We do things for their practical benefits and justify ourselves as rational and worthy, but underlying this there are deeper meanings, gestures, ways of ordering and structuring our world of which we may or may not be conscious. When this is applied to researching brand attitudes and choice, the distinction is as shown in Figure 2.

What turns a product into a *brand* is that the physical product is combined with something else—symbols, images, feelings—to produce an idea which is more than and different from the sum of the parts. The two—product and symbolism—live and grow with and on one another in a partnership and mutual exchange. This has been described (Cooper, 1979) as a sort of attachment

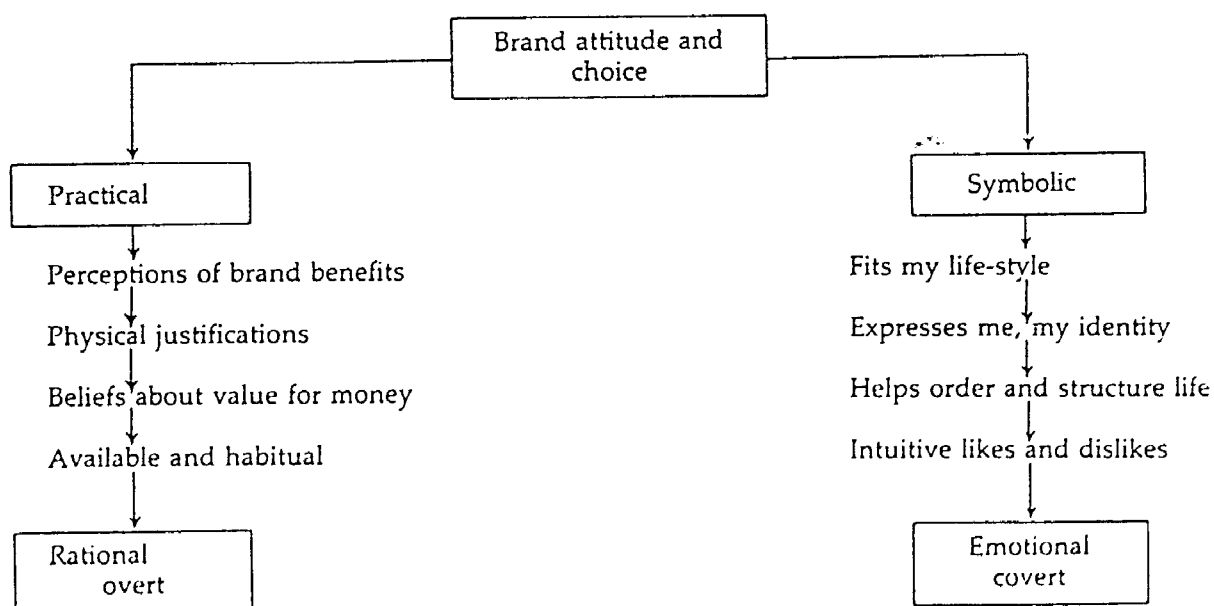


Figure 2 Practical and symbolic attitudes to buying brands.

or 'symbiosis' which consumers have for their brands and the advertising surrounding them.

Researching the 'practical' is relatively straightforward. It is usually available to direct questioning, asking, reminding, pressing, in an impersonal way, as in structured questionnaires. It invites conventional, logical, worthy responses. The 'symbolic', however, requires a different sort of probing, and much more time. To start with, a sympathetic consumer interview situation is required where trust can develop, and where 'permission' is given to express thoughts and feelings without social or personal censorship. Unconscious wishes and identifications are often present which can be revealed by projective interviewing or careful observation of inconsistencies, slips, blaming, etc. And there are the purely intuitive, playful properties of brands and advertising which take us into the inner world of consumer imagination. It is this inner world which can provide the sources of creative, and in our view effective, advertising (see Figure 3).

