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COMMENTS ON ROGER GODBEER'S PAPER

I believe that we researchers should be indebted to Roger Godbeer for his delineation of some of the problems of the multi-national advertiser. However important to the advertiser these problems might be, some are not research problems, some are not problems for print researchers, and some go beyond research capabilities.

WHO IS A READER?

Roger began – and correctly, I believe – with the problem of definition. Who is a reader? What is primary and secondary readership? He implies, and again correctly in my opinion, that the advertiser really wants to know about his advertisement being read and comprehended. Generally in print audience research, we attempt to assess only the Opportunities to See an ad, ie, that a person opened the magazine or newspaper. In short, all we measure in AIR is the number of pair of eyeballs that are open in front of one or more pages of an issue.

Should we measure how many people were exposed to and even affected by a particular ad? Of course we should. However, as much as we would like to do this, we just do not have the technology. The old DEMOS experiments done in the UK and similar experiments done elsewhere tell us that readers' *claims* of readership of particular pages are so seriously flawed that use of such data could well lead to very bad decisions. Sometimes, I believe, no data are preferable to data which are just plain wrong, and if we cannot identify which pages are seen, it is almost impossible to evaluate the effect of seeing a particular ad.

PRIMARY VS SECONDARY

Roger asks about primary vs secondary readership. That old distinction stems, of course, from circulation, and for the most part is not used by researchers. If we could get the data, they might tell us something about the affinity of the reader for the magazine. For example, if the person who pays for an issue is far more likely to see and respond to an ad than the person who does not pay for the issue, the breakdown of readership into these two categories could provide useful information for the advertiser. However, once again we do not know how to get this information reliably. In the US, the history of this kind of research demonstrates conclusively that the number of subscribing readers is vastly overestimated. In my last experience with trying to get such information, the claimed number of paying households exceeded the number of copies circulated by from 10% to more than 100%. We just do not know how to get people to tell us the source of their copy with any reliability, perhaps because *they* do not know.

EDITORIAL ADJACENCY

Roger asks the question: does editorial adjacency enhance the value of an advertisement? Although I do not know the answer to the question, I *do* know how to find out. Indeed, as a member of a committee of the ARF studying environmental effects, I have spent quite a bit of time on this subject. I could take a single magazine and by splitting the press run, I could run an ad for product X adjacent to editorial material in some copies and adjacent to other

advertising material in another set of copies. I could then interview subscribers in each of the groups, ask about attitudes, recall, recent purchase, etc, and, if sample sizes were large enough, I could find differences if they exist. Wonderful! However, I might find that for some products or for some creative treatments of the same products, the reverse finding would result. And, for another magazine, the situation might be very different.

You will note that I have said "might". There is only one way to find out and that is to conduct these experiments repeatedly and build up a bank of findings. My own expectation is that the results will vary considerably by type of publication. For example, I would expect a camera ad in a camera magazine to perform better when it faces other camera ads because I believe that frequently such magazines are purchased and read for the advertising. The same ad in a general family magazine might perform quite differently.

The barriers to doing such a series of experiments are obvious. The primary one is money. Such studies are expensive and although the researchers are eager to perform them, it is extremely rare that an advertiser or an advertising agency will provide significant funding for such studies. Should the publishers pay? To some degree, yes, but the costs of such studies will be reflected in higher page rates and no single publisher is likely to engage in research which will, at the least, increase his cost basis vis à vis his competitors. And, equally important, the results could be detrimental to him on other grounds. For example, suppose that the publisher found that editorial adjacency was 22.5% better than advertising adjacency. Should he charge 22.5% more? And let us suppose that all advertisers wanted that adjacency. How can the publisher accommodate this demand without compromising the editorial integrity of his magazine which in turn would lead to lower consumer demand? I have only touched the problems for the publisher – but it is clear to me that publishers will not move

in this direction without great pressure from advertisers and without someone sharing the cost. These studies could be very, very expensive.

INTERNATIONAL DATA COMPARABILITY

Roger Godbeer also touches on the need for comparability of data from country to country. I am entirely and completely in sympathy with him on this score. In some cases, the lack of comparability is based solely on development from a time when the demand for data was solely from local advertisers. Those advertisers really do not care about what demographic subgroups were used in audience studies in neighbouring countries. In other cases, local cultural and financial distinctions force differences. For example, in some countries, non-cash payments to employees, perks, are taxed very lightly while in others they are taxed at the usual rates. Thus, even making household income breaks constant across countries could be misleading. What appear to be comparable income groups in two countries could represent very different sets of buying power. Use of such data, blindly, could produce seriously misleading media schedules. I should also point out my impression – and I do not have any data on this – that the media spending in most countries is dominated by local advertisers, not international ones. As a consequence, the demands of the locals will predominate in designing relevant studies.

