

Attention Engagement

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When you see a commercial on television do you sometimes ask yourself: Whose attention is it seeking? To whom is it talking? Have you then asked yourself: Why those people? Was that an active choice? Whose choice? Prompted by what considerations? What alternative strategies for attention engagement were available?

It is surprising that attentional issues in advertising are not more actively studied. Periodic expressions of concern by advertisers and others over the sheer amount of advertising are amply supported by a variety of evidence such as the number of ads available to be seen [5] (and actually seen [2]), as well as the number of program viewers who leave the room during the commercials [1, p.500; 13, p.193; 15]. Yet, compared to other aspects of consumer behavior on which marketing and advertising success depends, attentional processes have suffered neglect from theorists and practitioners alike. This state of affairs is probably attributable in part to the relatively meager treatment of attention in basic and in applied psychology,¹ as well as to a division of labor in the marketing community which has assigned decisions on important aspects of attentional strategy to the inscrutable creative process. In these circumstances, behavioral science plays only the unenviable role of after-the-fact assessor when a marketing researcher communicates test result numbers that signal “go,” “no go,” or “back to the drawing board.” Interpretive commentary and suggested modifications relating to attentional aspects are often minimal, if only because our conceptualization of attentional issues and options is rudimentary.

This paper has a twofold purpose: (1) to initiate a discussion of conceptual issues concerning attention by presenting a formulation for attention allocation, and (2) to describe a set of options for attention engagement in advertising. Attentional issues in the context of advertising tasks will be discussed first; the results of a search of the psychological literature on attention for

concepts that would be useful in marketing and advertising will be presented next.

Does “targets exposed” = “targets engaged”?

The selective exposure and selective attention of targets are two hurdles that advertising must jump in order to communicate its message. The problem of selective exposure is fairly well in hand as a result of the availability of audience data for the various media. Advertisers may select media vehicles whose audiences possess characteristics believed to be associated with the purchasing behavior they want to influence in favor of their brand. The issue addressed in this paper relates to the advertiser’s second hurdle, that of converting targets exposed to targets engaged. Consider a single television commercial exposure. What assumption should the advertiser make about the ratio of targets exposed to targets engaged? What steps should the advertiser take to ensure that the exposures obtained through the media buy engage the targets’ minds? Even persons sitting alone and apparently concentrated on watching television retain the option of attending to their own thoughts rather than to the program or the commercials.

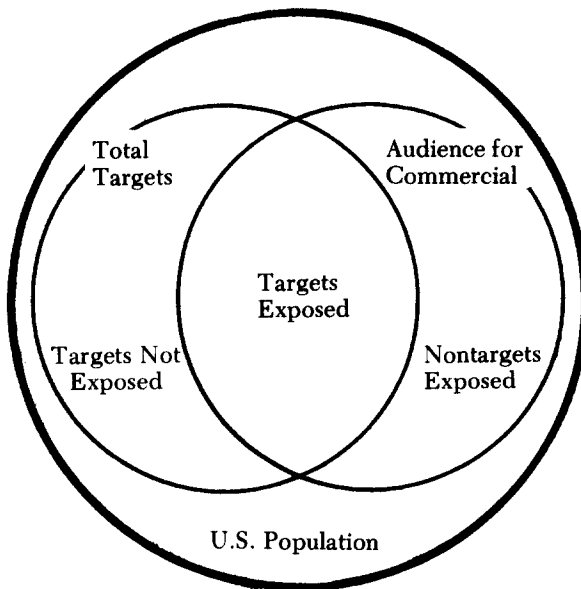


Figure 1. Targets exposed in relation to total targets and commercial audience.

