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# Methodological Guidelines for Advertising Research

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# Methodological Guidelines for Advertising Research

## **Abstract**

In this article, highly experienced advertising academics and advertising research consultants John R. Rossiter and Larry Percy present and discuss what they believe to be the seven most important methodological guidelines that need to be implemented to improve the practice of advertising research. Their focus is on methodology, defined as first choosing a suitable theoretical framework to guide the research study and then identifying the advertising responses that need to be studied. Measurement of those responses is covered elsewhere in this special issue in the article by Bergkvist and Langner. Most of the frameworks are derived from the authors' own published work, although other frameworks are noted where appropriate.

## **Disciplines**

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# **Methodological Guidelines for Advertising Research**

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**In this article, the highly experienced advertising academics and advertising research consultants, John Rossiter and Larry Percy, present and discuss what they believe to be the seven most important methodological guidelines that need to be implemented to improve the practice of advertising research. Their focus is on methodology, defined as first choosing a suitable theoretical framework to guide the research study and then identifying the advertising responses that need to be studied. Measurement of those responses is covered elsewhere in this special issue in the article by Bergkvist and Langner. Most of the frameworks are derived from the authors' own published work, although other frameworks are noted where appropriate.**

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In the present article the authors have selected what they consider to be the seven most important improvements of a methodological nature that need to be implemented in today's advertising research. The initial emphasis in each is on theory and on mistakes to avoid and the closing emphasis in each comes in the form of a research guideline. By way of overview, the seven methodological concepts highlighted in this article are:

1. The probabilistic nature of the four buyer response steps – exposure, ad processing, brand communication effects, and brand purchase – and whether or not the steps need advertising repetition.
2. The three separate sequence of responses, at each of the last three buyer response steps, that must be taken into account when planning and testing advertising.
3. In measuring the ad processing step, the need to estimate the prospective buyer's probability of paying initial attention to the ad.
4. In measuring the brand communication effects step, the need to measure brand awareness as the necessary precursor to brand attitude.
5. Clarification that the Rossiter-Percy Grid applies not to whole product or service categories but to the target audience's purchase decision for a particular brand.
6. The necessity of pretesting benefit claims, not benefits.
7. The future of ad testing.

Methodological issues in advertising research may be seen as largely a case of choosing a reasonable model or framework with which to plan the advertising research study. Almost any framework is better than none but surprisingly few have been proposed in the literature, with the consequence that advertising research, at least in the academic world, today resembles a scrambled set of jigsaw pieces that teachers and future managers are

supposed to somehow put together. In direct contrast with others' efforts, the advertising planning frameworks in what has become known as "the Rossiter-Percy model" are the only comprehensive, systematic, and conceptually consistent frameworks available in the advertising textbook and journal article literature. Following, in the authors' opinions, are the seven most important ones.

## **1. Buyer Response Steps and Repetition**

The first important concept to be understood in conjunction with the planning of advertising research is that advertising, to be successful, must pass through four basic buyer response steps – exposure, ad processing, brand communication effects, and brand purchase behavior or other purchase-related actions (to keep things simple, the following discussion refers to all behaviors targeted by advertising as "brand purchase"). As McGuire (1969) explains in connection with persuasion, these steps should be regarded as a chain of *multiplicative probabilities*, thus  $p(\text{exposure}) \times p(\text{ad processing}) \times p(\text{brand communication effects}) = p(\text{brand purchase})$ . The chances of advertising resulting in brand purchase are radically reduced by a low probability at any or all of the first three buyer response steps. Even the last step, brand purchase, is probabilistic since, because of possible derailment at the point of purchase, purchase cannot be guaranteed even after an ad has been effective on all prior steps. Consider, for example, the second step, ad processing. Ads that appear on informational websites, like *Google* or the various news sites, have a very low probability of being processed by those who visit the page because visitors with an information-seeking mindset have learned to ignore them. Let's say that a banner ad is placed in an online newspaper visited by 10% of the population, that it is noticed and read by 5% of visitors, and that a typical 1% of these visitors are successfully communicated to by the banner ad and click through to the advertiser's website. The probability chain is then  $.10 \times .05 \times .01 =$

.00005, or five ten-thousandths of a percent of the population that clicks through to the website and thus has any chance of buying the product as a result. This compares with, say, a 1-page magazine ad where the probability of the ad being processed is more like  $p = .49$ , meaning that a completely persuasive ad that reaches 10% of the population would result in a possible 5% of the population, that is,  $.10 \times .49 \times 1.00 = .05$ , trying the product (a scenario that could well have been attained in the pre-TV days with the big magazines *Life*, *Look*, and perhaps *The Saturday Evening Post*). Even a prime-time TV commercial on a relatively high-rating series program would be lucky these days to reach 10% of households (in January this year, according to Nielsen ratings reported in *Advertising Age*, CBS's *NCIS* was the highest rating series program, an average episode reaching 10.7% of households, followed by CBS's *The Big Bang Theory* at 9.7%). A new 60-second TV commercial will likely be paid full attention to at least once by 80% of those households, but only 2% may be "in the market" and have the category need for the product. The estimated sales result:  $.10 \times .80 \times .02 = .016$ , or 1.6% of householders can possibly buy the brand as a result of the advertising – and that's only if they are in the purchase situation soon after and don't get derailed at the point of purchase by seeing a better or lower-priced brand. Rossiter and Percy, you will find, are the only textbook writers to draw attention to this advertising response probability chain, and it is a sobering reminder of just how hard it is to get advertising to work. The takeaway message for advertising researchers from this advertising response probability chain is that you *cannot study just one of the steps* – and usually the ad processing step is the one selected – *and on that basis make an inference about the ad's effectiveness*.

