

# The Effects of Current Market Forces on the Impact of a TV Commercial in Creating Persuasion: Advertising Agencies Cannot Do It All Alone!

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**ABSTRACT.** The present study investigates the extent to which extenuating factors (excluding those produced by the commercial) affect the extent to which an advertisement is both persuasive and eventually engenders persuasion. The authors collected data from over 5,000 television commercials in the United States, and identified the existing market structure (e.g., brand share, number of competing brands, brand loyalty) surrounding each item at the time the product was advertised, in an effort to separate the effects of the advertisement from the effects of pre-existing market forces on persuasiveness. The results demonstrate that the combined pre-existing market forces have a greater impact on a commercial's ability to persuade than does the message or creativity in the advertisement itself. However, when pre-existing market forces between two products were similar, a creative advertising campaign was

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still identified as important in producing persuasion. Marketing strategy implications are discussed. [Article copies available for a fee from The Haworth Document Delivery Service: 1-800-HAWORTH. E-mail address: <docdelivery@haworthpress.com> Website: <<http://www.HaworthPress.com>> © 2006 by The Haworth Press, Inc. All rights reserved.]

**KEYWORDS.** Advertising agencies, executional variables, persuasion, recall, television

### INTRODUCTION

It has been a common joke in the advertising industry that “I waste half of my advertising budget, I just don’t know which half.” It is this truth that has driven advertising researchers and marketing executives to try to identify exactly what factors are most apt to lead to maximizing marketing/advertising objectives. It has been assumed that “successful commercials” lead to increased sales results, but the definition of a successful commercial *is* defined by increased sales results. The problem with the circular logic is that copywriters and advertising planners have not been given a priori guidance based on research on what works and what has an impact and what does not. In part, this mystery has been perpetuated by some advertising agencies that suggest that this is really an art form and not a science. The creative teams are almost treated like mystics who will “create the ultimate solution” if only they are given enough time and money. Because there is little empirical data to address this basic problem, an agency may create a very effective advertising campaign one year, and lose the account a few years later after a series of less than “effective” ads.

In fact, it may be too much to ask of any advertising campaign to significantly move sales. This demand on advertising seems to de-emphasize the role of all the other marketing factors that affect sales such as, sales and trade promotions, sales training, product quality, distribution advantages, pricing programs, sampling, etc. Additionally, it fails to recognize that market structure factors such as brand share, number of competing brands, and brand loyalty can have an impact on sales. A myriad of research has identified these factors as affecting a brand’s ability to grow (Agrawal, 1996; Chaudhuri, 1999; Hoyer and Brown, 1990). For example, if there are ten brands in the market and you are ranked number ten, it may be quite difficult to get people to switch to

your brand. Similarly, if there is high brand loyalty amongst competing brands, one would expect little brand switching. Thus, any advertising would be challenged to create a commercial that “moves” share.

When there are many brands in the market, there are more choices making it more difficult for any advertisement to create a sale as customers continue to engage in straight rebuys. In addition, when a company has a high brand share, customers are already buying the product and thus it becomes difficult for an advertisement to create a new sale. In many cases, the existing forces of the market will have a significant impact on how persuasive (in terms of creating a sale) any advertisement will be. Chaudhuri (1999) examines these issues in his research on brand loyalty. He finds that attitudes toward a brand are directly affected by market share. In other words, brands with a larger market share are more desirable because they have more buyers than brands with smaller market shares. In addition, larger market share brands have higher rates of repeat purchase by this larger number of purchasers.

Additionally, strategic variables (e.g., a superior selling proposition—“doctors approve of this drug more than any competing brand”) will also influence the effectiveness of a commercial. Certainly, the best commercial cannot overcome a brand with no brand differentiation or no selling proposition. While advertising agencies often beg their corporate clients for “powerful” messages to advertise, they are often given parity or a me-too product. Advertising agencies therefore often try to use “creative execution” to give “power to the ad.”