As illustrated in Figure 1, the entire audience secured through the media buy neither belongs in nor exhausts the advertiser's target market. "Targets exposed" is a smaller group than either the target market or the audience for the commercial. Accordingly, the audience for any ad includes persons who are and those who are not targets for the item advertised. The assumption is probably made that targets and nontargets sort themselves out through a process of self-selection. But how, exactly, does self-selection work? Is the process one of selective attending, or selective impact? Prior to the beginning of the ad, the attention of both targets and nontargets is, presumably, given to activities such as reflecting on the program material or talking. When the ad begins, do targets pay attention while nontargets continue as they were (selective attending)? Or perhaps the attending behavior of both targets and nontargets is similar, but the ad registers selectively with targets and leaves no impression on nontargets (selective impact)? If in fact advertising works according to the selective attending view, what is it that makes targets, and not nontargets, pay attention? Is it the difference in their purchasing behavior, for example, so that persons who buy a product with some regularity attend to advertising for that product while nonbuyers do not? The relevant data on attending behavior are lacking and, in their absence, speculation among advertising practitioners or theorists does not seem to favor any one view of the mechanism underlying the process of self-selection by targets.

Even more basically, one can ask whether advertisers assume that their targets are physically present during the entire commercial. An assumption on this particular issue is crucial to the structuring of the commercial. For example, if the target is physically present only for the first few seconds and may, in fact, be on the way out of the room, the primary task for the opening of the commercial is to engage the target's attention. If, on the other hand, the target is going to be present for the entire commercial, it may be immaterial whether the target's attention is engaged at the beginning, the middle, or toward the end of the commercial. It may seem wiser to plan to engage the target's attention at the commercial's start. However, the target's voluntary presence throughout, particularly in conjunction with the assumption of repeated exposures, permits greater creative flexibility and may even be necessary for the communication of certain kinds of messages. I shall return to the issue of delayed target engagement later.

The conceptualization and analysis presented in this paper will not suggest that there is but one mechanism underlying target engagement. On the contrary, the stance taken here is that advertising in general, and attentional processes in particular, work in a variety of ways. Accordingly, the best service a conceptual analysis can provide is to describe a range of options available to the advertiser and, to the extent possible at this time, state the implications of using each option.

The goals of the individual ad

Advertising involves communication, which means, to paraphrase Schramm, establishing a “commonness” with someone, a sharing of information, ideas, or attitudes [16, p. 3]. If communication has indeed occurred, the recipient’s mind will be different, however slightly, as a result. Advertising communication aims for a twofold effect: first, a representation of the message will be present in the target’s nervous system, and second, it will be so located in the memory network as to ensure the brand’s consideration among purchase alternatives at the appropriate time. Indeed, one might say that the creation and maintenance of this twofold effect is a major part of what advertising can be expected to do.

In everyday life we use a host of rituals and phrases to signal that we want a person to attend to what we are going to say. We place ourselves in the presence of the other, or if already there, use some conventional means to signal that we have something to say and want the other’s attention. Only in emergencies do we dispense with a preliminary attention-focusing stage and rely instead on the significance of the message itself to capture the person’s attention. Otherwise, in everyday exchange our attempt to engage the target’s attention is prefatory, is distinct from the delivery of the message and, in fact, communicates its own special and personal message —namely, that the individual being addressed is the intended recipient of a communication.

In contrast, advertising communication lacks a means of alerting its targets that a personally relevant message is about to be delivered. Indeed, the very fact that advertising messages are disseminated broadly, are literally *broadcast*, implies the opposite of personal relevance. Accordingly, the objectives of the individual ad must include a function similar to that of attention-getting in face-to-face communication; that is, the ad must find a way to locate targets and engage their attention. While there is, then, good reason to show attention engagement (see Figure 2) as a necessary objective of the ad, it should be remembered that engaging attention is not an end in itself. The attention of potential customers only is of value, and it is secured only for the purpose of achieving the ad’s communication objectives. To be useful to the advertiser, an analysis of attentional processes must address not only the question of how to engage attention, but also the question of whose attention is being engaged.

1. Target location and engagement
2. Message registration
3. Message and decision occasion bonding

Figure 2. Objectives of individual ad.

Voluntary and involuntary attention

For present purposes, Kahneman's [10] distinction between voluntary and involuntary attention is a good departure point, since in this paper I am focusing on advertising which is created under the assumption that it will be exposed at a time when its targets are engaged in activities other than those to which the advertising is relevant. Kahneman distinguishes between voluntary and involuntary attention in the following way:

In voluntary attention the subject attends to stimuli because they are relevant to a task that he has chosen to perform, not because of their arousing quality. ... Voluntary attention is an exertion of effort in activities which are selected by current plans and intentions. Involuntary attention is an exertion of effort in activities which are selected by more enduring dispositions [10, p.4].

