

MEDIA SCIENCE NEWSLETTER

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Media/Advertising News Interpretation for the Decisionmaker.

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Dear Colleague:

THE CONSUMER HAS BECOME HIPPER THAN MOST ADVERTISING. Focus groups around the country reveal unexpected TV commercial backfire effects. Showing naive and socially-embarrassing product discussions among consumers in TV commercials appears to drive down actual incidence of such product discussions. This has cannibalized word-of-mouth advertising opportunities rather than capitalizing on them. Television programs have also become more sophisticated, leave certain commercials seeming like 1950's relics beside them. Maintaining a sophisticated image is a major desired benefit of today's consumers, one which requires daily readjustment to a continuous acceleration in norm sophistication levels-- an acceleration which began in the 1950's with the introduction of TV. Any commercial which shows a brand user as a sap will drive down usage of that brand. Catch-22: A character generally impairs his/her sophisticated image by talking about a product. Creative people, let your right brains work on this one.

VOXBOX: THE NEWEST TELEVISION MEASUREMENT SERVICE. R.D. Percy & Company publishes initial reports based on a pilot panel of one hundred homes in Seattle. Electronic device measures set tuning, like the Nielsen and ARBitron audimeters; also measures viewer response, like QUBE-- but has fifteen response buttons to QUBE's five. Potentially allows keying particular buttons to individual household members, although it is not now being used that way. Device apparently also has potential to monitor commercials.

Initial Percy reports contain numerous innovations in rating analyses, including audience flow analysis (now must be obtained by special tabulations in the Nielsen/ARBitron systems), audience reactions to specific program quarter-hours (e.g. informative, unbelievable, credible, funny, boring, dumb, person/excellent, etc.), and audiences during commercial breaks.

Reports will not get the attention they should until Percy summarizes the data by dayparts and program types: reports now run to hundreds of computer pages for each station for each week. Just what the agency media planner would like to see (gag). For want of a nail...

THE FUTURE OF TELEVISION AND RADIO AUDIENCE RATINGS MAY LIE IN PERSONAL EXPOSURE METERS, WORN AS WRISTWATCHES; which record (for monthly or weekly transmission through the respondent's telephone to a central computer), second-by-second exposure to specific TV channels and radio stations. These instruments would measure the wavelength of broadcast stations being tuned to by receivers within twenty feet (alternatively, calibratable to any other distance) of the respondent. Would yield meter-hard data on an individual person base. Would require

very little respondent effort, making high cooperation rates achievable. Tanner Electronics, Van Nuys, California, indicated the technical feasibility of these meters in 1965 discussions with Interpublic. But perhaps justifiably gunshy after its earlier unsuccessful attempt to market a new ratings system based on truck-mounted electronic scanners, the company has not risked development of the personal meter. The industry has continued to rely on TV-set-meters and diaries for another decade and a half. How does this relate to the general decline in American industrial innovativeness? How can the communications industry get the kind of research tools it deserves in an age when people can travel to the Moon?

ARF SEEKS TO AMASS AVAILABLE INFORMATION ON THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ADVERTISING "RECALL/ATTITUDE SHIFT" AND SALES. ARF mailing has so far turned up eighteen top advertisers willing to pool information. If this cumulation study shows the same kinds of patterns detected in the Milwaukee Ad Lab cumulation study ten years ago, it will indicate that the media variable has virtually equal weight to the creative variable in determining sales response. Problem is that the media variable is held constant or ignored in testing creative executions, so latter creative tests cannot predict realworld media-mediated sales results. Signals a need for a quantum increase in advertising research investments in media/creative pretesting, if pretesting is to be able to defend its creative choices as being the ones that will perform best in the realworld media to be used, among the realworld audience prospects to be exposed.

ARF's FIRST ACTION IN PUBLIC AFFAIRS ARENA is to point out methodology flaws in Michigan State University study of the effects of alcoholic beverage advertising. Possible next step by ARF would be to generate better research designs from within the advertising industry, aimed at studying and minimizing any potential negative side effects of alcoholic beverage advertising. Greatest public concern: teenagers drinking while driving.