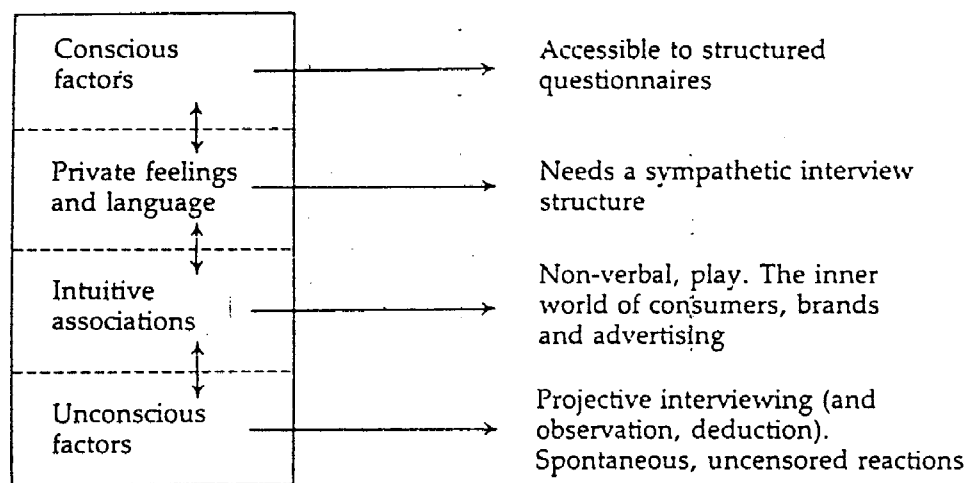


Figure 3 Researching symbolic attitudes to advertising: basic model.

We can take this basic model further, distinguishing between what is public and private, communicable and non-communicable, aware and unaware (Figure 4).

This 'model' is similar in some respects to the motivational ideas of the 1950s and early 1960s in pointing to unconscious, repressed and embarrassing motivations. The main difference—and it is an important difference—is the recognition of the *intuitive* level which is largely responsible for the inarticulate and active involvement consumers have with advertising. Whether it is strictly above or indeed below the so-called unconscious level is arguable. In many respects we prefer to see it as a different order, at a tangent, reaching into cultural myths and archetypes.

Interpretative models

The balance of interest in the social sciences has shifted towards a more phenomenological and humanistic orientation, and there are many recent additions to knowledge and changes of emphasis which cast fresh light on

METHOD	LAYER			OUTPUT
Simple questioning	PUBLIC	COMMUNICABLE	AWARE	Immediate, spontaneous response
Asking/reminding				Justifications, explanations
Pressing				Detailed elaborations/introspections
Sympathetic probing	PRIVATE	NON-	NON-	Concealed, personal
Play, drama, non-verbal				Intuitive
Projective approaches				Repressed attitudes, motives

Figure 4 Researching symbolic attitudes to advertising: deeper approach.

consumer motivations, particularly on styles of thought and social meanings of advertising symbols. It is these which aid the interpretative process.

'Left'-'right' communication

An unlikely source, neuroanatomy, has clarified the two kinds of consciousness common to greater or lesser degree in all of us. The left hemisphere (right side of the body) and the right hemisphere (left side of body) correspond to the 'practical' and 'symbolic' styles of response, respectively (Figure 5).

Whilst still calling for recognition of unconscious motivations, this puts as much emphasis on the intuitive aspects of consciousness—day-dreams, fantasies and images—often highly personal, and typical in response to brands and advertising. Some people, of course, are more inclined to one or the other style, creative people to the latter and many researchers to the former; hence the conflicts between them. But much advertising is essentially and increasingly 'right hemisphere' communication, dealing in symbolic communication.