Kahneman's view is helpful for two reasons. First, he is asking us to keep in mind, simultaneously, two levels at which the individual is operating, on the one hand carrying out immediate plans and intentions, and on the other retaining the capacity to be diverted from those immediate pursuits to other interests. For Kahneman's "enduring dispositions" to exert their influence, it must be the case that stimuli are being processed on an ongoing basis before they gain attention and conscious awareness. This indeed appears to be the case. Contemporary views see attention as the result, in consciousness, of a complex preliminary categorization of the stimulus energy that reaches the sense receptors [6, p.341]. Second, Kahneman locates in the person the determinants of both voluntary and involuntary attention and directs us to search for the determinants of involuntary attention in the predispositions of the target individual. When communicators cannot rely on the target's immediate plans and intentions to direct voluntary attention to their message (as in the advertising context under consideration), they can secure involuntary attention only by giving thought to the nature and experience of the target.

Properties that engage attention

Berlyne has described three kinds of stimulus property which humans are predisposed to favor in the allocation of attention: affective, collative, and intensive [3, 4]. "Affective" are emotion-arousing properties, whether pleasant or unpleasant, and "intensive" refers to physical properties such as loudness, brightness, and chromatic color. "Collative" is a term introduced by Berlyne to refer to properties such as novelty, surprisingness, incongruity, complete strangeness, complexity, uncertainty, conflict, and oddity. He explains his use of the term as follows:

We shall call them *collative variables*, since, in order to evaluate them, it is necessary to examine the similarities and differences, compatibilities and incompatibilities

between elements—between a present stimulus and stimuli that have been experienced previously (novelty and change), between one element of a pattern and other elements that accompany it (complexity), between simultaneously aroused responses (conflict), between stimuli and expectations (surprisingness), or between simultaneously aroused expectations (uncertainty) [3, p. 44].

“Collative” properties attract attention not by their physical energy (as in the case of “intensive” properties) nor by their emotional significance (as in the case of “affective” properties), but by an underlying matching, or comparison, activity which they appear to initiate. This matching process may not in fact be very different from preattentive processing. Conceivably, it is the nonroutine outcome of the matching process in the case of “collative” properties which necessitates more than preattentive processing and which triggers the allocation of attention.

Table 1
STIMULUS PROPERTIES THAT ENGAGE ATTENTION:
SUMMARY AND IMPLICATIONS

Stimulus Property	Basis for Attention Allocation	Breadth of Attention Engagement	Accompanying Affect
Affective	Emotional significance, pleasant or unpleasant	Specific subgroups	
Collative	Nonroutine outcome of cognitive processing	General within same culture	Neutral to pleasant; individual differences?
Intensive	Physical properties	General	Depending on intensity may be unpleasant

As summarized in Table 1, differences in the assumed basis for attention allocation among the three classes of stimulus property have a number of implications for the outcome of attempted attention engagement. One set of implications relates to individual differences in responsiveness to stimuli. Intensive and collative properties are probably quite general in their effect, although in some instances (incongruity for example), collative properties may be culture-specific. Affective stimuli, on the other hand, are likely to be specific in their ability to engage attention. For example, a four-legged bird, used by Berlyne [3, p. 100] as one illustration of incongruity, is likely to engage attention widely and without regard to feelings about the illustration, birds, or four-legged animals. In contrast, an illustration of a bird or of a four-legged animal can be expected to engage attention only among those people in whom it arouses feelings of liking or disliking. Because their effectiveness derives from the feelings they arouse, affective stimuli offer the potential of selectively engaging the attention of audience members for whose likes and

dislikes an advertised product is specifically tailored. For example, a homemaker shown performing a strenuous household task while dressed for business or a party (collative-incongruity), is likely to engage attention among audience members generally, regardless of feelings about the particular chore. In contrast, a homemaker shown somewhat stressed by the chore (affective-unpleasant), but dressed appropriately, will selectively engage the attention of those people who find the chore similarly distasteful.

