Should Advertisement be Believable or Convincing? *

"Importance" and "believability" rank highest in Alfred Politz' scale of what is efficient advertising, with "uniqueness" in third position.[1)]

He states: "It can be shown that the relation between the three terms should be multiplicative and not additive. The number of people who think the claim is important has greater influence on efficiency of advertising than the number of people who think the claim is believable; and this group has a greater influence than the number who think it is unique."

(We leave out of this discussion the obvious necessity for an advertisement to be noticed in order to be effective; the measurement of the attention gained by an advertisement has its own and separate problems.)

Now, if the relationship between these three criteria is in fact of the kind Politz stated, then the exact meaning of each one has to be scrutinized very closely. I chose the second criterion for discussion, for it seems to have generated more confusion than the other two. That has had its consequences in ad testing.

Politz apparently had in mind to test whether an advertisement was "convincing", when he introduced in his institute the technique which has been associated with his name by the organizers of this Seminar. In fact, it is a pretty old technique, used by other researchers independently, as the papers by Dr. Jetter and Rohde showed.

It is based on the assumption that the proper way to measure the effectiveness of an ad is to measure changes ...

- in awareness of the brand
- in the way its quality is rated
- in characteristics associated with it
- in susceptibility to buying it.

Ideally, one would interview consumers on these points, then expose them to the advertisement, then interview them in the identical fashion; and changes in results between the first and the second questioning would tell us about the effects of the advertisement.

Unfortunately, the first interview is likely to distort the picture: respondents become aware of the experiment's purpose and do not react to the ad as naturally as they would in "reality".

* presented at the ESOMAR-Seminar on „Measuring Advertising Effectiveness“, Munich 1965

Therefore, one has to use two groups which are of identical structure: a test group where the ad is exposed that has to be tested, in the control group it is not exposed. Both are interviewed identically about the brand in question; and significant differences can then be interpreted as changes produced by the ad.

In order to overcome statistical tolerances, the groups have to be relatively large – 150 to 200 cases each – and one needs always one group more than there are ads to be tested, the control group. That is expensive, both with regard to time and money.

Our present interest is in the area of product characteristics, which the producer of the brand and his advertising agency have come to regard as important: consequently, they want to get them across to the potential consumer. Does he or she accept them? In other words: does he or she become convinced that the brand owns these (desirable) characteristics?

The potential buyer or consumer may regard certain claims for a product as "believable" but he or she may not associate it with the brand advertised; he or she has not been adequately convinced.

Confusion of these two concepts easily leads to research procedures which produce misleading results. I have seen a number of attempts to show people a slogan, press and or TV commercial and to ask them whether they regard that as "believable"; and if so, to rest satisfied that the advertising is on the proper path to success.

But this may not be the case at all: all that respondents have said, is "it can be believed". They have not said: "I do believe it" – and even if they did, as an answer to a more or less direct question, **we** should not believe that; for we all know how irritatingly polite respondents are, always trying to accommodate the poor researcher. Consequently, we prefer to avoid such questioning procedures and set up experiments of the kind described above, where respondents are not aware of the fact that they are part of an experiment.

Of course, there are situations where it has to be established first that some claims is a least "believable". But even here we face the dilemma that sometimes "an advertisement need not be believed completely to be effective", as John C. Maloney pointed out. [2)]

In that article, Maloney also drew attention to the fact that "believing" is not an either/or occurrence. As Politz put it recently: "If you ask people if they believe what the ad says, you will get a percentage who say yes, sure. As if they would bet their life on it and everybody drops out."[3)]

And it could be the other way around: "It can be explained why some people respond to Bufferin's claim - 'Twice as fast as aspirin' – and yet when questioned about it admit that they do not believe the claim. What happens is that they partially believe it. Their reasoning is approximately as follows: 'Bufferin claims it is twice as fast.' I do not believe it. Advertisers usually exaggerate, but if they dare to go that far, then most likely the truth is that they might be 20 % better than the competition." [4)]

Consequently, we may not get a difference between control and test groups in accepting "Bufferin is twice as fast as aspirin", – but would expect a difference on "Bufferin is very effective", plus a stronger disposition to, at least, try out this brand.

That one gets quite different results if one measures "believability" or "conviction" is illustrated by the following results of a TV test.

Two TV films for competing tooth pastes were tested in Hamburg. The films were shown in our test-bus on a 16mm projector, where the picture appears on a screen of about the size of a tv set screen. We needed three groups: the first one saw a series of commercials including the one for brand A, the second one saw the same commercials with B instead of A and the third (control) group saw only the other commercials.

Respondents were selected according to quotas and by alternating continuously the three groups of films from one showing to the next any systematic bias between the two test and one control group was avoided.

As the following tables show, the question "which characteristics would you expect?" favors film B, whereas the comparison of characteristics attributed to each brand in test and control group favors film A.

My interpretation is that respondents have perceived that film B offers more arguments, but they have not been **convinced** as much as they have been by film A - for reasons which are outside of the scope of this paper.

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1) "Politz on Copy: Make the Sales Points Stick out", Printers' Ink, April 1, 1955,
quoted in: **Lucas & Britt** - "Measuring Advertising Effectiveness", p. 123, McGraw Hill, 1963.
2) John C. **Maloney** "Is Advertising Believability really Important?", in Journal of Marketing, October, 1963.
3) "Advertising Age", December 28, 1964.
4) Letter of February 17, 1965.

TEST DESIGN

I.) Conviction that brands possess certain characteristics

Group T-1 was shown TV film for tooth paste brand A (among 5 other films)

Group T-2 was shown TV film for tooth paste brand B (among 5 other films)

Group K served as control group, which saw neither film A nor B but only 5 other films

After film showing, each group was given questionnaires to be filled in. It contained, among other questions, a list of characteristics with question "which of these do brands A and B possess?"

II.) Ideas conveyed by films

In each test group the film for A or B was shown again solo 3 times, with 3 questions on product characteristics after each showing, like

"what kind of taste would you expect of brand A?"

In the control group, all of these 9 questions were asked of each brand without showing film.

Each group consisted of 200 housewives.
Differences are significant at 1-sigma level when they exceed 4-5 %.