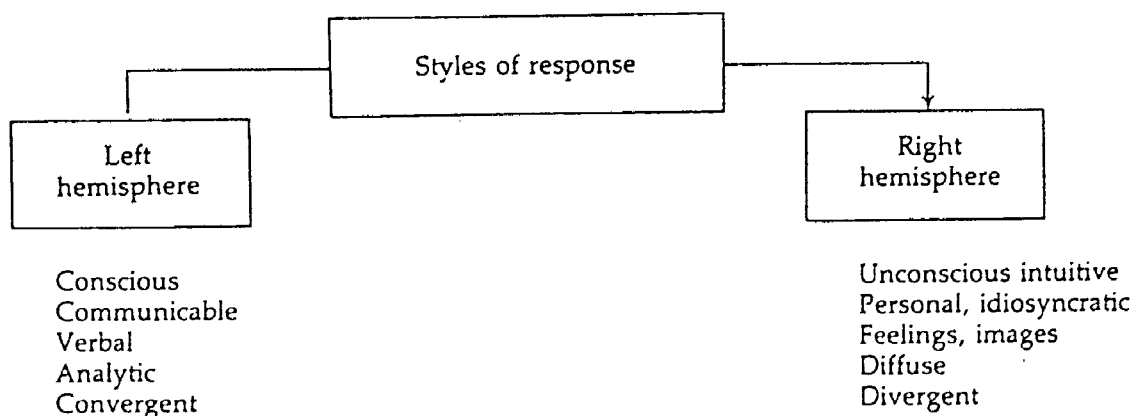


Figure 5 Left and right hemisphere communications.

Symbolism

What we mean by 'symbolism' are images, feelings, archetypes and meanings which link with current values in society. Examples of symbolism used in advertising are familiar:

Class	Care
Discrimination	Science
Youth	Magic
Sex	Adventure
Indulgence	Mastery
Freedom	Wisdom

We see them at work in many celebrated examples of advertising, such as the After Eight, Hovis, Campari, etc. examples noted earlier. What makes them distinctive is that they are closely allied to prevailing cultural myths.

These values work to establish the difference between one brand and another. Consumers use them to express themselves and to attain their own identities. Projecting such symbols into inanimate objects (whether they be of political significance, such as flags, insignias, etc., or merely products for consumption) is a fundamental human trait we use to structure the world around us. This in turn helps to explain why brands are used as a sort of language.

Brands bought tell a great deal about who you are, where you are in life, what you were and where you are going. Brand choices are as much a part of ourselves as the way we speak, the words we use, our dialect, dress, gestures and language. Brands are a part of ourselves and we are part of our brands.

Brands as language

To be more precise, brand symbolism is a special form of *language*. Two types can be identified:

1. Brand as expressive gestures which are chosen to say something in a general way to other people about who you are and who you are not. Brands here are like words, and branding gives them a special intonation or accent.
2. Brands as rituals. Rituals are specialized ways of celebrating some act. In the case of brand as ritual, purchase and use are saying something deeper. Ritual brands are brands bought regularly and very loyally, usually related to some emotional or social event. They are, to use an anthropological view, not mere gestures but incantations, spells or celebrations, often to make purchase more interesting or less boring.

All consumer behaviour is an expressive gesture of some sort. They inform others, tell them something about our social identity, mood, intent and expectations, and what sort of relationships can be expected. They typically take place unconsciously and unwittingly, but can be made explicit when consumers are encouraged to daydream. Here is a vivid soliloquy from a woman daydreaming about how she uses brands to identify people:

'I like to look in the bathroom best. You can tell a lot from a bathroom. Look in the

bathroom cabinet. What sort of toothpaste do they use? Is it old "stuffy" Colgate? Or have they been taken in by the advertising and use Crest? It's these health warnings the kids keep coming back with from school.

'Whenever I see TCP it says a lot. It reminds me of my mother: TCP says to me "keep still or I'll hurt". Try as they might TCP will always say "Mum", "Be good" and a smell you can tell a mile off. It's the same with Dettol.

'Brands of soap are another thing. Lifebuoy takes you back to childhood too—I can't help thinking about boy scouts. Lux, well that's someone who likes to get up slowly, none of this active, stimulating stuff. Pears to me says "pamper me"; "I'm an English rose". Imperial Leather reminds me of class. I don't know why . . .'

Still in the context of cleaning, here is an extract from some role-playing between housewives adopting the roles of different brands and surfaces around the home:

Brand A approaches the kitchen sink: 'Go away, you rotter. You'll scratch me, upset me. (A persists.) . . . Ooo! Ugh! You're painning me. It's like rape! Go over there (pointing to stains); she'll love it. I want you (i.e., Brand B).

She beckons Brand B: 'Mmm, lovely. Smooth me, caress me . . .'