A second set of implications relates to the possibility that affective tone may accompany the attention engagement achieved by the use of intensive or collative stimuli, even though neither intensive nor collative properties secure attention by affective arousal. The emotional tone that would accompany use of intensive stimuli is likely to be unpleasant, since loud sounds, bright lights, etc., tend to produce stress. The experience of attention arousal through collative stimulus properties is more likely to be pleasant and even amusing. However, the uncertainty, reversal of expectations, etc., that underlie the effectiveness of collative properties in engaging attention may, especially in extreme forms, irritate or produce anxiety in some people.

Table 2

DETERMINANTS OF ATTENTION ALLOCATION

Voluntary Attention	Involuntary Attention
Relevance to chosen activity underway	Relevance to deferred activities—Affectively pleasant or unpleasant
	Collative properties
	Intensive properties
	Repetition

Determinants of attention allocation

Table 2 shows the determinants of attention allocation. It draws on and adapts the views of Kahneman and Berlyne presented above. In particular it uses Kahneman's basis for distinguishing voluntary and involuntary attention (relevance to the task a person has chosen to perform), as well as Berlyne's three classes of stimulus property. Table 2 departs from these authors mainly in three respects. For Kahneman's "task" I have substituted "activity" in order to embrace both tasks and interests, i.e., activities which are undertaken under some form of compulsion, whether from the physical or social environments, as well as those which are undertaken "for their own sake." Although "task" is often used in psychology in a sense that embraces discretionary activity, I am substituting "activity" in part to avoid the artificiality of talking about a

person's engaging in the task of television watching and in part because I intend, later on, to treat tasks and interests separately.

In place of Kahneman's "more enduring dispositions" as the basis for involuntary attention allocation, I am using the greater specificity of Berlyne's three stimulus classes. The second respect in which I am departing from the two authors results from the juxtaposition of their views. Kahneman contributes the notion of relevance to a chosen activity underway as the basis for voluntary attention. Clearly, some place must be found among the determinants of involuntary attention for reminders of the many other tasks and interests that fill a person's life but have been deferred in favor of the one activity in progress. In the context of an advertising target watching television, the advertising stimuli which engage attention by affective arousal are those relating to problems (affective-unpleasant) or to pleasures (affective-pleasant) of daily life which have been put aside for the moment while the person watches television. It is possible, then, to be more specific about Berlyne's affective stimuli: Stimuli which engage attention by affective arousal are those related to the tasks and interests of the viewer.

Finally, I have added "repetition" as another determinant of involuntary attention. Stimuli that do not engage attention on a first presentation and that lack intensive, affective, or collative properties nevertheless intrude into consciousness upon repeated presentation. Conceivably this is a mechanical result of the opportunity for practice which repeated presentation provides to the preattentive categorization process, possibly mimicing, in its effects, the enhanced sensitivity associated with affective significance. Repetition could, of course, be regarded as but another example of intensive properties, but I consider this inadvisable if only because the implications for managerial action of using repetition or intensive properties differ so substantially.

The present view of attentional processes relates in a straightforward way to the typical advertising exposure situation. At the time of exposure to advertising, targets are usually engaged in some activity they have chosen, such as reading a newspaper or magazine, watching a television program, talking to family or friends with a TV set turned on. For the moment they have put aside the other tasks and interests of their daily life, activities which, in many instances, make use of goods and services that are advertised. For now, they are allocating attention voluntarily to their chosen activity. At the same time, the stimulus energy reaching their sense organs is being analyzed and categorized continually. This continual processing leads them to allocate attention involuntarily to stimuli with certain properties—namely, affective, collative, and intensive, as well as to patterns of stimulation that are repeatedly received. The four determinants of involuntary attention allocation offer advertisers four options for engaging their targets' attention. From considerations such as those summarized in Table 1, it appears that these options do not

lend themselves to interchangeable use, but are instead likely to serve different purposes, and to entail different side effects, in the overall communications task.