AD COUNCIL PROGRAMS, AND ENTERPRISE SQUARE THEME PARK (Oklahoma City, Late 1981), FOCUS ON TEACHING AMERICANS ABOUT THEIR ECONOMIC SYSTEM. Generate awareness and somewhat more favorable attitudes. Amounts to arranging the deck chairs on the Titanic in relation to Yankelovich's 4/79 finding that 64% of Americans believe that "the U. S. is in deep and serious trouble", up from 41% last year. Needed: new energy in the Ad Council. More participation by AAAA, ANA, ARF, the media, others. A more gung-ho program to help America believe she can still make it.

LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS PLANS TELEVISED DEBATES IN 1980 BETWEEN THE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES. HOPES FOR CANDIDATES WILLING TO LET CAMERAWORK BE UNRESTRICTED, show audience reaction, unfavorable camera angles, etc. Multimedia Publishing Company proposes LOWV distribution of interactive game books to be used while viewing the debates. CBS research shows that such "print reinforcement" of television programming increases program ratings and viewer enjoyment. "Is it that eight hours per day of passive, one-way media absorption by the average American adult is reducing our sense of active participation in life?" the Multimedia Presentation asks. Its game books are called TELE-VIEWERS. Separate from the proposed LOWV Election Debate TELE-VIEWERS, 1980 Election Coverage TELE-VIEWERS are available for PBS-type sponsorship or self-liquidating sale by advertisers interested in increasing voter participation and knowledgeability. Custom TELE-VIEWERS can be tied in with any television programs, e.g. The Olympics, Specials, viewer self-test programs, award shows, soap operas, sitcoms, etc. by interested advertisers and broadcasters.

MILLER BEER SUES BRUZZONE RESEARCH CORPORATION FOR TESTING RECOGNITION OF ITS COMMERCIALS VIA STORYBOARDS MAILED TO VIEWERS. BRC tests a cross section of all prime time network TV commercials on a continuing basis. Reports findings to top advertiser and agency clients, and publishes summaries of top- and bottom-scoring commercials in its newsletters. Some Miller commercials performed poorly in these comparisons, apparently triggering the suit. Case comes to court in San Francisco on May 21, is a landmark test of the new copyright law as it applies to advertising research.

BRC method is a new development based on leftbrain/rightbrain paradigm taking over psychology. Day-after recall tests of TV commercials are believed to emphasize leftbrain (verbal) effects of a predominantly rightbrain (visual) medium. BRC thus uses a visual stimulus (storyboards) to elicit rightbrain measure of television commercial effectiveness, to supply information missing in day-after recall tests.

BRC defense reflects the Fair Use provision of the new copyright law, which protects the right to use portions of copyrighted material for research and certain other purposes. Nevertheless, since Miller suit asks for destruction of BRC data, the research company has sent 57 leading advertiser/agency researchers an offer to supply them with free BRC data for their commercials, if these data can then be compared with other measurements of these commercials in order to increase industry understanding, before any such destruction can take place. Offer is also open to all other researchers with comparative data on tested commercials. ARF is considering cooperation with BRC in this project.

J. WALTER THOMPSON IS FIRST SUBSCRIBER TO MEDIA SCIENCE NEWSLETTER. However, VP Media Research Gabe Samuels would have preferred the name MEDIA ART & SCIENCE, pointing out that "the value of the numbers has been sorely overdone in a field whose essence is the art of communicating with human beings". We agreed, and soberly renewed our pledge to make this newsletter an interface for both the art and the science of media communication.

