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How Consumers React to New-Product Ads

...Implications for copy development.

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The research reported here was designed to determine ways in which people react differently to commercials for new brands versus those for mature, ongoing brands. The reason for undertaking the research was to identify differences that would offer clues to developing more effective new-product advertising – both in terms of strategy and execution. Furthermore, it was felt that such research would fill a gap in the literature since the writers were unable to find any published studies quantifying differences in audience responses to commercials for new versus established products.

Although there is extensive literature on marketing and promotional planning for new products, relatively little has been written either about the nature of new-product advertising per se or about appropriate copy strategies for new-product campaigns (see, for example, the review of new-product development literature by Chaterji, Lonsdale and Stasch, 1980). Furthermore, what has been written seems to have been largely speculative and subjective, rather than based on quantitative consumer data.

Barnett (1968) described the challenge of developing new-product advertising as involving two basic steps: (1) determining which characteristics consumers most desire; and (2) making sure the advertising clearly communicates those characteristics. On the other hand, Wolf (1974) delineated the special considerations pertaining to new-product commercials primarily in terms of product positioning.

More recently, McCollum/Spielman (1980) reviewed their commercial testing experience on new brands and concluded that new-product commercials must: get the brand name across; avoid trying to communicate too much; strive to establish credibility; and avoid the use of humor. And Urband and Hauser (1980) have proposed that good new-product advertising should address each phase of the response hierarchy, e.g., unaware, aware, knowledge, liking, preference, conviction, and purchase (Lavidge and Steiner, 1961). The authors also note that interest in the product "must be augmented with the advertiser's skill in creating interest in the advertisement per se." In other words, not only must the product deliver real benefits, but the advertising execution must attract and maintain attention as well.

Methodology

Data for our study were drawn from the Leo Burnett Co. copy-research history file. A search of the file yielded 78 studies of commercials for 37 new products, most of

which were extensions of well-known company for brand names. The 30-second commercials all were for packaged grocery goods, and all the products ultimately were introduced into the market with varying levels of success or failure. For comparison, data also were extracted on 139 randomly selected 30-second commercials for 54 established packaged good brands.

All of the new- and existing-product commercials were researched prior to television airing; thus, respondents had no previous exposure to any of the executions.

Commercials that made use of familiar, preexisting advertising characters (e.g., the Pillsbury Doughboy) or established formats (e.g. the Valley of the Jolly Green Giant) were excluded from the data sets. New-product commercials of this type are campaign extensions and were thought to possess an advertising heritage that sets them apart from typical new-product advertising.

Each of the new- and existing-product commercials was researched among 30, or occasionally 50, female users of the product category who were recruited by shopping mall intercept and individually interviewed. Standard quotas were employed to achieve a balance of age and educational levels. A total of 2,320 respondents saw new-product commercials, and 4,176 saw commercials for existing brands. The studies were conducted between 1975 and 1980.

Respondents viewed on commercial, answered open-ended questions, and then described their responses to the commercial on the Viewer Response Profile, a set of sentence and word items that are rated on a six-point, disagree-to-agree scale. The items represent six factor dimensions: Relevant News, Stimulation, Brand Reinforcement, Empathy, Confusion, and Familiarity. (Information on Leo Burnett's development of the Viewer Response Profile, its reliability, and its application may be found in Schlinger 1979a and 1979b.)

Findings

To determine whether viewers in general rate new-product commercials differently from those for established products across the items included in the analysis, a MANOVA was performed. The resulting F-statistic was significant (Wilks' criterion = 0.785, exact $F(43,6495) = 42.11$, $p < .0001$), showing that consumers do rate the two classes of commercials differently. The next question, of course, is: How do reactions to new- versus established-product commercials differ?

As a first step to address this question, grand means were calculated across items representing each of the six standard factor dimensions of the Viewer Response Profile. The data indicate that viewers describe new- and old-product commercials as most different in terms of Familiarity, Relevant News, and Brand Reinforcement. Generally speaking, commercials for established products are seen as more familiar and reinforcing of established attitudes toward the brands, whereas commercials for new brands are rated

higher on Relevant News. Commercials for established brands also are described as more stimulating and empathic. (See Table 1.)