Options for attention engagement

I have presented in outline form a description of attentional processes and of major determinants of attention allocation. I turn now to consider how the present view of attention may be related to other components of advertising communication as shown in Figure 2, in particular to the advertising message. Essentially, the advertising message functions to impart information about a sponsor's brand. The information may range in quantity from the simple assertion that a particular brand is a member of a product category, e.g., "X is an aspirin," to the assertion that the brand has one or more qualities and/or uses, e.g., "X is an aspirin that safely gives fast relief from severe headaches and tension, that is used by knowledgeable and caring people for themselves and their loved ones, at all hours of the day and night." As a tool of marketing strategy, the advertising message represents marketing management's judgment of the best positioning for its brand. The judgment will have been made in the light of the different kinds of consumer wants that exist for that product category, of the firm's own production and distribution capability, and of the degree to which consumers perceive their wants to be satisfied by existing brands (including those of competitors). Viewed in the broader context of the marketing concept, the role of advertising is to inform consumers about the particular set of attributes, i.e., want-satisfying qualities, that a brand claims for itself. It is then expected that the brand will be included in the purchase consideration set of those consumers who regard its claims as relevant to their particular wants.

The implications of the marketing concept for the way advertising is thought to work have not been explored as fully as they deserve. The key marketing notion that goods and services are responsive to consumer wants (cf. likes and dislikes) suggests that the advertising message itself contains elements that can elicit affective reactions in some audience members. Accordingly, pleasant and unpleasant aspects of the motivational context for using the advertised product are available as means of engaging attention. Furthermore, when portrayed in a print ad or TV commercial, they selectively engage the attention of members of the commercial audience, and thus at the same time serve to locate the targets for the advertising message. Of course, some activities and conditions for which goods and services are used arouse no discernible feelings, positive or negative, in some people and are accepted without much thought as a part of daily life. In such cases, since affect related to product-use cannot be tapped to engage attention, other methods of ensuring attention allocation must be considered.

I shall illustrate the common ground for attentional and motivational strategy with reference to recent work on consumer motivation and brand positioning [8, 9]. Briefly, consumer wants arise from feelings associated with the way the product-use situation is perceived by the consumer. Table 3 shows seven perceptions of the product-use situation. In the sense in which "task" and "interest" were used above, three of these situation perceptions represent task orientations: Current Problem, Potential Problem, Normal Depletion; two represent interest orientations: Interest Opportunity, Sensory Enjoyment Opportunity; the remaining two, Product-Related Problem and Satisfaction Frustration, involve, additionally, consumer reactions to marketplace offerings. Singly or in combination, these seven categories of consumer motivation offer the marketer a range of brand positioning options.² In each of the motivation classes, with the exception of Normal Depletion, a source of consumer affect is readily identified and available for use as the basis for attention engagement by affective arousal.

Table 3

**ATTENTION ENGAGEMENT OPTIONS CORRESPONDING TO
VARIOUS CONSUMER MOTIVATIONS**

Motivation class for which brand is positioned	Attention engagement option
1. Current problem	Affective-unpleasant; Affective-pleasant
2. Potential problem	Affective-unpleasant; Affective-pleasant
3. Normal depletion	Repetition
4. Interest opportunity	Affective-pleasant
5. Sensory enjoyment opportunity	Affective-pleasant
6. Product-related problem	Affective-unpleasant; Affective-pleasant
7. Satisfaction frustration	Affective-unpleasant; Affective-pleasant
Most or all motivation classes (Ambiguous positioning)	Affective-pleasant

Affective-pleasant or unpleasant: motivation classes 1, 2, 6, 7

In four of the motivation classes (1, 2, 6, and 7), consumer wants arise from aspects of the product-use situation regarded as aversive. The corresponding brand positioning is intended to alleviate the unpleasantness experienced by the consumer. A positioning tailored for one of these motivations may attempt to engage the target's attention either by depicting the source of the unpleasantness (affective-unpleasant), or by showing the pleasant state of affairs that accompanies dealing successfully with the initial unpleasantness (affective-

pleasant). Alternate versions of the opening seconds of a television commercial are described in Table 4 to illustrate the affective-pleasant and affective-unpleasant forms of attention engagement in the context of positionings for floor cleaning brands.