### ***PURPOSE OF THE STUDY***

The purpose of this study is to break apart the various strategic and executional marketing elements and to examine the relative roles of the major elements of any advertising program. These would include the market structure (e.g., brand share, number of competing brands, and brand loyalty) the selling proposition (e.g., claims that the advertised product is better than competitive products or an older version of the advertised product), strategic communication (e.g., new product/new feature, product convenience, brand name reinforces benefit), and executional variables (e.g., number of actors present, whether children are present, demonstration of product in use) on a sale. The objective of this study is to provide information that can be used to help create advertising with the potential to generate greater sales in the context of the other variables.

Specifically, the objective will also be to identify which of the execution alternatives are the most effective, and to quantify their effectiveness. The objective is not to reduce the role of the creative process, but rather to provide guidelines that could help shape a commercial. Creativity has been defined as “combining two or more previously unconnected objects or ideas into something new” (Arens, 1996). However, the concept of limits on creativity is not inappropriate either. It is attributed that Voltaire stated, “originality is nothing but judicious limitation.” The creative process should still be “sacred” and subject to the exciting ideas and formats seen in the market. But, having some insight about what has worked in the past may help to shape what will work in the future.

## *METHOD*

### *Procedure*

It should be clear to the reader that to accomplish the aforementioned purpose, an extensive database had to be available to include all the needed variables. To accomplish this task, the database had to include all four elements of the commercial (market structure, selling proposition, strategic communication, and executional advertising) as well as a measure of performance. The data used in this study are provided by RSC (Research Systems Corporation), The Quality Measurement Company. RSC, also known as ARS (Advertising Research Systems), has been an international leader in the field of advertising testing and measurement. Besides simply copy testing the commercials, RSC's internal focus has been to utilize diagnostic tools to help their clients improve their advertising results. They have accumulated a current database of over 5,000 copy tests on over 1,300 different brands in over 150 different product categories. This is the largest, most complete database available on advertising results in the world. Furthermore, as the leader in the field, their research and measurement techniques are well accepted by the industry, and have been reported in other peer-reviewed journals in marketing.

We used the ARS Persuasion metric®, a “branded” variable created by RSC to measure the commercials' selling power. Past RSC research has demonstrated that this score is highly related to the ability of the commercial to change buying behavior. However, since the ARS Persuasion metric® is the primary dependent (sales performance) variable,

its validity should be discussed. Shirly (1999) showed that brand share changes were highly related to the ARS Persuasion metric® on pre/post (advertising) share measurements. Shirly (1999) reported that when television commercials scored +7 on the ARS Persuasion metric®, they had a 97% chance of moving the business ahead more than half a share point. When the ARS Persuasion metric® was less than 2, you had only a 9% chance of moving the brand share half a share point. Other research by Blair and Raback (1998), using the same metric, demonstrated that when the ARS Persuasion metric® score was over 5.7, brands had substantial (+10%) increases in five year sales, and when the score was 4.5, the increase was modest (between 0 and 10%). When the ARS Persuasion metric® was +3.3, on average, the brands suffered a decline in sales over the same period. While no quantitative system is a perfect measure, the data suggest that the dependent measure used in this and previous research is an acceptable surrogate for sales or market performance.

We coded the 5000+ commercials to examine whether various elements were present or absent in each commercial (please see Table 1 for a complete list of the various advertising variables for which we searched the advertisements and please see Table 2 for a list of the definitions of these advertising variables).

Each commercial was categorized by multiple coders. The coders were part of the trained RSC organization. [Note: These judges were only used to determine whether the executional elements were present or absent.] We obtained the persuasion score from actual advertising tests conducted on *the target audience* selected by the advertiser. This is extremely important in that many advertising studies are conducted on convenience samples rather than the actual target audience for the commercial.

### ***Independent Variables***

The independent variables are distributed into various classes (e.g., market structure, selling proposition, strategic elements, executional elements).