The full form could be mistaken for a narrative tape or rough animatic. Not that the women were being asked to develop advertising, but to go beyond the simple rational explanations for brand choice, such as 'it works for me', 'it smells nice', etc. Material like this, presented to creative people, is a rich source of thoughts, language and creative ideas which can emerge later from the recesses of the creative mind. Similarly, material in a non-verbal form (psychodrawings, for instance) can 'speak' to creative people, where verbal, rationalized reporting inhibits them, prompting the well-known distrust and alienation creative people often feel with research.

We can take another example, medicines, and look at other applications of these techniques. OTC medication, of course, plays an important part in the treatment of minor illnesses. For example, more than two out of five adults take aspirins or other pain-killers in a given two weeks, one in seven of us will be doing so in the next 24 hours. An important question is whether taking a branded analgesic as opposed to unbranded can actually increase pain relief. The hypothesis is that there would be increased confidence and added values in a brand from its marketing and advertising, and if this is so it would provide proof of the efficacy of branding actually influencing the mind's control over bodily processes. Indeed this proved to be the case (Branthwaite and Cooper, 1981). Double-blind trials demonstrated that branding accounts for a quarter to a third of the pain relief. That is to say, branding works like an ingredient of its own interacting with the pharmacological active ingredients to produce something more powerful than an unbranded tablet.

Now clearly this is a profoundly important result for the pharmaceutical industry but it leaves unanswered the questions how and why particular women get more or less relief from different brands. To look at this aspect, extended

creativity groups (ECGs) contrasted users of two different leading analgesic brands.

People played out the role of having a headache, what they looked for by way of relief, and the effects they felt different brands had. Any differences, of course, were entirely psychological since the pharmacological activity of these are the same.

One way of illustrating this is through psychodrawings. For example, a woman sees her headaches due to outside practical factors. She describes them in relation to the kids, noise, atmosphere. Another expresses her headache in more emotive, personal terms, feels her pain creep up on her. To solve her problem, the first woman's brand is positioned as pragmatic, straightforward and clinical. The other is more like a tonic, caressing or stroking. Role-playing again indicates this where the latter brand is expressed by one woman taking another woman and actually caressing and stroking the pain away from her. Its positioning associated with that is clearly very different from the other pragmatic attacking the pain.

Effects like these psychological effects are by no means limited. Specialists and general practitioners also have branding loyalties and deep-seated reasons for prescribing one and not the other. Again, the active ingredients in their choices are more or less equivalent, and the use of such methods is essential to overcome their professional inhibitions about letting their intuitive and unconscious feelings show themselves (Cooper and Lenton, 1983).

Such phenomena are not only illustrated by nationally advertised brands which have a clear personality but also apply to own-brands. If I buy a Woolworth brand I am saying 'I believe in good, honest values' or, more furtively, 'I really discovered it by myself'. If I buy Sainsbury's I am saying 'I'm a thoughtful housewife; I reject commercial values', or 'I go out to work. They [Sainsbury's] can buy and select better than me'. So-called *own*-brands therefore have a distinct personality. The same type of approach has also recently been applied to the analysis of political behaviour (Lunn, Cooper and Murphy, 1983).

Social context

There are several definite rules about how to use advertising once it is seen as contributing to the language of brands:

1. Advertising functions to keep a user-group together, to recognize and identify one another (cf: 'our' language). It can be a 'secret' language for minority brands like French cigarettes or Volvo cars in Britain—'others like me'—holding them together.

Conversely, brands not used and their advertising help to identify out-groups—'those not like me'—who can be foreign, threatening, difficult. These unspoken early warnings are very useful in social encounters with somebody new. Examples include the newspaper someone reads, or in beer drinking whether someone is a real ale drinker. Each subtly joins people together or pushes them apart (brands not used, by the way, are sharper ways of discriminating brands than by brands used).