Table 4
TWO FORMS OF ATTENTION ENGAGEMENT BY
AFFECTIVE AROUSAL

Motivation class for which brand is positioned	Affective-unpleasant	Affective-pleasant
1. Current problem	Homemaker experiences effortful floor cleaning Homemaker's young child crawls on dirty floor	Homemaker experiences effortless floor cleaning Homemaker's young child crawls on clean floor
2. Potential problem	Homemaker imagines criticism of floor condition by unexpected visitor	Homemaker imagines approval of floor condition by unexpected visitor
6. Product-related problem	Homemaker is distressed by waxy build-up	Homemaker is pleased by absence of waxy build-up
7. Satisfaction frustration	Homemaker is frustrated by disappointing outcome of floor cleaning just completed	Homemaker is pleased by gratifying outcome of floor cleaning just completed

The two forms of attention engagement by affective arousal, illustrated in Table 4, arise directly from the nature of the motivations to which each of the four positionings is responsive. Accordingly, both forms are available, in principle, when one of the four positionings is being executed. Explicitly or implicitly, a choice is made between the positive and negative approaches, as well as among the various degrees of unpleasantness with which the latter could be portrayed. What can be said about the implications of attempting attention engagement in either way? Both attentional and associative implications need to be considered.

"Attentional implications" refers to the extent of attention engagement, measured by whatever criterion, among audience members who are product category users and, more specifically, who are targets for the positioning, i.e., those members of the commercial audience who belong in the motivation class indicated. The affective-pleasant option is probably less accurate in locating targets than is the affective-unpleasant option (i.e., compared to affective-unpleasant, affective-pleasant may engage the attention of fewer

targets and more nontargets), if only because viewers may find the meaning, or the "point" of the affective-pleasant option to be somewhat ambiguous. Subsequent parts of the commercial may, of course, clarify the meaning and thus raise the additional question of the implications of early versus later target engagement.

Regarding the affective-unpleasant option, the literature on the use of fear appeals points to the possibility that the viewer may withdraw defensively and shut out the message, particularly in response to extreme portrayals. Engel et al. wrote a perceptive critique of the unthinking application of the fear appeals literature to the advertising situation which is worth bearing in mind [7, p. 313]. From the present perspective the point can be made, in any event, that a graphic portrayal of unpleasant aspects of consumer activities and conditions is unnecessary. Since goods and services are tailored to respond to consumer wants, the portrayal of a consumer problem in order to engage target attention is intended merely to strike a responsive chord in those consumers who consider the particular unpleasantness to be bothersome. As authentic targets for the brand positioning they can hardly need unduly graphic portrayals of the unpleasantness. The temptation to accentuate gruesome states and outcomes may in fact be greater in public service advertising where the sponsor's objective is often to create motivation rather than merely, as in marketing, to respond to existing motivation.

"Associative implications" refers to the possibility that viewers may form associations between the advertised brand and the stimuli used for attention engagement, probably through a process similar to classical conditioning. In this connection it is, of course, the affective-unpleasant option that may be troubling. Advertisers may be unwilling to permit even the possibility that their brand will be associated in consumers' minds with the image of an unpleasant aspect of daily living. The understandable aversion of marketers to the risk of creating negative associations for their brand may be further reason why the use of unpleasant stimuli for attention engagement is often moderate in execution, or is avoided entirely in favor of the affective-pleasant option. Casual observation suggests, however, that there may be product category differences in the degree to which advertisers are willing to risk the formation of negative associations for their brands. When positionings for the motivation classes shown in Table 4 are involved, attention engagement through the use of moderately unpleasant scenes may be commonplace in household product categories, for example, but is rarely seen in cosmetics.

There are, here, many questions in need of research, including: Does the use of unpleasant stimuli to engage attention promote the formation of negative associations for the advertised brand? Is there an adverse effect on brand image and brand choice? Is the effect found in only some product categories? Finally, is the affective-unpleasant option advantageous nonetheless, because

of superiority, compared with affective-pleasant, in securing the attention of targets?