*Market structure.* Three measures were used in the analysis to represent the market situation for each commercial that was tested. It is well documented that the ability to create new sales is influenced by the current structure of the market. The market structure factors including brand share, number of competing brands, and brand loyalty, for each of the tested brands or products were all provided by the companies or

TABLE 1. Complete List of Advertising Elements Used in the Preliminary Study

| Category   | Specific Advertising Element  |
|--|---|
| Strategic  | Brand-differentiating key message<br>New product/New feature<br>Product convenience<br>Competitive comparison<br>Brand name reinforces benefit<br>Superiority claim<br>Product is double-branded  |
| Communication  | Related recall<br>Key message communication<br>Demonstration of product in use<br>Time actual product on screen<br>Product benefits main message<br>Information on results of using<br>Setting directly related to use<br>Slice-of-life format<br>Number of on-screen characters (4+)<br>Number of vignettes (2+)<br>Background cast male main character(s)                                     |
| Timing and Counting Variables                            | Number of brand name mentions<br>Time until category identified<br>Time until brand identified<br>Time until product/package shown<br>Time package on screen<br>Number of times brand name/logo shown<br>Time brand name/logo on screen<br>Main message in first ten seconds<br>Number of screen cuts   |
| Information Content<br><br>Information Content continued | Price<br>Value<br>Quality<br>Economy/savings<br>Dependability/reliability<br>Sensory information<br>Aesthetic claims<br>Components/ingredients<br>Availability<br>Packaging<br>Guarantees<br>Safety<br>Nutrition/health<br>Independent research<br>Company research<br>Research (no source)<br>New uses<br>Company image/reputation<br>User satisfaction<br>Special offer/event<br>Use occasion |

| Category                          | Specific Advertising Element   |
|-----------------------------------|--|
| Brand/Product identification      | Nonproduct/single product/multi-product<br>Manufacturer/distributor identification<br>Visual brand sign-off<br>Auditory sign-off   |
| Visual Devices                    | Scenic beauty<br>Beauty of characters<br>Ugliness of characters<br>Graphic displays<br>Surrealistic visuals<br>Substantive supers<br>Visual tagline<br>Visual memory device  |
| Auditory Devices                  | Memorable rhymes<br>Unusual sound effects<br>Spoken tagline  |
| Promises, Appeals, Propositions   | Attributes/ingredients<br>Main message<br>Benefits of ownership<br>Product reminder main   |
| Message                           | Sexual appeal<br>Comfort appeals<br>Safety appeals<br>Enjoyment appeals<br>Welfare appeals<br>Social approval<br>Self-esteem<br>Achievement<br>Excitement/variety  |
| Congruence of Commercial Elements | Setting related<br>Setting unrelated   |
| Commercial Tone or Atmosphere     | Cute/adorable<br>Hard sell<br>Warm/caring<br>Modern/contemporary<br>Wholesome/healthy<br>Technological/futuristic<br>Conservative/traditional<br>Old fashioned/nostalgic<br>Happy/fun loving<br>Cool/laid back<br>Somber/serious<br>Uneasy/tense<br>Relaxed/comfortable<br>Glamorous<br>Humorous<br>Suspenseful<br>Rough/rugged<br>Unsubstantiated claim (puffery) |

TABLE 1 (continued)

| Category                 | Specific Advertising Element  |
|--------------------------|---|
| Commercial Structure     | Opening surprise/suspense<br>Surprise in middle<br>Surprise at closing<br>Unusual setting/situation<br>Humorous closing<br>Blind lead-in<br>Message in middle   |
| Commercial Format        | Continuity of action<br>Testimonial of user<br>Endorsement (celebrity/authority)<br>Announcement<br>Demonstration of results of use<br>Comedy/satire<br>Animation/cartoon<br>Stills/storyboard<br>Mood/image dominant<br>Serious drama<br>Fantasy/surrealism<br>Problem/solution<br>Interview<br>Camera involves audience<br>New wave/product graphics<br>Number of words |
| Music and Dancing        | Music present<br>Music major element<br>Music creates mood<br>Dancing<br>Music/dancing extravaganza<br>Well-known music<br>Continuing music theme   |
| Commercial Setting       | Indoor<br>Outdoor<br>No setting   |
| Main Characters          | Female<br>Child/infant<br>Racial/ethnic<br>Celebrity<br>Actor playing role of ordinary person<br>Real person<br>Created<br>Animal<br>Animated<br>No main character<br>Child/infant/animal/animated  |
| Characters in Minor Role | Racial/ethnic<br>Celebrity<br>Animal(s)<br>Created/cartoon<br>Real person(s)  |

| Category                    | Specific Advertising Element  |
|-----------------------------|---|
| Other Commercial Characters | Character identified with company<br>Continuing character in campaign<br>Spokesperson on camera |
| Commercial Approach         | Rational/emotional<br>Positive/negative   |
| Comparisons                 | Direct comparison<br>Indirect comparison<br>Self-comparison<br>Category<br>No comparison        |

