

BLACK CONSUMER'S ATTITUDES TOWARDS ADVERTISING*

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OPSOMMING

Vraelysresponse van 'n groep halfgeletterde en ongeletterde Swartmense is ontleed met die doel om enkele gesindhede ten opsigte van advertensies te bepaal. Die nodigheid, geloofwaardigheid, doeltreffendheid en trefkrag van advertensies asook die aard van advertensiemedia is ondersoek. Betekenisvolle gesindhede kon vasgestel word en afwykings kon gedeeltelik toegeskryf word aan die samestelling van die groep wat ondersoek is.

Advertising in the western world has become an integral and vitally important aspect in the economic survival of practically all industry. It is generally accepted that advertising creates preferences and influences buying behaviour (Lambin, 1975). The relationship between advertising campaigns and sales tells this story. It is also evident that in the life of man, it not only affects the behaviour of millions in day to day situations, but advertising has become part of life itself in that it subtly motivates and shapes responses that otherwise would not have surfaced at all. Psychologically seen, advertising is a dynamic force and its positive and negative nuances have more than economic meaning only. The latter is often not realised, particularly on account of the practical demands of economic realities. The dynamics of the buying process can also be viewed from a different angle, namely in the sphere where basic motives and inner drive states of buyers are considered. This constitutes an approach towards the mechanics of advertising which stresses qualitative aspects rather than quantitative ones.

In terms of ordinary behavioural dynamisms, it is to be expected that tolerant and accommodative attitudes prevail with regard to advertising. People normally believe in the value and meaning of advertisements and even though it will under certain circumstances be considered to be necessary evils, a dominantly positive approach is expected (Bogart 1978;

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Cannon, 1973; Lambin, 1975; Leymore, 1975). It is a clinical axiom that negative attitudes ranging from indifference to aggression, cause build-ups of resistance and this can in the final instance, apart from literacy and cultural-sophistication factors, seriously hamper advertising effectiveness.

Relatively little is known about the buying behaviour and attitudes of South African Blacks towards advertisements (Deppe, 1975, p.6). In view of the increasing buying power of the latter, influencing behaviour in this regard is of cardinal importance in the economic sphere. It is the intention of this study to investigate the nature of certain attitudes of unsophisticated (illiterate and semi-literate) Blacks in so far as these can influence the effectiveness of advertising.

METHOD

A questionnaire consisting of ninety items was compiled after careful consideration of the attitudes which needed to be analysed. These attitudes relate to five broad aspects of advertising. Relevant items in the five categories are listed in Tables 1 to 5. The significance of the difference between number of affirmative and negative responses on each item was determined by means of the chi-square test. Items with differentiation values of 72 + 108 were statistically significant at the 0,01 level and are tested in the said tables.

The underlying rationale of this analysis is that agreement/ disagreement with simple statements will collectively reflect basic attitudes on the research field covered. Especially if the questions relate to a non-clinical field where personal identity need not in any way be affected or endangered, valid responses could be expected. It was also accepted that all respondents to the approached, in some way had contact with different kinds of advertising media, be it through discussions or personally. None of the respondents lived so far from any trade centre that they had indeed never come into contact with any of the media.

Subjects

Questionnaires were given to second-year psychology students who live in the rural areas of Northern Transvaal viz. areas bordering Pietersburg, Tzaneen and Louis Trichardt. Questionnaires were to be administered on parents and relatives, who were illiterate and semi-literate. Precise ages of respondents could not be ascertained because this was mostly

unknown. It was approximated to range between 30 - 65 years. 120 Males and 60 females responded. The majority of respondents always lived in rural areas (125 versus 55).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Attitude on the necessity of advertising

For those who grow up in environments which literally survive on advertising in one way or another, it may be difficult to visualize a society where such a necessity is questioned. Insight into the nature of such attitudes may drastically affect the kind of advertising directed at less advanced societies. It is self-evident that the nature of campaigns aimed at naive versus sophisticated buyers will necessarily have to differ. Van der Reis (1969 p.14) maintains for instance, that the interpretation of ads depends on the level of educational sophistication of the interpreter rather than on the racial group to which (s)he belongs.

The items contained in Table 1 are aimed at the necessity of advertising. The frequency of response to each item is also listed.