Roger points out that in many countries in which his company is interested, there is no or little media research. He is correct once again. If, for example, a small underdeveloped country was a major market for me, I would be most frustrated to find little or nothing on which to base media decisions. Alas, the smaller and the poorer the country, the greater the relative cost of doing even a simple readership study. Yes, Roger, we do know how to do audience studies in such countries – but where will the

money come from with which to conduct the study?

SINGLE SOURCE

Roger Godbeer uses several different definitions of single source, but let me focus on one fairly general one. To me, a single source data base is one which includes, for a projectable sample of people, a record of the media exposure of each person for TV and print and radio, and a record of their purchases and some detail about those purchases, eg, whether the purchase was made at a specially reduced price, etc. Assume with me that one can somehow collect all of these data for a large sample of people, say 50,000 in some one country. And assume further that the data are without error; that is, there is no under or overclaiming for media or for product data. The only errors are sampling variation.

This is a great concept, but how is one going to analyse the data? This is not a great controlled experiment in which all variables are held constant but one. One could find, for example, that heavy users of Brand X are heavy recipients of Brand X advertising. To infer cause and effect is hazardous unless we can find a group which has not used Brand X and after exposure to its advertising switches to that brand. But then, we must eliminate other possible causes such as a price promotion, lack of availability of usual brand, sudden product quality change, etc.

I am very happy to be semi-retired and not faced with the problem of analysing the data sets which are going to be produced by single-source systems. Frankly, I believe that such data will only fulfill expectations if the time frames for analysis are very long and if the sample sizes are larger than anything we have ever considered before. Then, the analyst is going to have to build very complex mathematical models from part of the set of data and test them on

the remaining data. In short, single source will not be, in my opinion, a panacea at all. I suspect that ten years from now we will look back and wonder why the expectations were so high.

OTHER ISSUES

Finally, Roger has raised a great many important issues with respect to how print affects people. What is the role for print? For TV? Should the creative be different for each? These, and the other questions he raises about print were ones that concerned me greatly during over 25 years in the business.

I believe that there are two responses to Roger's plea in addition to my seconding it. First, we don't know how to do the studies which will answer his question. We just are not smart enough to be able to do these studies at the kinds of budget levels which are usually proposed. We are not even very confident that we can measure AIR with a great degree of accuracy - in many countries, we have noted that average AIR's have gone up or down from one year to the next and we cannot even state with certainty that we are observing a real phenomenon or one which is an artifact of our measurement systems.

The second response to Roger's plea is one of complaint. Print media are regularly asked to justify themselves with all sorts of research. But television, which in my country is the dominant medium, is never asked to do any of this kind of research. Until the advent of the peplemeter, television was not even asked to provide the most elementary demographic or product usage data about its viewers.

In most countries, television is *believed* to be more effective than print, often with little hard evidence to support the claim. And oftentimes, the little evidence is suspect or contaminated with other non-controlled factors.

A FINAL WORD AND CHALLENGE

Roger Godbeer has told us that he manages a global media investment of about \$400 million, a very large sum of money. If his company, and others like it, were to devote just half of 1% of their media budgets to basic research, perhaps we could make some strides. Just consider, my fellow researchers, what we could do with \$2 million dollars, year after year, to search for an understanding of how media work. We could conduct experiments with magazines and newspapers; we could develop new measuring systems. And if 20 or 100 companies similarly spent one half of 1% of their media budgets, we could soon begin to see some payoff. And if the larger media joined them with similar investments, it would not be long before our knowledge would begin to grow at an accelerating rate.

One of the underpinnings of good research programme is a set of hypotheses. In this regards, I commend to you a new piece of research by Professor Victor Nell of the University of South Africa, just published by the Yale University Press. Nell deals with reading fiction and his findings are not directly applicable to our problems, but he does provide some insights

which might help us to learn more about reading of advertising and editorial material in magazines and newspapers.

For the most part, I agree with Roger Godbeer that the data we now have do not deal with the major problems of multi-national (or even local) advertisers. However, as I have indicated, some of those problems will continue to exist because we just do not know how to solve them: others are susceptible to more study but we do not have the money to attack them, and still others are so complex that it is possible that there are no general answers.

I leave you with one observation – the Advertising Research Foundation's Gold Standard project, which I think is the most exciting effort in the US in a long, long time, needs \$200,000 for its next stage. As of this writing, and after a lot of effort, just half of that amount has been raised – and very little of that from advertisers.

References

Nell, Victor (1988). *Lost in a book: the psychology of reading for pleasure*. London & New Haven: Yale University Press.