TABLE 2. Definitions of Variables

*Definition of Brand-Differentiating Key Message*

- a) Serving to *differentiate* the brand from the competition in a way that is *demonstrated* or *proven*,
- b) Making a claim that only the brand is able to make—that is, whether the message expresses a *“point-of-difference”* for the brand (whether the point-of-difference is meaningful or important is not considered).
- c) Being *unique* in the sense that the advertisement emphasizes some new aspect of the product. This may be a “new/improved” formula for an old product.

*New Product/New Feature Information*

This refers to any information concerning a new product introduction, new components, ingredients, features, or characteristics of an existing product; or an improvement (qualitative or quantitative) in any feature, component, ingredient, or characteristic of an existing product (e.g., “new and improved,” “now with 50% less sugar,” or “new and milder,” “new and stronger,” “now with built-in flash”). This includes any “new convenient feature” to the package (if the package is the “new convenient feature”).

*Product Convenience Information*

This refers to information concerning the ease with which the product may be obtained, prepared, used, or disposed. The product convenience can either be stated (e.g., microwaveable could get this code, as could statements such as “simple” or “easy” when used in reference to the product) or demonstrated (e.g., showing children using a product normally associated with adults), but not implied.

*Competitive Comparison*

There are two types of competitive comparisons: direct comparisons and indirect comparisons. Direct comparisons to other product(s) occur when a competitor is identified by name. The competitive package or product with name identified is shown, or the competitor is verbally identified by name, not just category identification. The competitor should be in the ARS photograph. The indirect comparison to other product(s) is a comparison made between the advertised product and competitor’s product, but the competitor is not specifically named (e.g., “better than the leading brand,” “better than other brands”). This does include comparisons to an old version of the test product or a comparison to a generic category.

*Superiority Claim Information*

This claims that the advertised product is *better* than competitive products or an older version of the advertised product.

TABLE 2 (continued)

*Brand Name Reinforces Benefit*

The brand name, at least somewhat, states what the product is or what the product will do. Some examples of products which exactly describe (and somewhat reinforce) the benefit are the following:

"Exact" descriptions of the benefit

Dow Scrubbing Bubbles  
 Heinz Homestyle Gravy  
 Lysol Basin Tub and Tile Cleaner  
 Kellogg's Cornflakes

"Somewhat" descriptions of the benefit

Move over butter  
 Sine-aid  
 Caress  
 Rice Chex

*Double-Branded Products*

The advertised product has two brand names (e.g., Goodyear Aquatred).

*Demonstration of Product in Use*

The product is demonstrated while in actual use (e.g., shaving in a commercial for shaving lather, applying make-up). A demonstration of the use of product, a product benefit, actual demonstration (e.g., dipping into a beaker of fluoride to demonstrate fluoride is absorbed by teeth). The demonstration must be visual (explicit).

*Time on Television Screen*

The amount of time the actual advertised product is on the screen.

*Product Benefits Main Message*

A major focus of the commercial is to show what the product does (e.g., lasts longer, comfortable, whiter teeth) or how to use it, information on results of using any information concerning the outcomes with the use of the product.

*Setting Directly Related to Use*

A commercial setting which demonstrates normal product use or a typical purchase situation.

*Slice-of-Life Format*

An interplay between two or more people which portrays a conceivable real situation. There is continuity of action.

*Number of On-Screen Characters (4+)*

There are four or more characters on screen during the commercial. This includes principal or background characters.

*Number of Vignettes (2+)*

There are two or more vignettes from the first moment the commercial begins until it ends. Each story, which can stand alone, is counted as a vignette. These stories can be short, if they complete a thought or idea.