Also neglected in most advertising textbooks, beside the probabilistic chain of advertising response, is the role of *repetition* within the buyer response steps. Rossiter and Percy identify four different advertising situations as follows: (a) *Direct-response ad or one-time promotion offer* – where repetition is not necessary and the buyer response steps are

gone through only once, that is: exposure → ad processing → brand communication effects → brand purchase. (b) *Ad repetition prior to action* – this is the scenario needed for new product advertising. The potential buyer has to cycle through the first three buyer response steps at least several times before action can take place, thus: repetition (exposure, ad processing, brand communication effects) → brand purchase. This ad repetition sequence has major implications for advertising research, particularly for the pretesting of TV commercials. Although this never happens in academics' or practitioners' pretesting methods, informational new product commercials have to be exposed at least twice in a solus setting and about four times in a clutter setting, and transformational new product commercials at least three times and about six times in a clutter setting, before they can be properly evaluated for their ad processing probability and their brand communication effects probability. For those readers unfamiliar with the careful and specific Rossiter-Percy definitions: *informational* advertising addresses advertising situations where the primary motive for brand purchase is negatively originated, originating from a consumer-perceived problem or anticipated problem, so that the advertising promises negative reinforcement – called “negative” because it negates a problem – by buying this brand as the best solution to the problem; whereas *transformational* advertising addresses advertising situations where the primary motive for brand purchase is positively oriented, so that the advertising promises *more* positive reinforcement – sensory, intellectual, or social – from buying and using this brand than is promised by other brands. (c) *Full sequence recycling after trial for repeat-purchase products and services* – this is the type of repetition needed for established consumer packaged goods and regularly accessed services. Continued advertising is needed to keep the buyer buying the brand in the face of advertising for competing brands; thus, repetition of all four buyer response steps – full sequence recycling – occurs (exposure, ad processing, brand communication effects, brand purchase). In the established-brand scenario,

current TV commercials and print ads have to be retested with brand purchasers to see whether the brand's ads are "wearing out" so that executional variations can replace them.

(d) *Recycling on the last two buyer response steps with no advertising needed* – this is the ideal situation because it saves the advertiser money. In this no-advertising scenario, the current buyer of the brand remembers it or encounters it at the point of purchase and the situation becomes repetition on the final two steps only (brand communication effects, brand purchase). A very valuable purpose of advertising research is to track the *post-purchase* period to see what happens and whether another wave or "burst" of advertising needs to be aimed at current brand buyers.

The twin problems for advertising researchers, then, are that they study advertisements without regard to the buyer response steps that ads have to pass through and they also fail to account for advertising repetition. Advertising repetition is basically a media scheduling problem, about which academics, apart from those few like Peter Danaher who consult to leading advertisers on media planning, have had nothing to say for years. Most critically, media planning *theory* has been neglected in journal articles and especially in textbooks, where media planning theory remains in a primitive and, given that this is where most of the advertiser's budget goes, unsatisfactory state (referring only to the simplistic media concepts of reach and frequency and the all-too-aptly-named Gross Rating Points). The exception is again the Rossiter and Percy textbook. Media-planning frameworks introduced in the 1997 edition (see also the Rossiter and Danaher 1998 book on advanced media planning, which contains an easy-to-use CD software package) include the concept of *reach patterns* and a management-judgment formula for estimating the required *minimum effective frequency* per advertising cycle.



## 2. Three Response Sequences to Be Taken Into Account

Traditionally, advertising students are taught that there is a single “hierarchy of effects” of advertising response operating at any one time. The Lavidge-Steiner hierarchy – unawareness, awareness, knowledge, liking, preference, conviction, and purchase – is usually taught as the relevant sequence for mass-media advertising; and the venerable AIDA sequence of attention, interest, desire, and action is usually taught as the relevant sequence for direct-response advertising. Rossiter and Percy are the only advertising theorists to explain that there are actually three different response sequences operating at once (they operate “inside” the last three buyer response steps of ad processing, brand communication effects, and brand purchase) and that all other single hierarchies, such as Lavidge-Steiner and AIDA, confuse and conflate the sequences and also omit many essential advertising response types. The complexity of the inner workings and interrelationships of the response sequences has no doubt deterred other researchers from coming to grips with them, but this is no excuse. *If these three response sequences represent advertising reality, then advertising researchers must accommodate them in their research.* The three sequences are diagrammed in Figure 1.

Figure 1 about here

First is the *ad processing* sequence consisting, in the Rossiter-Percy approach, of a “heterarchy” of responses that include Attention, Learning, Emotional responses, and Acceptance responses. What makes things complex is that Learning, Emotional, and Acceptance responses loop back to, and depend on the presence of, *sustained* Attention responses (see Figure 1). The problem in ad testing is that researchers never measure all four types of ad processing response, or at least not with the same respondents in the same study, and if they did they would be unlikely to know how to relate them unless they knew about the Rossiter-Percy ad processing theory. For example, the Learning response – and in particular,

the rather mindless rote learning of the brand's key benefit – is critical for an ad aimed at low-involvement brand choice, whereas the more carefully considered Acceptance responses – spontaneous cognitive responses made during ad processing – are critical for an ad aimed at high-involvement brand choice because they could just as easily be rejection responses, pushing the probability of successful ad processing down to zero. Also, Emotional responses, both positive and negative, have to be measured very specifically – not as overall affect or liking-disliking – and they have to be analyzed as an emotion *shift* (a negative emotion shifting to a slight positive emotion for informational advertising, and a neutral state or slight negative emotion shifting to a strongly positive emotion for transformational advertising). The lesson here is that advertising researchers cannot be said to have studied ad processing properly *unless they measure all four processing responses, analyze them at the individual respondent level rather than aggregating them across respondents as is typically done, and analyze emotional responses as requiring a specified shift.*