2. Some brands are comforting, reassuring, universal signs, understood by everyone. Buying the same brand affirms basic social arrangements, it

- produces order, and accounts for the noted repeat purchase in many areas such as food and drinks, anywhere where there is risk or anxiety involved.
3. Because it is like language, branding becomes abbreviated. That is, consumers condense the cues from advertising into simple codes to make them more efficient for recognition, signalling and display. This is obviously crucial for any attempt to change the meanings of 'old' brands, since the vocabulary is set, pointing to the need for brand language to be consistent and to build on existing meanings. A typical finding is that consumers reject major departures from the traditions of a brand, which is picked up in research in recalls of 'old' advertising, or misappropriation of advertising recalls from one brand to another that fits it better.
 4. The right brands to use, just like language, vary with the social context. This is evident from the foods people eat, particularly in the distinctions between formal and informal occasions (Douglas, 1982b). In formal occasions the social rules are much stronger; people need to conform to rituals established over long periods of time. Food-eating habits during the weekend as opposed to the week illustrate this, and when looked at by class and age show the different social functions of food just as language and accents do.

For research, an important function is to 'decode' the consumer language and symbolism of brands, and for advertising to plug into that language.

Researching the active consumer

Expectations of advertising

Advertising is capable of entering language, daydreams and intuition because of its independent existence. It does not simply *do* things to people in the sense of treating consumers as objects to manipulate, nor does it merely do things to products, like creating USPs, brand personalities. Rather, *people* do things to advertising, interact with it, and produce surprising outcomes. As we suggested earlier, in the UK:

1. Advertising is expected to exaggerate, sing praises, transform products. It has psychic energy.
2. It fascinates, compels. We know we are being sold to (conscious self); it 'should' be suppressed, but we need to project, get involved, be surprised, be attracted, confront our irrational selves.
3. It is living, childish, dramatic, contentious, foolish, magical, glossy.
4. It reaches into the depths of personal motivations and collective feelings, using symbols to portray, tricks to release.
5. Its rituals and repetitions communicate with the deeper self. Successful advertisements enter public vocabulary and become part of ourselves.

How we react to advertising has changed. It has lost its manipulative reputation—stimulated by *The Hidden Persuaders*—and become part of culture. As we saw earlier, there is less suspicion nowadays and more enjoyment of, and involvement in, advertising. There is a feeling of greater trust, greater marketing

literacy, along with a willingness to participate, enjoy and respond, accepting exaggerations and brand praise, and making allowances for these.

The transactional (TA) analogy

To take this further, it is worth dipping into transactional analysis (TA), at least briefly. TA is about analysing the dialogues of life in the sense of 'Games people play' or 'Ads people use'. What TA argues is that there are three mental modes: parent (P), adult (A), child (C). Communications are basically in one of these modes (which are easily detectable from the language and tone used), although there is often cooperation among them and one may be a cover for another. Consumers receive communication from one mode and respond accordingly. The characteristics of each are given in Table 2.

Table 2 *The characteristics of the three communication modes*

	Parent	Adult	Child
Proposition	Good/bad Should/should not Must/mustn't	How? What? Why?	Won't Can't
Mood	Judgemental Authoritative	Evaluative	Spontaneous Assertive
Tone of voice	Concerned Comforting Critical	Even Calm	Fun-loving Defiant

The parental mode is vengeful or loving, and the child petulant or free. An example is given in Figure 6. In this example, an ad is detected to be 'talking down' to the consumer, treating him or her as a child, thus prompting a 'petulant child' response. The connection becomes crossed.

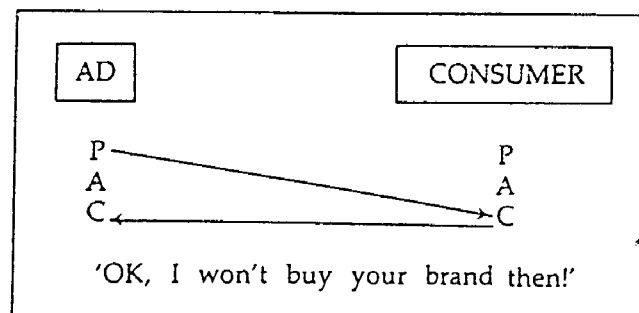


Figure 6 Parent-child advertising mode.

Communications are usually more rewarding when they are complementary (see Figure 7). Confectionery can work like this. An ad captures the feeling of eating an expensive, indulgent product. It invites the consumer to play too and his 'free child' does so.