*Background Cast*

These are characters (i.e., people, animals or created characters) in the commercial other than the principal character(s). These characters may serve as scenery or background (e.g., people walking by, people sitting around, etc.). These characters are only incidental to the commercial message (i.e., not active in making a product claim, not demonstrating product benefit, etc.).

*Male Main Character(s)*

The character(s), carrying the major camera role of delivering the commercial message, is a male. This is not applicable to incident or background characters, or those characters making a cameo appearance.

were known by RSC as part of their service to the client. Specifically, brand loyalty was measured by category switching, and the two other measures were actual known quantities.

*Selling proposition.* The ability to persuade is obviously related to the strength of the selling proposition. For example, a commercial that would say as a commodity food once did in jest, “. . . buy us because we need the money” is likely to be less persuasive than one that says “. . . buy this because it will make your life easier and give you more time to yourself.” The difficulty in including this variable is how to measure it separate from the commercial itself. ARS has created a methodology used by their clients to tease apart the persuasive ability of the selling proposition from the persuasive ability of the commercial. The methodology is also a branded process known as Firststep®. The process creates a test that takes the selling proposition as presented by the client and a non-descript voiceover commercial, and creates, without any graphics, background or other executional elements in a commercial that is presented to the respondents with the traditional behavioral change protocol.

*Strategic elements.* The strategic elements include variables that the advertising agency would be provided by the brand manager. These are factors that may determine the brand’s persuasive appeal, but which the advertising agency cannot create. These would include brand-differentiating key message, new product/new feature, product convenience, competitive comparison, brand name reinforces benefit, superiority claim, and product is double-branded. While the authors presume that, in many cases, the brand manager works with the agency to determine brand name, benefits, etc., it is really in the domain of the brand manager, and a given for the agency.

*Executional elements.* While there has not been any unanimous agreement as to the classification of the execution alternatives, even more debate has occurred between the importance of execution and the message. The arguments of creative execution license versus concept discipline have persisted as long as advertising agencies have existed. Two of the early gurus argued on this exact point. David Ogilvy’s Rule 2 for copywriters, “what you say is more important than how you say it,” argues the importance of the message. William Bernbach’s response, “execution can become content, it can be as important as what you say . . . A sick guy can utter some words and nothing happens; a healthy vital guy says them and they rock the world,” suggests the creative execution is in itself important. What is often lost in these discussions is just how effective the various execution alternatives are.

Stewart and Furse (1986) studied the effectiveness of executional elements using an extensive list of more than 1000 commercials. They determined that there were variations in the influence of the executional elements depending on the criterion measure used. They did not, however, compare these executional elements to the other factors in commercial persuasiveness. In a study on the impact of executional style on television commercial effectiveness, Laskey et al. (1994) replicated aspects of the Stewart and Furse (1986) study, but incorporated the Shimp (1976) typology of television commercial styles. They extended their study to see if the results varied by product category. They found that executional elements did have an effect on recall and key message content, but they did not find a relationship to persuasion.

A review of three popular advertising text books reveals that no empirical data have been provided as to the effectiveness of the execution elements. For example, Arens (1996) describes "standard subjects for ad visuals" including picture package, product alone, product in use, product features, comparison, benefits, humor, testimonial, and negative appeal (Arens, 1996). Vanden Berg and Katz (1998) refer to a classification system for TV advertising that includes six types: Demonstration, testimonials, presenters, slice-of-life, lifestyle, and animation. They also added humor, music, and emotion to their system. Belch and Belch (1995) include 11 "ways" advertising messages can be presented including: Factual message, scientific/technical, demonstration, comparison, testimonial, slice-of-life, animation, personality symbol, fantasy, dramatization, and humor. While this is not suggested to be an exhaustive search, it does dramatize the lack of agreement between the specific possible executional elements and alternatives. The complete list of executional elements initially used is shown in Table 1.