The results of ad processing feed into the next sequence, that of *brand communication effects*. These communication effects, and there are five of them, are called Category Need, Brand Awareness, Brand Attitude, Brand Purchase Intention, and Purchase Facilitation. (Rossiter and Percy's textbook is the only book that has identified all five communication effects, specified their accompanying options as communication objectives, and offered single-item measures of them.) Brand communication effects are learned in parallel, not in sequence, although they operate pretty much in sequence (as a hierarchy) during the brand choice process. Advertising for a familiar brand, which would usually represent a low-involvement brand choice, needs only to reinforce two communication effects: Brand Awareness, and Brand Attitude *conditional on* – that is, elicited from – prior Brand Awareness. Advertising for an unfamiliar brand in a category that is anything other than totally riskless, signalling a high-involvement brand choice, has to address *all five*

communication effects: it has to create or remind the prospective buyer of the Category Need, instil Brand Awareness *connected to* the Category Need, develop a favorable Brand Attitude *conditional on* the prior Brand Awareness, and encourage Brand Purchase Intention *conditional on* the presence of Category Need, and usually has to provide Purchase Facilitation with perhaps a promotion offer and a convenient means of obtaining the product. The problems in both academic and applied ad testing for brand communication effects are that *no thought is given to which of the brand communication effects need to be measured* and that in testing ads for high-involvement brand choice, such as direct-response ads (with digital media's direct-response ads joining traditional media's direct-response ads to form what is now the largest category of advertising), the first and last of the communication effects, Category Need and Purchase Facilitation, are neglected.

The third and final sequence of effects to be taken into account, and in fact it has to be considered first when planning advertising research, is the *buyer stage* sequence. This sequence operates for individuals most often in hierarchical order. Brand-related communication effects feed into the buyer behavior hierarchy, which consists of five stages: Not in the Market, Need Arousal, Search and Evaluation, Purchase, and Usage. One of the most common problems, virtually universal in academic advertising research, is the testing of ads *without knowing what particular stage the test respondents are in*. As an example of this mistake, researchers in an advertising research article published not too long ago in *JCR* tested ads for unfamiliar imported beers with a U.S. undergraduate college student sample that consisted primarily of underage females, most of them, of course, Not in the Market, and, not surprisingly, the bipolar brand attitude ratings that the researchers measured clustered around the neutral midpoint. Another example is advertising intended to reach brand buyers not prior to purchase but actually while they are in the Usage stage; this post-purchase advertising can reduce possible dissonance and reinforce choice of the brand for next time.

Proprietary ad testing services are somewhat better in this regard in that they are likely to screen at least for category usage versus non-usage, although the other stage distinctions are usually missed.

### **3. The Probability of Attention to the Ad**

The most neglected aspect of ad processing in both commercial and academic advertising research, ad testing research especially, is the *probability of the prospective buyer paying initial attention to ads* in the different media of advertising and to the different advertising units within that medium. Initial attention determines the entire likelihood (probability) of the ad processing step being successfully completed. Attention probabilities, of course, also vitally affect the actual delivery of media plans (via the exposure step of the buyer response sequence). The Rossiter co-authored textbooks (1987, 1997, 1998, and 2005) are the sole compiled source of all-media estimated ad attention probabilities.

Academic advertising researchers have always overlooked ad unit attention factors and now the neglect has spread to practitioners, too. In the good old days, most large broadcast advertisers subscribed to Burke's Day-After Recall service which estimated attention to TV commercials and radio commercials of different formats and lengths by measuring the proportion of the program audience who could recall seeing or hearing the commercial within a day or two after it being aired. Similarly, most large print advertisers who spent substantial budgets in magazines and newspapers subscribed to the Starch Noted service which estimated attention to print ads of different formats and sizes by the through-the-book recognition method. For some reason, use of these two services has dwindled to a trickle but, fortunately for these traditional media, attention norms have not changed (simply because human psychophysiology has not changed). Traditional media advertisers, therefore,

can still use the figures from 40 years ago in the first edition of the Rossiter-Percy book which were reported in index form, though easier to understand are the same figures in the 1997 book reported as probabilities. Advertisers in non-mass media – notably outdoor, directories, and in digital media – are not so fortunate. Your authors had to find needles in haystacks to get reasonable attention estimates for ads in these media, especially for the quickly diversifying forms of digital advertising. Another problem was that the attention-estimating methods for these non-mass media ads were never as clean as the day-after recall method for broadcast or the ad recognition method for print. However, for managers faced with deciding on media plans, *almost any reasonable estimate of ad-unit attention differences is infinitely better than no estimate at all.*

The importance of ad unit differences in attention-getting capacity should be apparent from the probabilities estimated in Table 1. A 30-second TV commercial, for example, has an estimated .65 probability of being paid attention to (but this drops to about a third of that if the program being watched has been time-shifted). A 60-second TV commercial, often used to launch a new product or service, has about a .76 probability of being paid attention to and even though you don't get twice the "bang for your buck" the audience increase might be worth it in terms of increased prospects. A 1-page consumer magazine ad, on the other hand, has an estimated .49 chance of being noticed to the extent that the consumer can later recognize the ad as being in that issue, but only among those who subscribe to or purchased the magazine; secondary or "pass along" readers have only about a 5% chance of seeing a given ad, making total circulation figures for magazine readership uninformative unless the advertiser knows the extent of primary readership. Outdoor ads, a non-mass medium form of advertising which includes indoor posters, receive a tremendous boost in attention from a stand-alone location as opposed to being placed among other outdoor ads; the attention probability advantage of stand-alone placement, .80 vs. .40 for pedestrians and .53 vs. .38 for

drivers, would in most cases be well worth the extra cost. As a final example, companies' websites, which of course have largely replaced brochures, have a 100% probability, obviously, of having the homepage being attended to by those who voluntarily visit the site, but only about a 25% chance of the visitor going to the next page and a diminishing probability of opening subsequent pages.