The factor mean scores provide only a broad outline of differences between new- and existing-product commercials. For greater detail, it is necessary to look at the data on specific VRP items.

Of the 43 items included in this analysis, 24, and 56 percent yielded a significant difference ($p < .001$) between mean rating of new- versus established-product commercials. Items show in Table 2 were rated higher for existing products. The conservative .001 significance criterion was used because of the large sample size and the desire to discuss only those differences that are substantively meaningful.

New-Product Commercials. Mean scores on the first two statements in Table 2 indicate that most viewers agree they learned something from commercials for new products. Commercials for existing brands, on the other hand, generate average ratings below the mean (3.5) of the scale on those two "news" and "information" items. The implication is that ads for new brands are seen as having higher news value to the consumer, as one would expect. Information in commercials for existing brands is likely to be redundant with a viewer's stored knowledge about the brand name, its attributes, and perhaps its advertising style. Therefore, the old product ads contain comparatively less information, as information theorists define that term to mean new, unexpected, and unpredictable content (Shannon and Weaver, 1949; South, 1957).

Scores on the Relevant News items in Table 2 also show that viewers of new-product commercials are more likely to (1) express a desire to obtain further information about the brand; (2) indicate tentative interest in trial; and (3) acknowledge dissatisfaction with currently used brands, perhaps because the ads inject a previously unknown brand into the consumer's mental map.

These differences between new- and old-product commercials suggest that the new-product ads stimulate relatively more brand-related interest and involvement. This does not necessarily mean that the new-product commercials are highly involving in an absolute sense. Packaged goods usually are described as a low-involvement product category, and television as a low-involvement medium (Krugman, 1965; Wright, 1974; Lastovicka, 1977; Lastovicka and Gardner, 1979; Kassarian and Kassarian, 1979). However, the newness of the brand and their messages seems to heighten viewer interest, at least in a forced exposure condition, which may generate a somewhat more involved response to their ads. This finding supports the hypotheses advanced by several researchers that there are multiple levels of involvement, and that involvement per se – whether with products, brands, attributes media, advertising executions, message processing, etc. – should be treated as a continuous rather than a dichotomous (high versus low) variable (Lastovicka, 1977; DeBruicker, 1979; Greenwald, Leavitt, and Obermiller, 1980; and Mitchell, 1981).

New-product commercials score higher on the two negative Brand Reinforcement items shown in Table 2. The first of these implies that viewers are more skeptical of the claims for new than for existing products. Such a reaction is logical given that consumers cannot evaluate the advertising claims in light of their own experience, and the finding supports an observation by McCollum/Spielman (1980) that: "With a new product the challenge of establishing credibility and conviction is probably greater than with an established brand."

Differences on the second negative Brand Reinforcement statement show that respondents claim to counterargue more when watching commercials for new brands. Although a scaled affective response cannot be assumed to measure cognitive activity such as counterarguing, the item does support the notion that viewers feel relatively more involved with the brands and claims in new-product commercials. It also may indicate that some new products had "benefits" or attributes which were undesirable to a portion of the target market.

Finally, the last statement in Table 2 shows that viewers felt it requires more effort to follow commercials for new than for old brands.

Existing-Product Commercials. Turning to Table 3, mean scores on Familiarity items support an interpretation that one reason commercials for existing products are easier for viewers to follow is that they are more recognizable or redundant. Respondents have heard most of the established national brands included in this research, and chances are that they have been exposed to past advertising campaigns.

Existing brands are rated higher than new brands on the two positive Brand Reinforcement items shown in Table 3. Consumers are relatively more certain that the established products are "dependable," "reliable," and "good." Even so, the untried new products do not score below the mean of the scale on Brand Reinforcement, probably because nearly all of these line extensions are explicitly associated with a familiar company or brand.

The remaining items in Table 3 which differentiate between commercials for new and existing brands have to do with the executional elements of the ads.

Interestingly, viewers describe old-product commercials as more entertaining, exciting, playful, amusing, unique, and attention-getting than ads for new products. They are more engaged by the execution and seem more apt to empathize with the characters and situations.