What these examples illustrate is people *doing* things with advertising, and not just being passive. In research, however, the problem is that the situation tends to provoke the 'parent' and 'adult' modes, making them the power points irrespective of what the advertising is trying to do. This leads to consumers

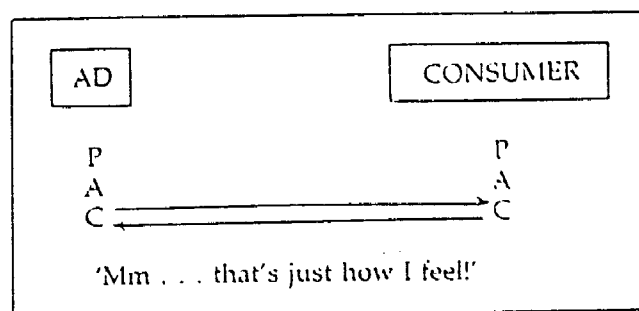


Figure 7 Complementary advertising.

making judgements about what is 'good' or 'bad' advertising, rejecting it as silly (childish), becoming preoccupied with literal negatives, and so on—all the 'bêtes noir' of research to creative people.

Consequently, for aiding the creative process, we need ways of releasing respondents, giving them 'permission' to express themselves in ways which do not prompt artificial modes.

Styles of research

Methods for exploring the consumer psyche, especially the right hemisphere, are now reasonably accessible. The following list is by no means exhaustive but sets out some of the main ways of tapping the intuitive and unconscious levels, both for pre- and post-advertising evaluation:

- Role-playing—make believe, 'let's pretend' (housewife, child, designer, salesman).
- Personal analogies—individual imagines him- or herself to be object or material with which s/he is working and 'feels' like the object. Critical element is 'emphatic identification'. Involves description of facts, emotions, values. (Interaction in group situation helpful.)
- Direct analogies—analogies are sought from another field. Organic analogies for inorganic problems, or vice versa, are more effective than analogies from same realm.
- Symbolic analogies—symbolic or poetic metaphors to describe essentials of the problem or object.
- Fantasy solutions/future scenarios—state problem and solution in terms of how one wishes the world would ideally be. Imagining one is dreaming is helpful.
- Psychodoodle/psychodrawing/psycholumps—expressing intuitive ideas and associations through non-verbal media, using lines, colours and moulding. Conveys synaesthetic images, transfers experience, articulates thoughts afterwards.
- Adjectivization—using brand names, consumer categories, etc. as adjectives to force associations with other fields and products.
- Personification—imagine product or object coming to life, having character, personality, life-style and relationships.
- Projective techniques—story completion, obituaries, free association to allow unconscious and intuitive feelings to emerge.

Group conflict/competition—group members compete to sell products, advocate ideas.

One research implication of this is to adopt a much freer attitude in assembling data, inspired by Jung's remark:

'It is rewarding to watch patiently the silent happenings in the soul, and the most and best happens when it is not regulated from outside and from above.'

This is to go hand in hand with sharp and clear analysis of the meanings associated with and responsible for consumers' intuitions, images and responses. The methods we advocate are largely qualitative but not exclusively so. What is important is to enter by whatever method the inner world of imagination, intuition, private language and play which are the meaningful stuff of advertising. Qualitative methods are most useful, simply because they allow us to see the world as consumers experience it: from their frame of reference, with their own words, gestures and behaviour. Qualitative methods allow us to explore cultural concepts such as beauty, pain, fun, hope and play as they are defined and experienced by real people in their everyday lives (Bogdan and Taylor, 1982). But a key point must be made about qualitative research as we mean it here. We are not talking of sheer conventional group discussions which often masquerade as qualitative research but are little more than reportage—running the risk of portraying consumers as rational and worthy, and stunting the creative process. What we have in mind is a positive attempt to bring alive consumers' personal intuitive and unconscious reactions by the use of these specific techniques of projection and empathy, to produce raw and interpretative data of a special, humanistic kind: verbal, poetic, pictures, playthings, daydreams, etc.