Table 1 about here

Attention probability findings make boring reading, quite frankly, and apart from the few who are consultants to proprietary advertising research companies, academics have neither the resources nor the interest in doing this type of research. However, *advertising textbook writers among academics should at least report the research that has been done*, as well as emphasize the *critical importance of it for advertising effectiveness* (due to the fact of attention's fractionating effect on the probability multiplication chain outlined earlier). And advertising academics who engage in real-world consulting should definitely point out these attention norms to their advertiser clients, if only because attention has such a large effect on overall advertising response.

#### **4. Brand Awareness: The Gatekeeper Communication Effect**

While Attention serves as the gatekeeper before other ad processing responses can occur, Brand Awareness plays a similar role among the communication effects at the next step of buyer response. Among the communication effects, *most advertising researchers skip over Brand Awareness and study only Brand Attitude*, or  $A_b$  as it is commonly referred to. Consider the situation of an ad for a new or fictitious brand. The researcher will conclude that the ad they are studying has been effective if it appears to increase attitude toward the brand, usually by comparing the post-exposure attitude rating given by the experimental

group with the attitude rating registered by an unexposed control group. Little do they realize that this improved attitude could never come into play unless the ad has also achieved brand awareness. In fact, the new attitude will never be elicited unless the consumer or prospective buyer happens to encounter and recognize the brand when in a shopping situation or when searching on a retailer's website, and it will never be retrieved from long-term memory unless the prospect is able to recall the brand when the category need arises. Brand awareness is therefore a gatekeeper.

Brand Awareness is very tricky to measure properly, and is necessary to measure the appropriate type for the brand choice situation at hand. As Rossiter and Percy uniquely point out, there are *two basic types* of brand awareness, involving recognition and recall respectively, and a *third compound type*, increasing in importance in today's giant retail displays, called brand recall-boosted recognition. The researcher can figure out the predominant type of brand awareness by conducting up-front research (or, it must be said, by doing a little sensible introspection and thinking) to construct what Rossiter and Percy call a *behavioral sequence model*. This can easily be done in *focus-group research* by asking the participants, individually, to mentally walk through the last purchase or purchase attempt in the product or service category, with the researcher carefully making a record of the main cue that initiated the brand choice. Table 2 shows the possibilities.

Table 2 about here

Brand Recognition is the appropriate form of brand awareness to measure when the brand is encountered, usually among other brands, at the point of purchase. (The Rossiter-Percy Grid, shown later, gives some typical examples of brand recognition situations.) Here, the initiating cue is the brand name or the brand package or brand logo itself – and it is important to determine which one of these specific cues is the cause of the recognition

response because that is the cue that should be emphasized in the brand's advertising. To measure Brand Recognition in an advertising pretest, the researcher has to show the respondents a typical competitive *brand display* and asked them to point out as quickly as possible those brands that they recognize, allowing 10 seconds, a generous search time for any brand display in the real world, for this task. If this test is conducted in up-front research, the researcher can ask respondents *how* they recognized each brand, because that will further indicate the precise recognition stimulus or stimuli to include in the advertising. There is also the occasional situation of *auditory* recognition of the name when the brand name is spoken, as when ordering a beverage in a restaurant or when a friend or acquaintance in conversation is recommending alternatives.

Brand Recall is the appropriate form of brand awareness to measure when brand choice is initiated *prior* to the point of purchase (again, see examples in the Rossiter-Percy Grid). The initiating cue here, of course, is the very first communication effect, Category Need. The brands are not available to be recognized, so they have to be recalled from long-term memory *in response to the category cue*. Notice that brand recall cannot, as some proprietary ad-testing company researchers seem to believe, be tested by seeing whether test respondents can recall the brand name from the *ad*; it matters only that they can recall it from the category cue. Most often, what has to be recalled is the brand name so that the prospective buyer can go online or look up a directory to find out where the brand can be bought. Likely the biggest mistake made in all forms of advertising is to emphasize or repeat the *brand name only*, without connecting it to the product or service category. In an ad test, category-cued brand name recall can and should be tested before administering the brand attitude measure. A pre-post design is ideal here but a fair approximation can be made from an experimental-control design by comparing the two groups' recall of the target brand at the



individual level and then recording as successful brand recall the proportion of respondents who recall the target brand in the, say, the top three when given the category cue.

Brand Recall-Boosted Recognition, which occurs when the prospect has to recall the brand first and then go looking for it in a competitive display, is an increasingly prevalent brand awareness situation. Not only are supermarket and drug retailers becoming larger in their category displays but so also are department stores and clothing stores, with a flood of name brands and retailer brands for consumers to choose from. In this brand awareness situation, advertising has a much more complex task: it has to stimulate brand recall by connecting the brand tightly to the category and also has to emphasize the appropriate brand recognition cue. In measuring this compound type of brand awareness, the recognition test obviously has to come first, followed by the recall test. The researcher then has to analyze the results in reverse order and then score recognition conditional on recall.

Brand-awareness measurement is nuanced and difficult, so it is not too surprising that *academic researchers take the easy way out by not measuring it at all*, and that proprietary ad testing and tracking services take the wrong way out by *measuring brand awareness incorrectly*. The Rossiter-Percy approach is the only approach that draws attention to this major advertising research problem and offers a theoretically sound solution.

## **5. Misuse of the Rossiter-Percy Grid**

The Rossiter-Percy advertising planning grid is probably the present authors' best-known contribution to the advertising research literature. However, it is almost always misunderstood and misused. A new version of the grid that hopefully will clear up these misunderstandings and prevent the grid's misuse is shown in Figure 2.