TABLE 1

ITEMS REFLECTING AN ATTITUDE ON THE NECESSITY OF ADVERTISING

		<u>True</u>	<u>False</u>
11 .	Too much advertising makes people sceptical about the worth of the product.	132	48
15.	Advertising is a waste of money.	33	147
20.	I do not waste my time reading ads in newspapers.	75	105
21.	(2) The world will lack sparkle if advertising is abolished.	151	29
21.	People waste lots of time reading advertisements.	47	133
24.	Even low income groups shop along the lines suggested by advertisements.	124	56
34.	I shall be perfectly happy if I never have to listen to an advertisement again.	47	133
35.	Good advertising is essential for good business.	163	17
36.	I don't know what advertising means.	18	162
37.	Good advertising is inseparable from a modern way of life.	142	38
38.	Without advertising, shopping would be impossible.	55	125
46.	Food is food, irrespective of who the manufacturer is.	112	68
48.	My buying habits are influenced by advertisements.	71	109
58.	Advertisements build resistance towards the products		

	they are trying to promote.	73	107
78.	Basic essentials need to be advertised in order to be sold.	121	59

The respondents under consideration know what advertising means (item 36), and they appreciate its integral connectedness with our modern way of life (item 37). They also accept its necessity for good business (item 35) and they reject a contention that was encountered in item 11, namely that advertisements make people sceptical about the very project it tries to promote (item 53). They also agree that advertisements add sparkle to life in general (item 21) and time *is* spent at reading or listening to advertisements (item 20). It will even cause unhappiness if advertisements are not read (item 34). Advertising is not a waste of money (item 15) and advertisements should be read (item 21) by all because even low income groups buy on the strength of advertisements (item 24). The ratio of positive to negative items is 12 : 3. This finding is in consonance with the contention of Anderson et al. (1973, p. 33) and Bogart (1978, p.19) on the economic functions of advertising.

A note of apathy and negativism is, however, sounded by the results of as many items as the above which indicated a positive attitude. The respondents, for instance, believe that shopping can be as effectively done without advertisements entering into the picture (item 38). They also believe that the manner of presentation of food products by different manufacturers is relatively unimportant (item 46 and 78) and, most importantly, it is believed that buying habits are *not* influenced by advertisements (item 48).

A finer analysis of the constitution of responding groups and a correlation of results of specific items responded to by specific groups could possibly shed light on the above interpretations. Such detailed analysis was however initially not considered and details could not be established afterwards.

Alternatively, the ambivalence can be explained in the variation of the population tested. The younger generation may adhere to the former interpretation while the older generation could be inclined to believe as indicated in the latter interpretation.

Attitude on the effectiveness of advertising

The items listed in Table 2 refer to the effectiveness of advertising. More specifically they reflect the degree to which respondently believe in the convincing power and effectiveness of advertising.

TABLE 2

ITEMS REFLECTING AN ATTITUDE ON THE EFFECTIVENESS OF ADVERTISING

		<u>True</u>	<u>False</u>
11.	Too much advertising makes people sceptical about the worth of a product.	132	48
22.	Advertisements where Blacks carry a message for Blacks are more effective than those which carry a message for all racial groups.	100	80
32.	One cannot shop intelligently without information supplied by advertisements	65	115
39.	I often buy a new article on account of a convincing advertisement.	88	92
41.	Advertising consists of a lot of lies.	85	95
42.	I usually buy articles without paying attention to brand names.	67	113
44.	It is a waste of time and effort to insist on a specific branded article.	51	129
45.	I always prefer to buy branded clothing.	120	60
48.	My buying habits are influenced by advertisements.	71	109
49.	Most advertisements are meaningless.	79	101
58.	Many advertisements fail to stimulate the interests of consumers.	118	62
59.	Advertisements seldom give enough information about the products they are promoting.	129	51
62.	Products would still be bought even without being backed by adverts.	150	30
65.	Women rely very much on advertisements.	146	34
66.	There's nothing that can advertise a product better then the product itself.	154	26
73.	Advertisements are only read by people who want to buy something.	41	139
76.	Most consumers rely on advertisements for determining product quality.	109	71
4-2	I have tried out some new breakfast foods on account of good advertising.	100	80
5-2	One should carefully consider different advertisements before buying a new TV set.	118	62
11-2	Quality products sell without any advertising.	125	55
12-2	Inferior products need a lot of advertising support before they are bought.	139	41
<u>16-2</u>	<u>I will be quite willing to advertise if I had anything for sale.</u>	<u>151</u>	<u>29</u>

Item 76 which states that most consumers rely on advertisements for determining product quality, is supported by the statements "that articles are bought only after paying attention to brand names" (item 42) and "I have tried out some new breakfast foods on account of good advertising" (item 4). Items with the implication that advertisements are believed in, are the following: "Advertisements are only read by people who want to buy something" (item 73); "One should carefully consider different advertisement before buying a new TV" (item (2) 5); "Inferior products need a lot of advertising support before they are bought (item (2) 12); "Women rely very much on advertisements" (item 65) ; The belief in the effectiveness of advertising is also reflected in the willingness to offer a product for sale by advertising (item 16-2). A noteworthy indicator on the effectiveness of advertisements is that for the group of respondents under discussion, advertising is not race-related (item 22).