The interpretation of these executional differences is not entirely clear. It may well be that new-product advertising does tend to be less stimulating and empathic than old-product advertising, because more time in the new-product commercial is devoted to establishing product claims. However, another way to interpret the differences is that viewers of new-product commercials are preoccupied with the unfamiliar information and therefore do not pay as much attention to the execution.

Data Limitations

One limitation of the data used in this research is that the test commercials all were created by one advertising agency. The limitation may not be too serious, since there is a substantial amount of cross-fertilization between advertising agencies in terms of people and ideas, and since every large agency uses a wide diversity of advertising approaches for its clients' brands. Another limitation is that the data are drawn from convenience respondent samples (as are typically used in copy testing).

A potentially troubling limitation is the problem that it was not possible to match the two data sets in terms of the product categories or brands represented. Thus, some manufacturers are more heavily represented in one or the other sample of commercials since some are more active in new-product development than others.

One way of reducing heterogeneity was to limit the two data sets to packaged goods' advertising. In addition, to see whether similar results would occur when product category was strictly controlled, a subsample of new- and existing-product commercials for a single product category was examined. The results of that study are not shown because the differences between new and existing products in the subsample were almost identical to the difference found in the larger study. This increases confidence that the findings reported here are a function of advertising response differences and not product category differences.

Implications for Copy Development

The research reported here confirms that consumers respond differently in a number of ways to commercials for new products than to those for established brands. From this consumer-oriented perspective, new-product advertising forms a distinctive genre or category of advertising, and that fact should be taken into account when creating and researching commercials for new brands.

A number of hypotheses regarding new-product copy development are suggested by this analysis; however, these need to be confirmed via additional research.

Among other differences, the data show that viewers of new-product commercials are more likely to indicate that as they watched the advertising they thought of reasons not to buy the product. While this post-viewing attitudinal measure may or may not literally reflect counterarguing during commercial exposure, it does suggest some resistance to the persuasive message. Where relatively high levels of resistance are found or expected for a particular new product, advertisers might consider using persuasive tools designed to reduce counterarguing. For example, distraction has been examined as a device for reducing resistance and enhancing persuasion. Thus, an enjoyable execution, e.g., using humor, music, etc., might serve as a pleasant distraction, reducing resistance and generating a positive affect that could increase persuasion (Zimbardo and Ebbeson, 1970).

Of course, distraction-based executions would need to be copytested. Research on the effects of distraction in a marketing context have produced somewhat mixed results (Gardner, 1970; Venkatesan and Haaland, 1968; Bither, 1972; Bither and Wright, 1973; Roberts and Maccoby, 1973; Petty, 1977). In addition, there is the danger that a distraction device such as humor could backfire because it distracts consumers from the product message, or because it is done ineptly (McCollum-Spielman, 1980; Sternthal and Craig, 1973; Marketing News, 1981).

The data also indicate that the new-product commercials on the whole are less credible than those for established products – both because the claims are less believable, and because respondents are less certain that the brands are dependable and reliable. The implication for copy strategy is that special consideration might be given to bolstering credibility, perhaps by testing reactions to credible spokespersons, providing consumers with objective-sounding information about a new brand, utilizing convincing product demonstrations, or strongly linking the new product to a well-regarded brand or company.

There is an indication that new-product executions may be somewhat bland, i.e., not very stimulating or empathic. Tyler (1977), writing about his annual compilations of new-product successes for Advertising Age, concluded that "new-product advertising just isn't as full of fireworks and optical delights as the best for our established products." One hypothesis is that information overload can cause executional blandness. As McCollum-Spielman (1980) note: "We often see multiple vignettes rushing past in rapid-fire succession to demonstrate that this new product is portable, appeals to all kinds of people, has 'automatic pilot,' is easy enough for a seven-year-old to operate, is made from the latest transistor technology, has remote control, performs seven major functions and can be used for seven more which you would hardly guess." Copy strategists should recognize that advertising executions need to attract and maintain attention as well as deliver a focused message.

The finding that new-product commercials may stimulate consumers to seek more information about the brand, e.g., by looking at the package in the store, supports the notion that new-product commercials do not have to be overloaded with information describing detailed product attributes. A commercial may only need to communicate enough about the brand's benefit(s) to generate information-seeking and tentative interest in trial. Also supporting the case for relative simplicity is the fact that viewers say that new-product commercials require more effort to follow than those for existing products; it would seem desirable to minimize that effort.