Figure 2 about here

Misunderstanding takes the form of not realizing that it is a 6-cell grid, not the usual 4-cell grid such as the surprisingly still-referenced FCB Grid (the major inadequacies of which were pointed in *JAR* by Rossiter, Percy, and Donovan back in 1991). The first two cells, nearly always ignored by advertising lecturers and advertising researchers, refer to Brand Awareness types (brand recognition or brand recall, respectively) which precede the next four cells, which refer to Brand Attitude types (forming a 4-cell grid of brand purchase involvement crossed with informational or transformational purchase motivation). Thus, *six cells* not four, and the two brand awareness cells cross with the four brand attitude cells so that there are *eight* planning options in the Rossiter-Percy Grid.

Misuse comes from regarding the attitude part of the grid as referring blindly to whole product or service categories – automobiles, for example, are typically classified by researchers as high involvement-informational; fashion clothing is typically classified as high involvement-transformational; laundry detergent as low involvement-informational; and soft drinks as low involvement-transformational. Rossiter and Percy always made it clear that classification in the attitude quadrants was based not on the product category but on (1) *brand purchase risk*, as perceived by the brand loyalty-based target audience, for the *next* purchase of the brand, be it a first purchase or a repeat purchase, and on (2) the informational or transformational nature of the *primary motive* exhibited by that target audience for purchasing that brand. A target audience of genuine new category users who have not yet purchased in the category would be making a high-involvement (high perceived risk) decision in buying any brand, almost regardless of the riskiness of the product or service category; imagine, for example, how long the young environmentally conscious consumer of today would spend deciding on his or her first brand of laundry detergent. A target audience of brand loyals would usually be making a high-involvement decision in trying out some other brand, whereas these same brand loyals, as long as there has been no significant model

change or major damage to the company's reputation, would be making a *low*-involvement decision when repeat-buying their usual brand.

Several crucial problems in advertising research stem from ignorance or misuse of the Rossiter-Percy Grid. The first problem is that advertising researchers never specify, let alone screen for when testing ads, *the brand-based target audience* and therefore cannot properly classify the advertised brand as being low involvement or high involvement. (Advertising researchers need to screen for *five* possible target audience types as listed in the grid, which fall into either the low-involvement or high-involvement classification.) The second problem is that without specifying the brand-based target audience advertising researchers cannot identify those communication effects that have to become communication *objectives* for the campaign. (A low-involvement advertising situation calls for the correct type of brand awareness and either brand attitude increase or brand attitude maintenance as the two communication objectives, whereas a high-involvement advertising situation usually calls for category need generation, the correct type of brand awareness, brand attitude creation or change, brand purchase intention formation, and purchase facilitation – thus all five communication effects become communication objectives.) Finally, advertising researchers should take note that the study of *creative execution tactics*, which includes the appropriate type of presenter to use and indeed whether or not to use a presenter, makes absolutely no sense without first classifying the advertising situation into the cells of the Rossiter-Percy Grid. (On this latter ground, researchers should note that almost every empirical study in the advertising research journals can be discounted as incomplete and uninformative.) The Rossiter-Percy Grid, for which no pallid substitute will suffice, is therefore *the single most important planning framework* for advertising researchers to consider as well as for real-world advertisers to use.

## 6. Brand Attitude: Informational or Transformational

The Rossiter-Percy textbook, not so much in the first edition but certainly beginning with the second edition, makes extremely important contributions to the theory of Brand Attitude. There are actually three main contributions: a brand attitude model, an explanation of how informational advertising works, and an explanation of how transformational advertising works.

(a) Rossiter and Percy provided a model, a “free standing” emotion-added extension of the pioneering Fishbein model, showing how brand attitude can be created, increased, or changed downwards in some cases, in two different and not necessarily incompatible ways: by instilling the learning of *brand benefit beliefs* (via so-called informational advertising) or by associatively pairing the brand with specific *favorable emotions* or even with an overall feeling of positive affect (via so-called transformational advertising). This is a logical, quantifiable model. We know from our industry contacts that many managers use it, but we have seen not one academic use it in an advertising research study.

(b) Informational advertising instills brand benefit beliefs by making *benefit claims*, not by trying to communicate the benefit literally. Indeed, brands competing in the same product or service category often address the *same key benefit*, but advertising agencies are differentially effective in creating belief in this benefit for the brand simply because they make a more persuasive benefit *claim*. Advertising researchers, commercial or academic, invariably fail to understand the difference between a benefit, objectively stated and general, and the all-important benefit claim, subjectively stated or visually portrayed, and specific. To the present authors’ knowledge, the sole exception has been the professional advertising researcher Howard Moskowitz, who for many years has been testing the persuasiveness of specific visual, verbal, and musically conveyed benefit claims.

Informational ads have to work immediately if they are to work at all (think direct-response ads, for example). This means that *informational print ads should be tested with a single exposure to the test audience* whereas *informational broadcast ads should be allowed two exposures* because it is usually too difficult to pick up the benefit claims from a single exposure. The brand's benefit claims do not have to be remembered, although "catchy" short and concretely worded benefit claims often *are* remembered. What is essential, however, is not whether the consumer recalls the benefit claim but rather that the claim has resulted in an increase in or, if already very positive, reinforcement of the consumer's attitude toward the brand.

(c) Transformational advertising – the type of advertising that gives advertising its popularity – *slowly* builds brand attitude by the deliberate, or more often accidental, use of *evaluative conditioning*. Evaluative conditioning, unlike classical conditioning, is very resistant to extinction, which means that a transformational brand attitude, once it has been established, can survive long hiatus periods. For advertising researchers, the slow buildup of evaluative conditioning means that *transformational ads cannot be validly tested after a single exposure*, and in fact it is difficult to test them at all unless the researcher employs a single-item bipolar rating measure of  $A_b$  introduced immediately after seeing or hearing the ad. At least *three solus exposures* are needed to properly test a transformational ad, which is equivalent to about six exposures under normal media conditions.

