The increasing use of emotion in advertising has been the subject of much discussion over the past decade. In order to understand how this shift has come about, consideration needs be given to the changes occurring in today's marketing environment, changes which have resulted in new marketing challenges. These challenges have reshaped the task which advertising is designed to accomplish and, hence, the nature of advertising itself. They have reshaped the way consumers respond to advertising, and the kind of research that is done to identify and measure that response. What follows is an examination of the classical approach to marketing and the environmental changes which are making this approach untenable for many of today's brands. These observations will provide insight into both the use of emotion in advertising and the new research techniques, which are being developed to create and evaluate emotional commercials.

The Classical Approach to Marketing and Advertising

What has come to be accepted as the classical approach to marketing is that which took root in America in the 50s and 60s and has become institutionalized by the example of corporations such as Procter & Gamble. The approach was based on the development of products with performance advantages over competitive brands. The products would then be marketed on the basis of these advantages, which in most cases, could be demonstrated in fairly straightforward, argument-style advertising. Under these conditions, the task of advertising would be to present the product attributes in a way that consumers could understand, believe, and remember, and to turn those attributes into perceptible, value-added benefits. The consumer, having seen the advertising, would be persuaded to make the sensible decision to purchase the brand. Ongoing advertising would be designed to reinforce that rational choice.

Accordingly, advertising research was developed to track and monitor this fairly predictable process. As Charles Channon has said, "...the logic of the advertising translates directly into the logic of the research: Can consumers remember the brand? Can they remember its promise? Is it important to them? Did they believe it? Will they buy it? If you believe the logic of your marketing, there really is no other way to go." [1]

This logic and the advertising that results from it will continue to serve many product categories, especially those where clear product differences and superiorities are still possible. However, it is becoming increasingly clear that more and more products today do not lend themselves to this model. New challenges, derived from the technology boom of the 70s and 80s, are forcing marketers to alter their marketing logic, and, hence, their advertising and advertising research logic.
New Marketing Challenges

The boom in technology is challenging marketers on two fronts: first, by altering the competitive landscape and, second, by altering the channels used to distribute information about products and services to the consumer--the media.

Because the competitive landscape has become increasingly cluttered with "me-too" products, services and benefits, product differentiation based on functional differences has become increasingly difficult. To many consumers, available options are beginning to look more and more alike. And even when a marketer does find and can convince consumers that he has a unique performance advantage over the competition, technological copy cats are seldom far behind. So, as brand clutter increases and functional benefits become less distinct and less likely to be acknowledged, marketers have had to rely more on those intangible characteristics of a product and its advertising that serve to establish a unique relationship -- or emotional bond -- between the brand and the target consumer.

As Jacques Sequela, the French creative director has eloquently stated, "Who, today, can decently be interested in a detergent which only knows how to wash? Detergents have given us too much proof of their multiple whitening powers ... Anyway, what is the purpose of a detergent if not to wash whiter ... Evidence is no longer enough." [4] Technological progress has equalized the ability to introduce a functionally superior product. And consumers, who are well aware that white is white and bright is bright, are no longer impressed by me-too claims and badgering talking-head commercials.

The second effect of technology has been on the channels through which we communicate product and service offerings to the consumer -- the media. Today, with the mere touch of a button, consumers can zap out or zip through commercials, or switch to a noncommercial channel during a commercial break. Given the ease with which a given commercial can be made to disappear and the number of alternative options available, the challenge to today's marketer is to create advertising which not only informs, but also engages the consumer to watch it long enough to hear its message. Advertising today cannot argue. It must entice. It must seduce. It must present an attitude about the brand that insinuates itself into consumers' lifestyle aspirations and self-perceptions.

More and more advertising is being developed, which, in addition to illuminating the functional benefit, is designed to engage the viewer in the commercial tale. It demands that the viewer participate and, himself, supply some of the meaning. As far back as 1963, Marshall McLuhan noted that, "...the need is to make the ad include the audience (in the) experience." The principle is embodied in the way one is drawn into a detective story as one tries to fill in the missing links.