Affective-pleasant: motivation classes 4, 5 and ambiguous positioning

Only the affective-pleasant option is available for use in connection with positionings responsive to Interest and to Sensory Enjoyment motivations, as shown in Table 3. These motivation classes are defined to include the pursuit of cognitive interest and the enjoyment of sensory pleasure, respectively, as *ends in themselves*, not as being instrumental to the solution or prevention of problems. Accordingly, in neither case is there a preexisting unpleasant condition to serve as the basis for using unpleasant stimuli to engage the target's attention. Instead the attention of targets in these two motivation classes may be engaged by presenting affectively pleasant stimuli depicting opportunities for interest (e.g., the solitary fun of doing puzzles), and for sensory enjoyment (e.g., the delicious flavor of some nonessential food) which are appropriate to the product category.

Advertisers also have the option of positioning their brand ambiguously. In such cases, neither the commercial's video nor audio contains elements that permit the positioning to be classified as responsive to any one motivation class. A claim that the brand is "America's favorite," duly supported by research data but without indicating why, is one way to implement this positioning. For whatever reasons, marketing management is unwilling to associate its brand with likes or dislikes peculiar to the different consumer want segments. If affective arousal is to be considered as a means of engaging attention, a stimulus will have to be found that is pleasantly engaging for most of the targets (e.g., product category users in general), without at the same time clearly implicating any one motivation class. A variant of ambiguous positioning occurs when the brand's target has been defined primarily in terms of demographic or lifecycle class membership (e.g., teenagers, new brides). This decision may dictate the use of a motivationally ambiguous brand message since motivations within a target class so defined may be quite diverse. In such cases affective stimuli offer a way to engage target attention, provided a stimulus is found which appeals to a large proportion of the group in question.

Repetition: motivation class 3

Regarding the product in question, Normal Depletion consumers are neither driven by strong aversions nor attracted by the prospect of cognitive interest or sensory enjoyment. By definition, affect related to product use is

absent and hence unavailable to the advertiser for engaging the attention of targets in this motivation class. There is no implication that, aside from the produce-use situation at issue, Normal Depletion consumers are lacking in affect, and undoubtedly affective stimuli could be found which would engage their attention individually. Nevertheless, use of affective arousal to engage their attention *as a target group* poses a number of difficult questions. Will it be possible: to find one affective stimulus which will be arousing for a large proportion of the consumers in this motivation class; to maintain the attention, so engaged, through delivery of the brand's message; to avoid incurring resentment for having engaged their attention for the sole purpose of delivering a message in which they have no interest? While questions such as these await further study it would seem that reliance on repetition to engage the attention of Normal Depletion consumers is indicated as more in keeping with their orientation to the product category.

Collative and intensive properties

Affective stimulus properties are especially well suited to locating targets who are defined by their individual wants and they are probably also fairly useful in locating targets defined by demographic, lifecycle, or other class membership. In contrast, neither collative nor intensive properties appear to be similarly suited to engaging the attention of groups of consumers defined by some predetermined characteristic which has marketing relevance. Aside from their availability for use in the event no suitable affective stimulus can be found, wherein lies the value of these two stimulus classes to the advertiser? Collative properties may be effective in "softening" the impact of unpleasant affective stimuli, and in helping to communicate the "point" of pleasant affective stimuli. For example, many young people intensely dislike the appearance of their blemished skin, but neither of two current commercials attempts to show or simulate acne. One opens showing a pretty face with numerous tiny star-shaped patches where blemishes might be; the other starts with a young girl saying to another that she hates her for her lovely skin. In the first case, there is no doubt that skin blemishes (affective-unpleasant) are being portrayed, but the novelty of the star patches makes it a gentle portrayal; in the second, the girl's lovely skin is affectively pleasant but the unexpected and incongruous comment helps to engage attention and to make clear that the point at issue is blemished skin.

The opportunity for using intensive properties such as loudness and brightness on television is probably limited because levels of intensity are, in large measure, beyond the advertiser's control. Occasionally intensive properties are used, however, as in the case of one current commercial which includes a scream in the opening few seconds. Whether or not specific levels of intensity are regarded as objectionable by viewers is an empirical matter. Where they

are, the advertiser risks association-formation between the brand and the viewer's reaction of annoyance and dislike.