Transformational advertising is the only type of advertising that lends support to the oft-heard claim arguments made by advertising agency creatives that "advertising can't be measured," meaning in Rossiter-Percy terms that the brand attitude can't be measured with a detailed questionnaire, or that "it takes time to build," meaning in Rossiter-Percy terms that the ad needs time to achieve enough exposures at the individual level for evaluative conditioning to take place. That said, there is a lot of ill-designed transformational

advertising out there, due to advertising researchers *failing to pretest independently the evaluative intensity of the visual, auditory, and verbal cues* that are supposed to achieve the transformation.

## **7. The Future of Ad Testing**

Our colleagues Lars Bergkvist and Tobias Langner review ad testing *measures* in a separate article in this issue, so here the present authors take the opportunity to comment on where we think ad testing, that is, pretesting, is going as a *methodology* and where it should be going. Specifically, we foresee a big rise in the method of Management Judgment Ad Testing, a method first explained in the Rossiter-Percy textbooks. Online ad testing, we predict, will cause this rise.

The rapid rise of the Internet and with it the category of so-called digital advertising – now ranking in the top three budget-spending categories in most countries – has been accompanied by a return to the old-fashioned method of split-run ad testing, known in its digital reincarnation as A/B ad testing. Split-run ad testing originated for testing print ads, then, with the advent of cable TV it was extended to the testing of TV commercials. With the Internet, the split-run method can now be used to test digital print ads and online-delivered TV commercials as well (radio commercials since the early days, and print ads in traditional media nowadays, are hardly ever pretested, and neither are outdoor ads). Increasingly, pretests of online ads are being conducted cheaply through services such as Survey Monkey, which charge per question, so that the focus is on end-result questions such as purchase intentions or, in the case of direct-response ads purchase enquiries or actual purchase orders. There is little room for diagnostic questions, if they are included at all, that can reveal why the ad did or did not work.

Rossiter and Percy's solution is to perform most of this diagnostic analysis up front. To do this, some commercial ad-testing services are turning to automatic expert systems for ad testing and diagnosis but the problem with this method is that it is "one size fits all" and cannot possibly respond to the many variations in communication objectives and creative tactics that characterize different types of advertising. In the 1997 Rossiter and Percy book, a new procedure called Management Judgment Ad Testing was introduced. MJATs are completely customized to fit the brand and the advertising campaign. And they can be used to pretest all forms of advertising. Intended as a precursor to consumer ad testing, a Management Judgment Ad Test used alone will result in far less risk of bad advertising than no pretest at all. An example is given in Table 3 for Management Judgment testing of a 1-page ad to be placed in newspapers and magazines for the launch several years ago of the Saab 9-3 automobile in Australia. The ad employed a headline using a creative benefit claim aligned with the contemporary issue of environmental protection but also cleverly suggesting the car's sufficient horsepower: "The new Grrrrreen." This short questionnaire diagnoses the critical variables of (1) target-audience addressability, (2) product category specificity, (3) brand-name identification, (4) communication of the key benefit claim, and (5) reinforcement of the corporate brand's values. About 6 to 10 judges are needed for a reliable management judgment ad test – and for major campaigns in large companies or government organizations up to 30 judges can be recruited. Ratings on the 11-point scale shown are written or typed by the judge in the boxes next to the questions. Median ratings of at least 7 are required on all criteria (in this case five criteria) for the ad to be approved. Notice that you can still "split run" test using two MJATs, or you can split-test a new ad against the previous one.

Table 3 about here

The Management Judgment Ad Test accomplishes several things that cannot be achieved by using any other type of ad test. Firstly, it forces managers to think about and

prepare, before commissioning the advertising, a proper *creative brief*. This neglect quickly gets remedied when managers realize how off-base most ads are. Knowledge of the Rossiter-Percy ad processing responses and of which are the essential brand communication effects is extremely helpful here. Secondly, the MJAT usefully ensures *management buy-in* to those creative executions that survive the test. This means that managers get what they want from the ad agency and, on the other hand, that they cannot, as happens a lot, scapegoat the agency for campaign failure. Finally, whereas passing even a well-designed MJAT is not a guarantee of a successful ad or indeed a successful campaign, what the MJAT will do is *greatly reduce the downside risk* of running an unsuccessful campaign and never knowing why it did not work.

## **Conclusions**

Our recommended guidelines for improving the methodology of advertising research can be summarized as follows:

1. Advertising researchers must acknowledge the probability chain of advertising response and when planning advertising research studies must account for the buyer response steps of exposure, ad processing, brand communication effects, and purchase. They cannot continue to study only one of these steps, as is typically done, and then claim that they have studied advertising effectiveness.

2. Advertising researchers must understand that there are three sequences of advertising response operating at the same time: the ad processing sequence, the brand communication effects sequence, and the buyer stage sequence. Single “hierarchy of effects” sequences should not be taught, let alone relied on to plan advertising research. Neglect of



the last sequence, buyer stages, means that you will not be able to identify the appropriate target audience for the advertising.

3. Most advertising research studies focus on the ad processing step and the brand communication effects step and sometimes both. In studying ad processing, researchers must measure all four processing responses – attention, learning, emotions, and acceptance – and must analyze these responses at the individual level, not as responses aggregated over the total sample as is common analysis practice. More sophisticated is the understanding that advertising to a low-involvement target audience requires learning responses whereas advertising to a high-involvement target audience requires acceptance responses during ad processing. Most importantly advertising researchers must account for initial attention paid to ads in different media and of differing size (print ads) and duration (broadcast ads) because initial attention probabilities are the largest single factor affecting ad processing.

4. In studying brand communication effects, researchers must explain why they are including or excluding the following five communication effects – category need, brand awareness, brand attitude, brand purchase intention, and purchase facilitation. They must note that brand awareness and brand attitude must always be measured and that brand attitude cannot come into play until the prospective buyer has achieved brand awareness, which in turn means brand awareness of the appropriate type – either brand recognition, category-cued brand recall, or brand recall-boosted recognition.