Clearly, as advertisers strive to meet the challenges of increasing product parity, increasing media sophistication, and an increasingly sophisticated viewing audience with remote control in hand, their thinking must extend beyond the classical marketing logic of the 60s and 70s. It must extend beyond functional performance benefits and on to psychological and emotional needs as the sources of fulfillment that their brands deliver.
This has led and will continue to lead to different kinds of advertising. And, as the night follows the day, this must lead to different kinds of research -- research that seeks to uncover psychological motivations as well as functional needs.

**New Directions in Advertising Research**

The need to seek the magic, that sentimental bond between brand and consumer, has led to the rapid rise in methods borrowed from the disciplines of psychology, anthropology, and philosophy in advertising research. For example, the ways in which consumers and brands relate to each other, the symbolic associations consumers attach to brands, and the early emotional attachments which they form with them are all becoming grist for the creative mill. Such techniques allow the marketer to get at the kinds of psychological relationships between consumers and brands which are not easily accessible through more direct questioning.

These underlying motivations are not open to direct questioning because the consumer, himself, is often unaware of them. When the emotional consumer makes a purchase, the rational consumer is often the one to explain it. Blind taste tests show that consumers cannot reliably discriminate their own brand from others. And yet, when asked about their preferences, they readily claim that their brand tastes best [5]. New Coke may have hit the jackpot in a blind test, but the old original Coke was part of consumers' "emotional brandscape."

Psychological research has also shown that, when the verbal part of the brain does not know why a particular action has occurred but is asked to explain it, it will simple make up a plausible answer. And, of course, the individual will believe it! Michael Gazzaniga, a leading researcher in brain-behavior relationships states, "We feel that the conscious, verbal self is not always privy to the origin of our actions and when it observes the person behaving for unknown reasons, it attributes the cause to the action as if it knows, but, in fact, it does not. It is as if the verbal self looks out and sees what the person is doing and from the knowledge it interprets a reality." [2]

Likewise, when advertising is designed to implicitly stimulate a "gut" reaction as well as a cognitive one, it can be risky to ask consumers to explain their responses as if the situation were as simple as a + b = c. McLuhan has said, "Everybody experiences far more than he understands. Yet, it is experience, rather than understanding, that influences behavior, especially in collective matters of media and technology, where the individual is almost inevitably unaware of their effect on him." [3]

Clearly, when advertising extends beyond functional needs to emotional benefits, the advertising process is no longer a straightforward one. Therefore, efforts at evaluating its potential impact should focus less on the process of advertising and more on its outcome. That is to say, it may not always be fruitful (in fact, it may often be downright misleading) to ask consumers to explain their reactions to advertising. Rather, when a commercial is designed to affect a consumer in the "gut" as well as the head, advertisers would be better to focus their evaluative efforts on how the consumer's impression of the brand has changed as a function of his having seen the advertising than on asking the consumer to explain his reactions to the advertising itself. In evaluating emotional
advertising, it will also be less important to determine whether the consumer can remember the source of his impressions in the advertising, but rather, as Channon states, "whether the impression of the product is 'righter' or 'stronger' because of it." [1]

In conclusion, the marketer of the 1990s must interpret consumer needs and aspirations in terms of what products and brands he has to offer. Classical packaged goods marketing, grounded in functional preference and based on rational choice, is one approach, with its own set of assumptions and its own set of tools. These tools will continue to be useful for all of our brands some of the time, and some of our brands all of the time, but not for all of our brands all of the time.

Despite our customer's proclamations to the contrary, not all purchases are the result of the sensible, rationally-driven decisions which the logic of classical marketing would have us assume. To change or evaluate a consumer preference that is based primarily on a psychological or emotional attachment will require methods that are very different from those that are needed to change or evaluate a preference based on cognitive choice. It may require an attack on the psychological basis of the preference, itself.


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