The data suggest that one way new-product commercials "work" is to make dissatisfaction with one's current brand more salient. This is congruent with the commonly accepted belief that new-product commercials should effectively establish a meaningful point of difference between the brand and its competitors in order to be successful in the marketplace (Angelus, 1969; Booz, Allen and Hamilton, 1971; Davidson, 1976; Crawford, 1977).

Finally, the fact that the Viewer Response Profile scales produced meaningful and interpretable differences between new- and established-product commercials helps to support the construct validity of the instrument.

Table 1

Grand Means for Items Representing Six Attitudinal Factors

Factor ^a	No. of Items (n=43)	New Products (n=2320)		Established Products (n=4175)		t
		/X	SD	/X	SD	
Familiarity	4	2.64	0.84	3.05	0.94	18.06 ^b
Relevant News	9	3.85	1.02	3.53	0.96	12.35 ^b
Brand Reinforcement	6	4.24	0.83	4.48	0.86	11.01 ^b
Stimulation	10	3.46	1.00	3.62	1.00	6.18 ^b
Empathy	11	3.87	0.91	3.95	0.91	3.39 ^b
Confusion	3	2.34	0.78	2.31	0.77	1.5

^a Scores for items with negative factor loadings were inverted.

^b Significant at p<.001.

Table 2

Items Rated Higher for New-Product Commercials

Factor	Item	New Products (n=2320)		Established Products (n=4175)		t ^a
		/X	SD	/X	SD	
Relevant News	I learned something from the commercial that I didn't know before.	3.74	1.59	2.84	1.51	22.50
	The commercial gave me a new idea	3.58	1.47	3.04	1.36	14.59
	I would be interested in getting more information about the product	3.88	1.41	3.44	1.39	12.22
	The commercial made me think I might try the brand –just to see if it's as good as they say	4.13	1.42	3.80	1.44	8.92

	During the commercial I thought how that product might be useful to me.	4.20	1.41	4.00	1.42	5.46
	The commercial reminded me that I'm dissatisfied with what I'm using now and I'm looking for something better.	2.71	1.20	2.56	1.19	4.84
Brand Reinforcement (negative)	What they said about the product was dishonest.	2.28	0.93	2.11	0.90	6.80
	As I watched, I thought of reasons why I would not buy the product	2.69	1.43	2.48	1.37	5.83
Confusion	It required a lot of effort to follow the commercial.	2.43	1.12	2.30	1.10	4.48

^a All values are significant to $p < .001$ for a nondirectional (two-tailed) test.

Table 3

Items Rated Higher for Established-Product Commercials

Factor	Item	New Products (n=2320)		Established Products (n=4175)		t ^a
		/X	SD	/X	SD	
Familiarity	Saw before	1.98	1.23	2.79	1.68	22.50
	I've seen this commercial so many times – I'm tired of it.	1.84	0.99	2.19	1.15	12.96
	Familiar.	3.47	1.43	3.87	1.37	11.11
Brand Reinforcement	I know that the advertised brand is a dependable, reliable one.	4.00	1.36	4.59	1.17	17.35
	That's a good brand, and I wouldn't hesitate recommending it to others.	3.63	1.33	4.00	1.38	10.57
Stimulation	Exciting	2.84	1.26	3.07	1.31	6.95
	Playful.	3.12	1.40	3.37	1.44	6.81
	The characters (or persons) in the commercial capture your attention.	3.98	1.42	4.17	1.40	5.19
	Amusing.	3.49	1.40	3.66	1.42	4.67

	Unique.	2.92	1.35	3.06	1.41	3.93
	The enthusiasm of the commercial is catching – it picks you up	3.57	1.36	3.70	1.43	3.62
	I thought it was clever and quite entertaining	3.68	1.39	3.80	1.42	3.31
Empathy	I felt that commercial was acting out what I feel like at times.	3.02	1.38	3.22	1.45	5.56
	I liked the commercial because it was personal and intimate.	3.01	1.32	3.13	1.35	3.43
	Soothing.	3.79	1.29	3.90	1.30	3.33

^a All values are significant at $p < .001$ for a nondirectional (two-tailed) test.

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