5. Also essential for planning advertising research is the Rossiter-Percy Grid. This 6-cell grid requires the manager (and the researcher) to specify the type of brand awareness and the type of brand attitude to be achieved, with the latter depending on the low vs. high degree of risk perceived by the particular target audience in buying this brand on the next purchase occasion. Most critically, the creative tactics studied by advertising researchers are not

general, as most advertisers and researchers believe, and the study of creative tactics makes no sense unless they are studied in the correctly classified cells of the Rossiter-Percy Grid.

6. Advertising researchers must understand the distinction between benefits, objectively stated, and subjective advertised claims about those benefits, and only the latter are of any importance. Only one researcher that we know of correctly studies benefit claims – visual, verbal, and musical – and other researchers, if they wish to produce realistic findings about advertising effectiveness, need to follow this lead.

7. Our final recommendation is that advertising researchers adopt the management judgment ad test method. This method, besides being cost-effective and encouraging management buy-in, forces the advertising researcher to consider and specify the ad processing and brand communication objectives in the sort of detail that we have outlined in this article.

### **Acknowledgements**

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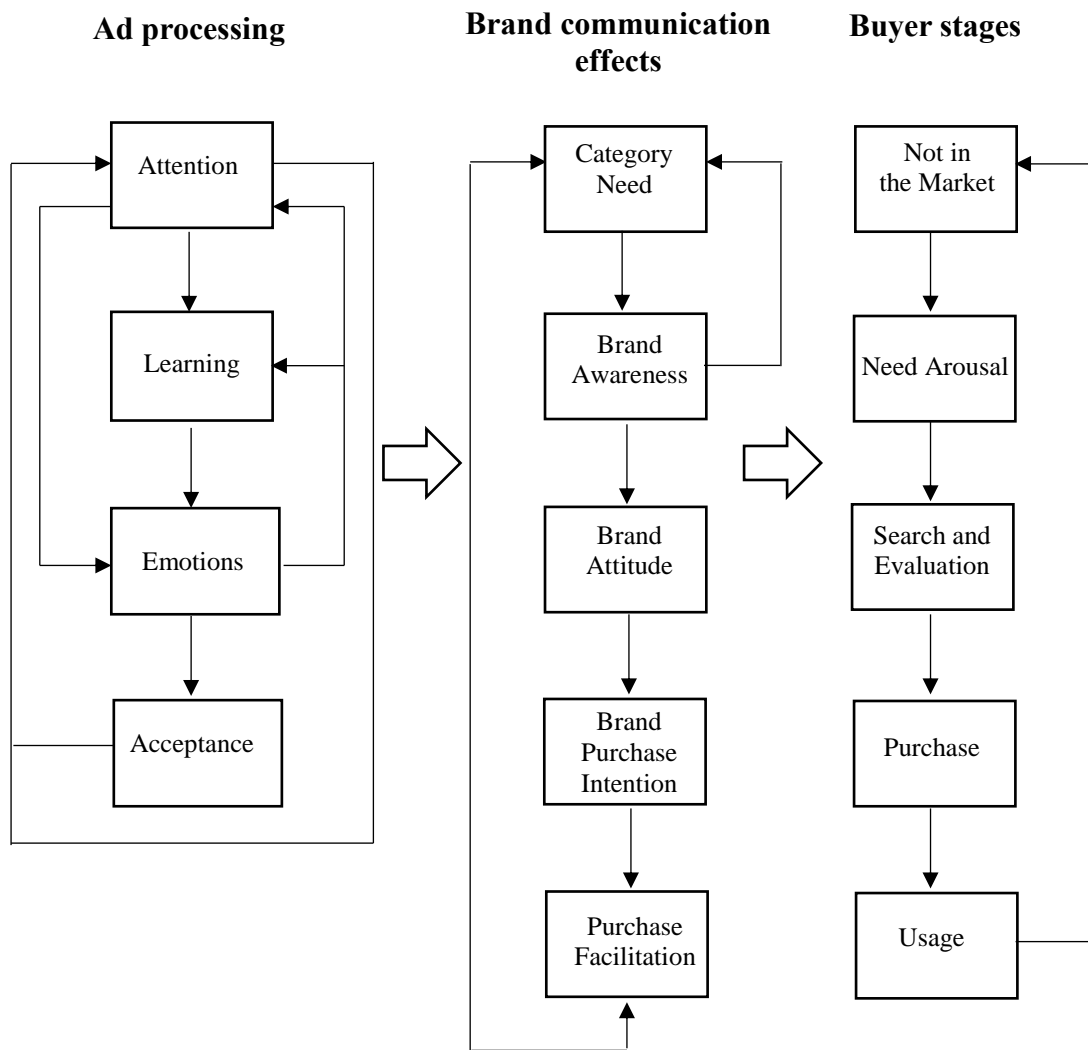


FIG. 1. Three simultaneous response sequences.