Delayed target engagement

Many ads show the brand in use, and often the commercial opens with a scene that represents, in fairly straightforward manner, one of the product-use situations listed in Table 3. In these cases, the ad's attentional strategy is an obvious extension of the brand's positioning strategy, although, as indicated, choices remain to be made as to how the attention of motivation class members will be engaged. Other ads portray the brand's attributes or consumer benefits indirectly and often symbolically. When this is the executional objective, the commercial may open with a scene depicting the symbolic association to be created for the brand. For example, a commercial that opens with a home economist conducting a cooking demonstration turns out, before the end, to be a recommendation for a vitamin brand. On a first exposure, the viewer has no way of knowing that the ad is about vitamins, or even of understanding that the home economist is to be thought of primarily as a nutrition expert. In cases like this, the ad's target engagement function appears to take second place to the objective of establishing an association between the brand and the idea represented symbolically, in this instance, expertise in nutrition. Before the opening seconds of the commercial can serve to locate homemakers interested in nutrition (presumably the targets of this ad), a fair amount of cognitive activity is required from the target, who probably also needs more than one exposure to the ad. On a first exposure, when the audio finally starts to talk about vitamins, viewers are in a position to reinterpret whatever fragments of the opening cooking demonstration scene they remember and retrospectively to perceive the home economist as a nutrition expert. In a real-life TV viewing situation, it is an open question how many exposures will be necessary before the opening cooking demonstration scene immediately attracts the attention of homemakers concerned about nutrition. I am not ruling out the possibility that the ad may function well from that point on, both in locating targets and in registering the brand's message. Among targets eventually engaged, message registration may even turn out to be more than usually successful. Clearly research is needed into the advantages and disadvantages of delayed target engagement so as to identify the circumstances in which this strategy is appropriate.

Prospect

Attentional strategy is one of the last major aspects of marketing to remain relatively untouched by behavioral science theory and research. It is also the domain of expertise of one of the longest established professional specialties

within the general field of marketing. Embodied in individual ads is a wealth of private and implicit understanding on the subject of communication, which is waiting to be made public and explicit. While I do not foresee the day when behavioral science will write ads, I see value in the development of a set of conceptual categories to classify advertising content in behaviorally relevant ways. What advertising practitioners do and do not do in creating an ad becomes apparent only in the light of the theoretical options. The practitioner's professional and intuitive wisdom concerning the right way to implement an assignment is a rich source of hypotheses for investigation by behavioral science with a view to articulating the circumstances in which alternative executions are appropriate.

Communications research has recently been criticized for its inadequate simulation of the conditions of advertising communication [14], and its weakness in exploring underlying processes [12]. Issues of attentional strategy bring the difficulties of simulating the advertising situation into sharp focus. The perspective offered in the present paper points to the dual requirement that advertising research subjects be free to attend or not to attend to the test material, and that enough be known about their motivations regarding the product category under study to permit systematically relevant experimental manipulations.

In recent years, in basic psychology and consumer behavior alike, "cognitive" approaches have been greatly in vogue. Lip service has been paid to the post-behavioristic view of the organism as an autonomous selector of stimuli, but in research which is often, in conception and design, as mechanistic as any inspired by stimulus-response psychology. The readmission of attention as a topic of legitimate psychological study acknowledges that individual differences in the *significance* of stimuli make it impossible to predict behavior from a knowledge of stimulus conditions alone. Unquestionably, cognitive psychology's vision of the autonomous individual who may select the stimulus input that influences his or her behavior challenges experimental ingenuity to devise and implement research designs accordingly. It is a challenge which advertising researchers are unlikely to ignore.

NOTES

1. Of nine consumer behavior texts examined, with publication or revision dates from 1974 through 1978, only two [6, 11] give the subject of attention more than passing notice.

Writers of consumer behavior texts probably believe that insufficient progress has as yet been made in the study of attention to warrant devoting textbook space to the subject. I would agree that basic psychology does not at present have much to tell us about attention that is useful, but I believe it has more to say than has been realized, and that what we can find there may contribute to an initial perspective on the subject of attention engagement that is of value to advertising practitioners and theorists alike.

2. For ease of exposition in what follows, consumer motivation classes are discussed individually. In fact, however, a consumer may belong in more than one motivation class; likewise, a marketer may choose as target more than one motivation class.

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