In order to make the list operational, and in order to reduce colinearity, we performed a bivariate correlational analysis. The process of creating the database involved dummy coding each of the 5,000 commercials for the presence and absence of our independent variables in the commercials. We created a vector with each of the present or absent scores with the ARS Persuasion metric® score. We performed a preliminary analysis to determine which of the elements were correlated to the ARS Persuasion metric®. To be considered in the analysis, an executional element had to meet three criteria. The element had to be represented in at least 200 or more commercials, the inter-judge reliability had to be at least .80 for its presence in the commercial, and the variable had to be able to differentiate on the ARS Superiority measure at the 90% confidence level relative to a degree of difficulty norm. Only

executorial variables that were significant (at  $\alpha = .95$  confidence level) were included in further analyses. The purpose of the filtering process of the independent variables was to reduce the possibility of including spurious variables. The actual elements shown in Table 1 were found to be either positively or negatively (using a bivariate correlation) related to the persuasion score.

### ***Dependent Variable***

As previously indicated, the desired measure for the dependent variable was sales generated by the advertising message or the extent to which the commercial was persuasive. In this study, the dependent variable is the ARS Persuasion score. Previous research indicated a high degree of validity between the calculated measure of persuasion and actual sales.

### ***MODEL***

The model used in this analysis is  $P_c = f(Sp_c, St_{c, n1}, RC_{c, n2}, EX_{c, n3}, MS_{c, n4})$

$c = 1 \dots \#$  of commercials from 1 to 5,000

$n1 = 1 \dots \#$  of strategic elements (St)

$n2 = 1 \dots \#$  of recall and communication elements (RC)

$n3 = 1 \dots \#$  of executorial elements (EX)

$n4 = 1 \dots \#$  of market structure (MS)

[Note: Sp = Selling proposition]

### ***RESULTS***

As indicated in the methodology, the initial list of variables was reduced to a more manageable number to determine the strength of the relationship between the dependent and independent variable. It should come as no surprise that a superior selling proposition was strongly re-

lated to the ARS Persuasion score. A superior selling proposition was judged as significantly higher than the norm. The bivariate analysis shows that 70% of the commercials that included a superior selling proposition (e.g., this product is better than either competitive products or an older version of the advertised product) were rated in the highest 10% in terms of persuasion (outstanding persuasion level). Only 8% of commercials without a superior selling proposition were rated in the highest 10% in terms of persuasion (see Figure 1). Thus, the likelihood of any commercial being very persuasive without a superior selling proposition was very low. Advertisers who are asked to create compelling, persuasive advertising for me-too products have little chance of success without the help of a superior selling proposition.

We performed a regression analysis on the remaining database. Figure 2 shows the amount of explained variation from the independent variables. As one can see, the known marketing structure variable explained the greatest amount of variation with over 55% of the variation

FIGURE 1. The Effect of the Presence of a Superior Selling Proposition on Persuasion

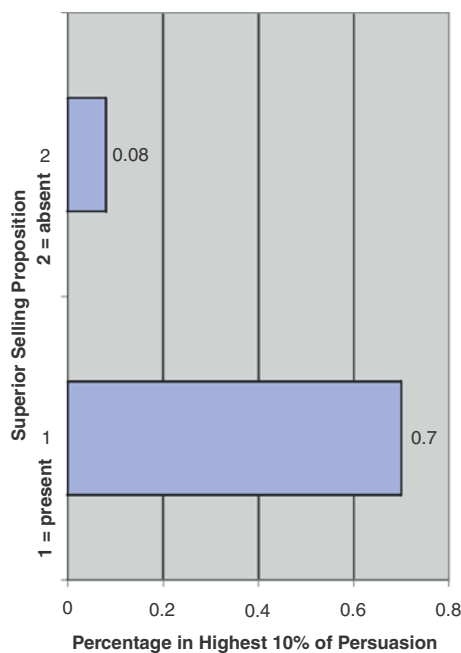
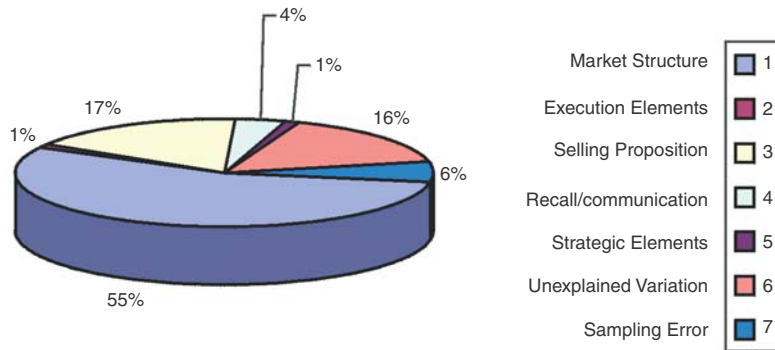