NEW BURKE REPORTS SHOW RADIO LEVELS HIGHER THAN TELEVISION. In their eleven October/November 1978 markets Burke shows the average person 12+ spending four hours and five minutes per day with radio (not counting any additional listening between midnight and 6:00 am). October/November 1978 NT1 data indicate the average person 12+ spent only three hours and fifty-nine minutes per day with television. Rep studies point out that Burke levels are 40-94% higher than ARBITRON. Agencies not fighting the higher levels despite potential longterm economic implications. Perhaps some agree that radio is now outpulling TV for average person's time. Must admit it seems unlikely to us. Higher Burke levels seem to be a function of the way they ask their questions: perhaps too many memory aids not used by the other services (e.g. mentioning clock radios, etc.) may be attracting yeasaying. Suggests a Burke test of a questionnaire omitting many of the aids/probes used only by Burke might bring ratings down to plausible levels. E.g. fall 1978 RADAR shows 3 hours 18 minutes (top ten ADI's), TRAC-7 3 hours 26 minutes (four markets) average daily radio usage per person 12+.

CONGRESS WILL AUTHORIZE THE FOOD & DRUG ADMINISTRATION TO WORK WITH THE FAST FOOD INDUSTRY, in pilot-testing "accurate, objective and informative" modes of incorporating nutritional information into FF advertising. Positive move by Don Kennedy, FDA Commissioner. Such dialogs could help close the huge distances between perceptions of the nutritional content of mass-marketed foods among business, government and consumers. Might even generate some viable new product concepts.

NUTRITIONAL CAMPAIGN TO GET CHILDREN TO EAT RAW FRUITS/VEGETABLES, fruit juices. "natural" peanut butter and low fat dairy products as snacks, in place of soft drinks, "sugary baked goods", rich desserts, candy bars, cookies and gum, under development for U.S. Department of Agriculture by Needham, Harper & Steers and American Institute For Research. Might be field-tested in two or three markets in spring 1980, involving all media, school and community groups, food marketers and parents. Pending results, might lead to a larger test or national rollout. Listening between the lines, "active social play" might be used as a benefit the kids can relate to, i.e. "eating better means having more energy", and as a secondary sales message, i.e. "active social play is better than watching television". If creatively effective, campaign might negatively impact a couple of dozen product categories, half a hundred major brands... not to mention dentist's incomes. Might even lower KUT (Kids Using Television). Shows that the advertising industry has a conscience. And that NH&S has a lot of guts.

THE MOVEMENT TO TRANSFORM TELEVISION PROGRAMMING NEEDS SOME NEW STRATEGIES.

There are now nearly a thousand "media activist" organizations in the U.S. that are working to make television less potentially-undermining to community values. Their effectiveness has been severely reduced up to now by the adversary approaches they have taken, which put most of their energies into criticizing existing programming. This has prompted the industry to put its own resources into defensive research (e.g., showing no link between TV and violence, etc.) with low potential to contribute to new solutions.

As the media activists catch on to their real opportunities to effective positive change, we expect to see these new strategies emerge: 1) Human Value Award Shows, in which top stars give prizes to makers of television shows of exceptional human value: excerpts are shown. A natural project for The Human Family Institute (Humanitas prizes). 2) Dubious TV Achievement Awards, satirizing programs of dubious human value (a natural spinoff for Esquire Magazine in conjunction with the Saturday Night Live players). 3) Expansion from "TV violence counts" to more multidimensional feedback systems, with a battery of Social Value Scores for each program: e.g. number of incidents contributing to stereotypes, glamourizing decadence, showing antisocial behavior as acceptable, etc., etc. Prosocial incidents would also be categorized and counted, e.g. demonstrating the value of idealism, honesty, objectivity, courage, hard work, multiple categories so the results offer some directional guidance to programmers. A natural project for Ralph Nader, Nicholas Johnson and George Gerbner. 4) Workshops to inspire the creative community. There are fewer than a thousand key people responsible for the bulk of prime time network programming. The sanest approach to this group is not to criticize and censor them, but to attempt to inspire them. Weekend workshops in supportive locations would allow them to show each other their most experimental work, discuss their ultimate creative ambitions, talk about what they would really like to do on television, and realize possible ways to incorporate their more-creative ideas into their TV work, despite constraints. A natural project for Werner Erhard. 5) Programs involving schools and teachers. By means of all such positive strategies, the media activists can accomplish more by encouragement in the right directions than they can by criticism.

Very best regards,

Bill Hamney

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