



Demarketing

A curious term. How long has it been in circulation? We have been involved professionally in the effort to "de-market" tobacco use, an effort as demanding of marketing talent, creativity and media savvy as any dreamed up by Don Draper and his colleagues for the other side (c.f. "Mad Men", the best show on television).

More recently we see the three largest soft drink manufacturers funding a joint campaign touting how they are removing sugared soda from schools. Are they trying to stay a step ahead of possible government regulation? Our national level of obesity surely doesn't help the cost of health care for which we all pay the price, to quote from Minnesota's tobacco demarketing program.

A Recovery?

We are picking up a variety of signals that the research business is turning around. We are getting more calls from clients (thank you) and fewer from desperate field services. In fact, our online panel providers seem quite busy.

We read that business recruiting in general is picking up. That's small comfort to last year's graduating class that may well see their lifetime earnings hobbled. Data show that first-year earnings and employment level impact how a worker does financially for the rest of his/her career.

What may well lag is hiring into research jobs. Companies are returning to profitability but many have done so by paring staff levels. The AMA does an annual employment survey so it will be interesting to see what they find.

Going to a Conference

Paul will be out of the office at a professional conference Monday-Wednesday, June 7-9. He will check messages periodically, but no serious project work will get done during this time.



Many Comparisons

So you have done a test in which eight different concepts have been rated. The obvious question is whether there are significant differences between them. Too often the word is passed down to the programmer to run significance tests, and he/she does—all 28 pairs. Wrong.

That approach almost guarantees that one pair will be found to be "significantly different at the .05 level", by chance alone. You don't want to do that. What is appropriate is a more-sophisticated multiple range test that evaluates everything at once. It is more conservative in that it avoids the danger of so many false positives.

Data permitting—and they don't always—a good statistician will run something like a Scheffé or Tukey test. It will tell you which clumps of scores are significantly different from which other clumps of scores. We will tell when you this needs to be done. Were that others were so careful.

A Unified Field Theory?

One of these years we may actually commit to writing up the theoretical framework we employ in thinking about consumer behavior. "Theory" needn't mean "idle speculation." Ours would incorporate solid empirical generalizations, constructs, and practical experience from a range of fields. Good theory is very useful in doing effective research. Our field, unfortunately, is littered with old concepts and habits that are increasingly dubious in the light of modern science.

Disabusing our clients of these myths is complicated by the need to disabuse your clients of them as well. They learned ideas in MBA programs or from other suppliers that have stuck, for better or worse. We can't wave a magic wand and just fix things, but we can be clearer regarding what we believe about consumer behavior and what that means for doing research.

In the balance of this column and in others to follow, we will spell out certain core assumptions.

Feelings about products/brands come first; opinions follow. When we ask a survey question about a brand, it may be the first time that the consumer has actually had to articulate a "rational" opinion. What a survey question or visual brand logo or mention of a product stimulates first is a visceral feeling that is more or less positive, and then some stream of memories.

Likewise while shopping, "gut feel" about the products comes first. Being familiar is normally a good thing. "Rational" factors such as price or size certainly enter in to the purchase decision, but no one ever went broke selling people things they viscerally like.

If you have worked with us on comparative concept or positioning tests, you know our bias toward a simple measure of "appeal" as the critical metric. After factoring out external limitations such as ability to pay or

availability, we are convinced that nothing better predicts future purchasing.

While we are fine with exploring which aspects of a concept make it appealing, we shudder at the idea of comparing concepts on a raft of other attributes. "But which scores better on 'for people like me'? Or 'Comes in all sizes'?"

Brand/product impressions tend toward the univalent. The more time you spend analyzing attribute data, the more you realize how often respondents are simply answering the same question over and over. If they feel good about the brand, they will rate it high on whatever questions you ask. If they don't like or don't know it, they will rate it lower on whatever questions you ask.

Chances are I will rate my favorite pasta sauce or beer or bank or clothing store very close to how you rate your favorite pasta sauce or beer or bank or clothing store—even though we have completely different preferences.

This is not to suggest that true brand differentiation cannot be found, but as an industry we waste a lot of resources asking pointless, repetitious questions. We saw some research recently that concluded that a great predictor of future purchasing is "a brand I have always bought." Well gee, big surprise.

Old Media, Alive and Well

Does that sound oxymoronic? The *Economist* magazine doesn't think so (May 1 edition). They point out that television is more than holding its own as a medium that is consumed. Zapping and TIVOing notwithstanding, it is also works for the delivery of commercial messages.

To be sure, the traditional "free" networks no longer define the medium, but cable/satellite TV is profitable in spite of itself. The *Economist* notes that TV is a "lazy medium." You don't have to do much work to watch it. It is easily shared with others. Not everything vital is online.