TOWARDS A NEW PERSPECTIVE

We have suggested that beliefs about how advertising works are themselves functions of how organizations *want* it to work. Models of the 'linear sequential' (transport and transmit) sort fit images of consumers who are potentially passive and manipulable. The easily-measurable indices of these models help support organizational continuity and reduce individual accountability. Conversely, creativity can disturb order, introducing risk and uncertainty. Thus advertising which is controlled and measurable and can be justified is preferred by such organizations. In turn, this has spawned advertising research methods which support and reinforce these organizational needs.

Whilst satisfying to the organizations and personnel concerned, we argue that these models are not necessary to designing effective advertising, and are probably increasingly counterproductive in the market place: first, that they are simply becoming out of date and out of tune with modern western society; second, the emergence, in the UK at least, of successful advertising with a different model, giving meanings to brands through a richer, holistic understanding of culture; third, changes in consumers themselves, who are now more active,

more sophisticated, enjoying and doing things with advertising, and rejecting the patronizing conventional advertisements.

We elaborate these trends into a humanistic view of advertising and branding. Brands have practical, rational values, but what makes them distinctive and unique are their symbolic values. Advertising operates more effectively at the symbolic, intuitive level of consciousness. To design such advertising and to check on its effectiveness in the market place requires methods for opening up the inner world of what consumers do to advertising, their play and imagination, the language it speaks, its social values, and so on. A methodology and a theoretical rationale are put forward for designing and evaluating advertising in a 'holistic cultural' way.

What this does, however, is to provoke a dilemma between advertising testing procedures, that seem to work pragmatically, and a humanistic approach which can disturb organizational control (Figure 8).

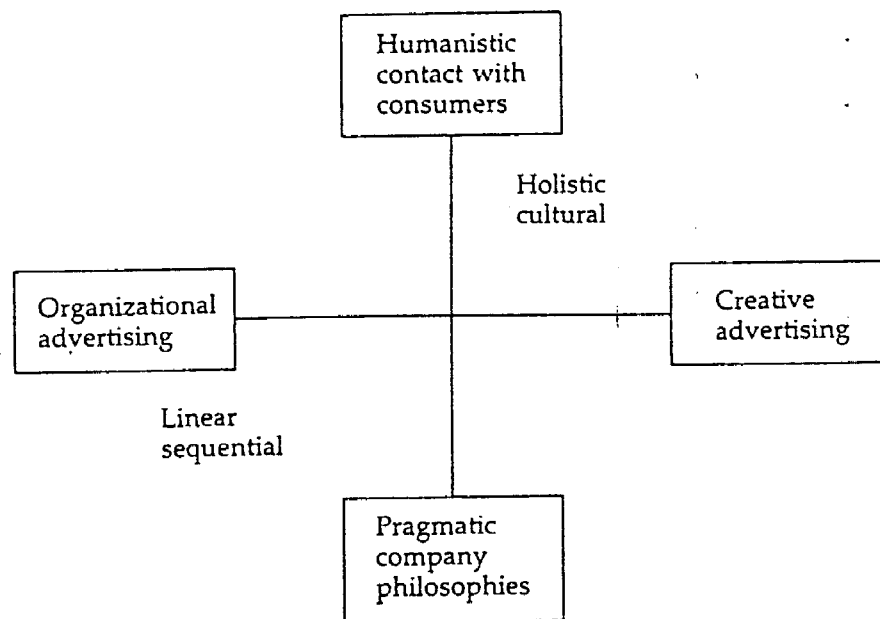


Figure 8 Advertising testing procedures.

Advertising which we are questioning lies in the organizational/pragmatic quadrant, and advertising which fits cultural understanding is in the humanistic/creative area. However, it is naive to see these as polarized against one another. There is movement taking place in the 'holistic cultural' direction, although this may be the first time it has been formally set out. The two other quadrants are clearly worth exploring, but what is also required is to change the dimensions of this map.

We, as researchers, need to develop the 'holistic cultural' model, bringing it more firmly into the pragmatic requirements of organizations, given that successful managements are becoming more and more sensitive to advertising as part of total culture. What the analysis also points to is for us to encourage changes.

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