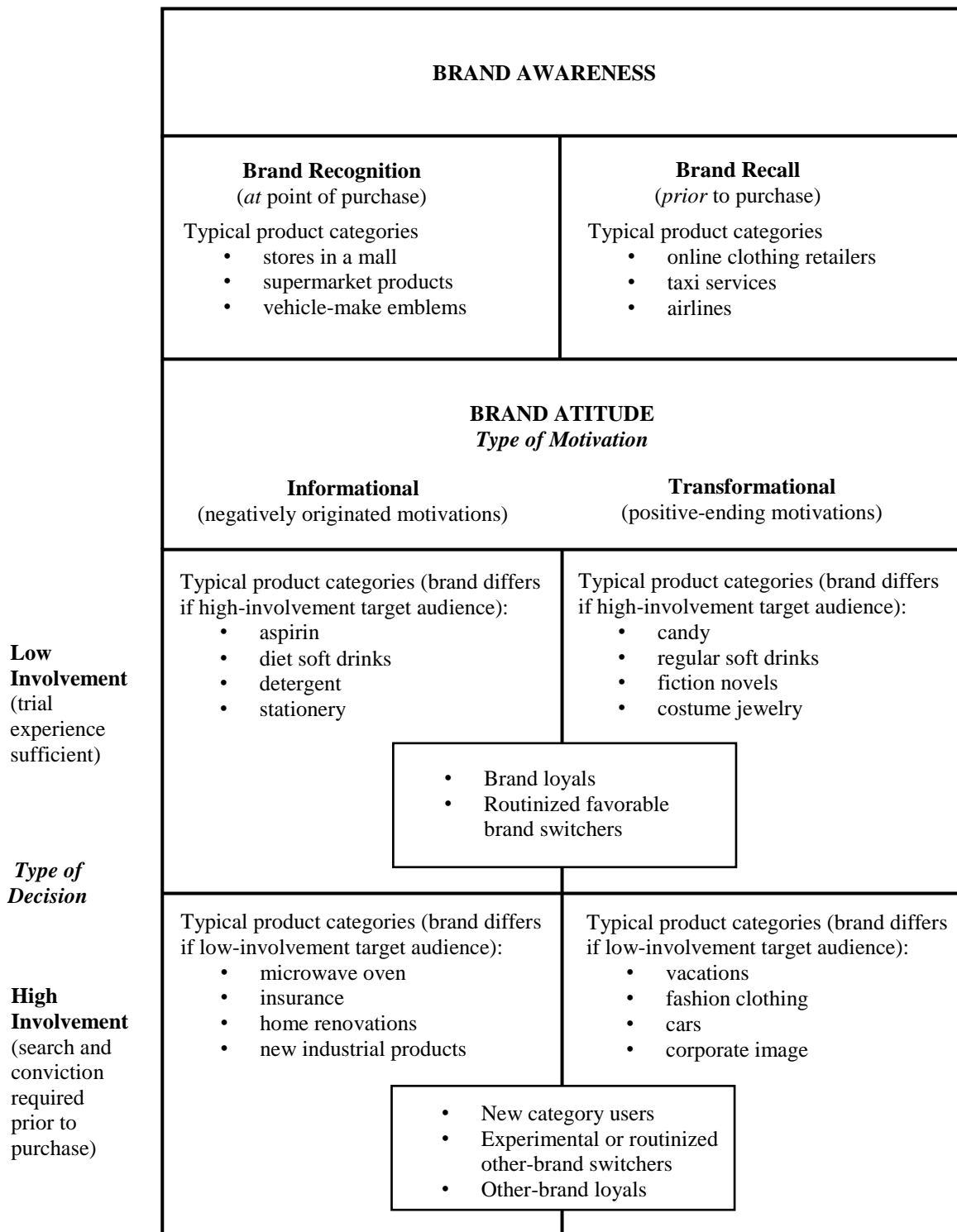


FIG. 2. Rossiter-Percy Grid

TABLE 1

## Attention Probability Estimates for Various Ad Units

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TV commercials		Radio commercials	
90-sec. or longer	1.00	60-sec.	.42
60-sec.	.76	30-sec.	.30
30-sec. (standard)	.65	15-sec.	.24
Co-viewed	.60	10-sec.	.21
Solus	.70		
15-sec.	.54		
10-sec.	.45		
Newspaper Ads	B&W	2C	4C
2-page ad	.52	.68	.77
1-page	.43	.56	.64
½-page	.30	.39	.45
¼-page	.21	.27	.31
Magazine Ads	Consumer	B2B	
Multipage, 4C insert	.78	n.a.	
2-page, 4C spread	.64	1.00	
1-page, 4C	.50	.64	
1-page, 2C	.39	.55	
1-page, B&W	.34	.46	
½-page, B&W	.24	.32	
Outdoor Ads	Pedestrians		Drivers
Overhead or line of driving	n.a.		.92
Stand-alone outdoor	.80		.53
Stand-alone indoor	.90		n.a.
With adjacent ads	.40		.38
Bus side, taxi back	.30		.50
Bus shelter	.40		.25

Yellow Pages (incl. e-Yellow)	
1-page display	1.00
½-page display ad	.82
In-column, ¼-column or ¼-page display	.72
In-column, less than ¼-page	.55
In-column listing (normal or bold)	.16
Online (Web) Ads	
Permission email (opening)	.68
Spam email (opening)	.34
Banner ad – static	.30
Banner ad – popup or animated	.40
Website (from click-through)	
Home page	1.00
Page 2	.24
Page 3	.21
Page 4	.15

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TABLE 2

## Brand Awareness Types and Cue-Response Sequences

Brand awareness type	Initiating cue		Awareness response
Brand Recognition	Brand name, pack, or brand logo	→	Recognize brand then ask self “Do I have the category need?”
Brand Recall	Category need	→	Recall brand name
Brand Recall- Boosted Recognition	1. Category need	→	1. Recall brand name
	2. Search for brand	→	2. Recognize brand



TABLE 3

Example of a Management Judgment Ad Test Questionnaire

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Ad: Saab 9-3 Automobile Judge: John Smith  
"Grrrrreeen" Date: Sept 2007

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10  
 ↑ ↑ ↑  
 not at all just acceptable excellent

1. How well does the ad "signal" the target audience?  
 (Australians who can afford an imported car)

2. Is the product category (sporty imported cars)  
 quickly evident?

3. How memorably identified is the brand-item name in  
 the ad (Saab 9-3)?

4. (The key benefit claim for all Saab car ads is  
 "Environmentally clean but doesn't compromise on  
 performance"). How clearly does this ad convey the key benefit  
 claim in its exact intended meaning, i.e., not as two  
 separate benefits?

5. How well does this ad reinforce Saab's corporate  
 brand values:

- Concern for the environment
- Premium quality

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