In contrast to the above indications, it again seems that some resistance or apathy towards advertising exist with the group under consideration. This is firstly implied where relevant items are not as significantly accepted or rejected as could be expected.

Item 11 shows an open suspicion towards heavy advertising. Item 39 indicates that almost 50 % of the respondents resisted buying new articles on the strength of convincing advertisements. They even believe that advertisements are meaningless (item 49). Similarly, the negative statement that "advertisements consist of a lot of lies" is not significantly rejected (item 41). Along the same line of thinking it appears that "advertisements seldom give enough information about the products which are promoted" (item 59) and, also in this regard, "many advertisements fail to stimulate the interest of consumers" (item 58). Disconcerting statements, namely that "products would still be bought even without being backed by advertisements" (item 62) and "quality products sell without any advertising" (item (2) 11), are both very significantly accepted. In this regard it is further indicated that "one can shop intelligently without the information supplied by advertisements (item 32) and, also, "buying habits are not influenced by advertisements" (item 48).

An attitude of pragmatic valuation of the product and not a subjective evaluation of advertisements, is indicated by the significant acceptance of the statement that "there is nothing that can advertise a product better than the product itself" (item 66).

Although this also reflects a questionable contradiction, the indication remains that the buying of necessities may in certain circles be promoted by a different kind of accentuation.

This finding corresponds with that of Lambin (1975, p. 147), that consumer behaviour is more rational than advertisers assume.

Attitudes on advertising media

It requires little reasoning to realize that in educated, sophisticated societies, specific media can be used with much more effect than others to attain certain goals. In advertising, the comparative success of the different media to conquer a market has been well documented (Anderson et al., 1978; Bogart, 1976, pp.107-116; Bourgeois & Barnes, 1979). On the other hand, the effectiveness of certain media will largely be neutralized if a target group is found lacking in terms of some interpretational aspect. A valid question which may arise relates to whether groups of Black people who may experience difficulty in the interpretation of visual symbols, be it subtle, suggestive pictures or the written word, interpret advertising messages as they are intended to be. Further more, do illiterates respond similarly to accepted stereotypical sound onslaughts which were found to be effective in other societies where training and education almost forces conformity in thinking and doing. Van der Reis (1969, p.27) has convincingly pointed out that differences in interpretation of media are not racial in origin. "They are interrelated with differences in educational level, the stimulation of the home environment and contact with the complexity of twentieth-century urban life". Items relating to such aspects are contained in Table 3.

TABLE 3

ITEMS REFLECTING AN ATTITUDE ON THE NATURE/MEDIUM OF ADVERTISING

		<u>True</u>	<u>False</u>
12.	I usually prefer to buy things which have been brought to my notice via the radio.	47	133
18.	Advertisements over the radio are much more effective than those in newspapers.	96	84
33.	Radio-advertisements distract attention from the beautiful music.	111	69
51.	Musical advertisements are very effective.	137	43
52.	Story-type advertisements are more effective than musical advertisements.	62	118
54.	Radio-Bantu advertisements are very shallow and unchallenging.	108	72

56.	Press adverts are seldom properly interpreted by Blacks.	103	77
57.	Radio-Bantu advertisements are directed at illiterates and semi-literates.	112	68
61.	Many sophisticated Blacks prefer buying goods advertised in the white press.	112	68
67.	Advertisements with an American touch appeal to many Black youth.	141	39
70.	Personalities used in the adverts can influence the success of the advertisement positively.	146	34
71.	Some picture advertisements are very permissive and therefore undesirable.	109	71
72.	TV will promote advertising better than the press.	128	52
75.	Advertisements with an English touch appeal to most Black sophisticates.	125	55
80.	Many advertisements in newspapers pass unnoticed because of their small size.	151	29
2-2	Personalities used in advertisements can influence the success of advertisements negatively.	95	85
15-2	The bigger the advertisement the stronger the effect.	129	51