FIGURE 2. Percentage of Explained Variation in Commercial Persuasion



explained. The second largest factor in explaining persuasion was the selling proposition. The remaining 6% of the variation in persuasive response to commercials was explained by what takes place in the advertisement. Of that percentage, 4% was explained by recall and communication factors. In other words, was the commercial memorable, and did it get across the key messages?

### ***DISCUSSION AND MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS***

Even if I am the best hitter in the major leagues, and I am told which pitch is coming towards me next, it is impossible to hit a *grand slam* without having all three bases occupied by teammates. Similarly, the various characteristics of the market structure, selling proposition, strategic elements, and executional elements, all must be in favor of the product being advertised if the advertising agency is to have its best chance to fully augment sales performance.

Our regression analyses, using data collected via the ARS Persuasion Metric, and collected *on the target audience of interest*, indicate that the known market structure (i.e., brand share, the number of competing brands, and brand loyalty) surrounding that product being advertised, accounted for 55% of the variance in the persuasiveness of the advertisements. Brand share must be considered before we credit or blame the advertising agency as, if I am last in share before I hire the advertising agency, my chances of increasing sales are not as good as if I am a market leader or I am number 2. In addition, the number of competing

brands must be factored in also as, if I am competing with a greater number of products that already have a fair degree of brand loyalty, then I have less of an opportunity for increased market share, whether my advertising campaign fares well or poorly. Lastly, brand loyalty (as measured by category switching) is a major factor that has quite an effect on increased sales. All three of these items, comprising the market structure, must be examined before we fairly assess the strength and profitability of the advertising effort.

On the other hand, our data suggest that the agency *can* control insuring that the client's company has a well-developed strategy with a clear selling proposition. Though it is important to say things in an engaging and perhaps humorous way, *what* you actually say is quite important. Namely, a superior selling proposition is quite effective in engendering sales results. Our analyses indicated that 70% of those advertisements that had a superior selling proposition were rated in the highest 10% of persuasion. Equally interesting was the finding that those commercials without a superior selling proposition were rated in the highest 10% of persuasion only 8% of the time. "Me-too" products just do not differentiate themselves from the other products in terms of their persuasiveness, and they do not leave room for a creative advertising agency to help in a notable way. Clearly, it would behove ad agencies to spend more time making sure that client has a good and persuasive selling proposition! This is something that ad agencies and the client can control!

Our results may be interpreted as disappointing if you are in the advertising industry. After all, they demonstrate that the execution of the commercial (i.e., the value added by the advertising agency) accounts for a minimal amount of the variation in persuasion. Still, we found evidence that a creative advertising campaign (i.e., one with a superior selling proposition) still engenders increased sales. Obtaining recall and delivering the key message content can make the difference between a bad campaign and a great campaign. Still, however, our data demonstrate that the adage "you can't make a silk purse from a sow's ear" is true in the advertising business.

### **LIMITATIONS**

Any researcher in the field of advertising knows that the answer to almost any question is, "It depends." The same is true with this analysis. An executional variable may be rated very high when viewed once, but when played over and over its effectiveness might wane significantly

more than another variable might. Humor may be effective when seen alone, but when it is in a pod of five funny commercials it may be less effective.

Additionally, a commercial targeted to a very specific audience may also find results that vary from the group average. It is important to examine all aspects of the total commercial offering to the consumer before one makes global statements such as "This is the way it should be." However, having some guidance as to what appears to be effective is better than being ignorant of the outcomes.

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