Items referring to the press indicate that the respondents believe that advertisements are mostly not properly interpreted. This may imply that the advertisements are not striking or simple enough (items 56 & 80). Conservatism is reflected in the significant response which indicates that "permissive" advertisements which seem to have impact in western cultures are frowned upon by the respondents who completed the questionnaire (item 71). Conversely, an elitist attitude surfaces in items which reflect a tendency to buy articles which have an American connotation (item 67); an English touch (item 75) and advertisements appearing in the press mainly intended for whites (item 61). This finding is supported by the work of Mkele (1959, p.7-12 and Deppe 1974, pp.55, 69).

Responses to items 52, 54, 57 and 72, imply that sophisticated patrons are building up resistance to certain kinds of advertisements and in terms of their financial strength at least a dualistic advertising system needs to be developed. Pragmatic considerations (item (2) 2 and (2) 15) apparently need not be discarded. It is also apparent that a specific medium does not have an advantage over and above another (item 12) although the anthropological observation

that music has a very special niche in the culture of Blacks is borne out by the responses to items 51 and 52.

Attitudes on the credibility of advertisements

The reaction of respondents towards the credibility of advertisements indicates that future effectiveness of campaigns may be questionable unless rigid standards of honesty are not adhered to. A basic premise of advertising is that the consumer believes in what is presented. It cannot simply be a matter of bringing articles to the notice of those who are supposed to invest money for obtaining such articles. Unless consumers are convinced that advertisements contain truthful details of what they need to buy, resistance even to the reading of adverts may be encountered. The long-term effect of such attitudes is of critical importance to the advertising industry. It is a matter also receiving attention elsewhere in the world (Dehollain, 1976) and it seems imperative that if the continued effectiveness of advertising is to be maintained, control of communication in this respect needs to be updated.

TABLE 4

ITEMS REFLECTING ATTITUDES ON THE CREDIBILITY OF ADVERTS

		<u>True</u>	<u>False</u>
26.	Advertisements tend to overstress the value of articles.	140	40
28.	Advertisements are intended only to influence the rich.	30	150
29.	Advertisements contain a lot of misinformation.	101	79
30.	Newspaper advertisements are usually very misleading	81	99
41.	Advertising consists of a lot of lies.	85	95
69.	Products seldom live up to the claims of the adverts promoting them.	131	49
3-2	TV will promote advertising better than the radio.	141	39
13-2	Too much advertising makes people sceptical about the worth of a product.	139	41
19-2	A fortune can be made out of good advertising	151	29

The respondents think that the value of articles is overstressed (item 26) and that products seldom live up to the claims of promotions (item 69). The belief also that too much advertising makes people sceptical about the worth of a product (item 13), coupled with the

non-rejection of the assertion that adverts are a lot of lies, confirms that a warning signal related to the credibility status of advertising is not unwarranted. In general, table 4 implies that even in the face of the advertisement bombardment, respondents are alert to specific unwarranted claims.

If the consumer accepts even before he tries a product, that he is being misled, it is evident that advertisers need to consider an "honesty in advertising" campaign. In this respect different media could effectively be used to reinstate credibility because advertising as such is not condemned (item 3). It is in fact believed that advertising will continue indefinitely and a fortune is even to be made out of it (item 19). It is further contended that advertising is not a waste of money (item 15, table 5).

Attitudes on the impact of advertising

An important requirement of advertising is that it should make a useful, lasting impression which has selling value and the impression should last even until there is an occasion to buy (Britt & Lucas, 1950, p.13). This requirement is best summarized by the term *impact*. It is the very essence of advertising and its success and effectiveness largely relates to the extent to which this goal is attained. Although feedback from the consumer is indirectly apparent in terms of sales, this may be a costly means of establishing impact, or rather the possible absence of impact.

Furthermore, in an economic world sedated by an avalanche of colour and sound, the whole question of ensuring *impact* becomes rather shaky. The implication of this is that if *impact* is neutralized by the nature and sheer volume of advertisements, attitudes and other human factor considerations may well revitalize the field.

Although it requires indirect deduction, an analysis of relevant items reflects that the general feeling of respondents support the view that advertisements have impact. A significant number says that advertisements are witty (item 14). This will not be noticed unless the wit has impact. Similarly, noticing colourful advertisements (item 16) noticing the nature of roadside advertisements (item 40), believing that also children notice advertisements (item 14-2), noticing the bright lights of cities, (item 20) support this implication.

Conversely a number of statements dampen the possible self-satisfied euphoria which may occur on account of the above positive outline. Item 49 which states that most advertisements are meaningless, is not significantly rejected.

TABLE 5

ITEMS REFLECTING ATTITUDES ON THE IMPACT OF ADVERTISING

		<u>True</u>	<u>False</u>
14.	Some advertisements are very witty.	156	24
16.	I enjoy the colourful advertisements by the bigger firms.	136	44
17.	I never read the advertisements in newspapers.	45	135
20.	The bright lights of advertisements lend a romantic atmosphere to cities.	152	28
40.	Roadside advertisements are very effective.	136	44
48.	My buying habits are influenced by advertisements.	71	109
49.	Most advertisements are meaningless.	79	101
74.	Excessive advertising can be a bore.	146	34
77.	Each advert has got a life-cycle and after some time it is ineffective.	146	34
7-2	I can easily recall three brand names representing good clothing	131	49
14-2	Children do not notice advertising at all.	63	117

Distractor items

The items contained in Table 6 were inserted as distractors. Such items are either self-evident or they cannot truly be responded to on account of a lack of information. These items can also serve as a test of truthfulness/rapport. If all self-evident responses differ from what can normally be expected, the rapport of the respondent can be questioned and such a questionnaire can be invalidated. This aspect was not tested in this study.

TABLE 6

		<u>True</u>	<u>False</u>
6.	One can only buy food wisely by carefully considering different advertisements on food.	94	86
13.	I do not spend a single cent on luxuries.	40	140
19.	Money spent on advertisements should be deducted from the price of articles.	87	93
23.	More money should be invested in advertisements to make people realise the worth of articles.	103	77
31.	A sound education is necessary to understand most advertisements.	110	70

47.	Some motorcars are better than others.	168	12
55.	Some products do not merit being advertised.	142	38
68.	Only shaky products need be supported by advertising.	96	84
79.	One never tunes in on a radio-station for the sake of advertisements.	144	36
17-2	Whites pay more attention to advertisements than Blacks.	118	62
18-2	Young people pay more attention to advertisements than do older people.	141	39

Non-discriminatory items

Table 7 contains items which were initially considered to have diagnostic value but turned out to have little significant differentiating value. Although deductions can be made from the results, for the purpose of this paper it was decided to rather concentrate on the statistical significant items.

TABLE 7

ITEMS WITH INSIGNIFICANT DIFFERENTIATING POWER

		<u>True</u>	<u>False</u>
25.	Articles will never be bought by the public unless supported by a sound advertising campaign.	87	93
43.	A brand name is sufficient evidence of quality.	88	92
50.	Most advertisements are vague.	94	86
60.	For many Blacks the advertising of a commodity leaves the impression that it is a common product	87	93
63.	Advertisements are read only by fashion conscious people.	82	98
64.	Many Blacks deem goods advertised in newspapers for Blacks, inferior.	87	93

CONCLUSION

The technique of directness whereby pertinent statements are made and responses requested, or where pertinent questions are asked to establish true inclinations and dispositions of respondents, is not new in scientific research (Prediger, et al., 1973). Valuable

information for effective communication can in this fashion be obtained on feelings which are normally not expressed, especially by those who may live an isolated and frugal life.

In contrast to studies which endeavour to establish attitudes on the effectiveness of techniques and media in advertising aimed at high density urban areas, this study intended to ascertain various attitudes of relatively naive respondents who, expectedly would have comparatively little economic means and also relatively little social and other communications contact. The value of advertising for this target group may therefore not immediately be as remunerative as is normally hoped for by the trading sector. However, in a world which gets increasingly smaller and markets which are constantly found in ever more unexpected regions, the findings reported in this study may prove to be not really a futile exercise. It is common knowledge that frequency modulated radio waves penetrate the wilds of Africa, Borneo, Brazil or other so-called undeveloped regions at an almost alarming rate. It is but a matter of time before also the press, television and such communication media will carry the message of what, why and how to buy, to those who presently may look and listen with suspicion.

ABSTRACT

Questionnaire responses of a group of semi-literate and illiterate Blacks were analysed in order to establish the nature of attitudes towards various aspects of advertising. Feelings on the necessity for advertising, its credibility, effectiveness, impact and the nature of the advertising media were investigated. Significant attitudes were established and contrasting views could partly be ascribed to the composition of the experimental group.

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