

10.2 How are we doing? An advertiser's viewpoint

When Steve Douglas conscripted me for this session I accepted with some reluctance, feeling with Shakespeare that some men are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon them. I find myself with the greatness, but otherwise in the last category. It would be pretentious of me to speak on behalf of all advertisers, so I would like you to consider my remarks as basically my own observations, and it is important to understand that my point of view may be different from yours. I have been involved with consumer research for over 25 years, and my interest in readership research stems from my association with Seagrams: limitations on distilled spirits in the United States preclude broadcasting, and hence the heavy interest in printed media. I have also recently been involved in a magazine research council, which piqued my interest enough to bring me to Montreal.

I do not consider myself to be knowledgeable in readership research — mine is a US point of view, and I wish there were other advertisers from other parts of the world to share their opinions. I have very diverse feelings after attending these sessions: as a researcher I must applaud what I have seen of scholarship, involvement, dedication and enthusiasm, and have not been so impressed by a series of papers for years.

I realise that there are varying points of view, but I am particularly interested in validity, and feel we must continue the search for a new measure of this. I am impressed by the fact that we are considering, as it is healthy to do, new points of view such as yesterday or today reading, diary panels, and possibly the intriguing suggestion from *Time* of electro-mechanical devices as a way of escaping the vagaries and biases inherent in a questionnaire. The suggestion of limitation to hardcore or frequent users is frankly something that should not be considered: infrequent readers also buy.

The real divergence arises when I take off my research hat and put on my advertiser one: What does an advertiser really want? We are not studying readers, we are studying potential buyers, and readership measurement is simply a means to an end. What concerns me is the danger of the means becoming an end in itself, and that is something that should be guarded against. The advertiser's goal is to sell his products most effectively, so that any edge he can get in terms of segmentation or clustering devices is grist for his mill to improve his position, his prospects, his productivity. The gap that I feel within this conference is

that there has been virtually no discussion of effectiveness: Colin McDonald mentioned it, and suggested that the next symposium would heavily emphasise it, but I feel that if advertisers are to be satisfied there must be such emphasis.

I am also disturbed by, and perhaps deplore, the lack of representation of advertisers at these sessions, and to a lesser degree of advertising agencies and their contributions. It seems unhealthy that this symposium should not represent those who buy the advertising and by those who create the advertising and buy the media. Perhaps that is the fault of the advertisers, who I know have often delegated to their agencies the role of media selection: if that is true I would still have appreciated greater contributions from agencies. I think that at the next symposium there should be a greater attempt to bring advertisers into the sessions: I know there have been some attempts to reach them, but as researchers we owe it to ourselves to find out why so few are in attendance. The fault may lie not in our stars, but in ourselves.

There are other issues for future consideration apart from effectiveness. Intermedia comparisons are a complex problem that will not go away from the advertiser's point of view, and possibly the use of panels in this instance would be very helpful. A particular US problem is that of interviewing minorities: the fastest-growing group there are Hispanics, but I would be hard put to it to find many Hispanics in either the MRI or the SMRB surveys. This requires Spanish-speaking interviewers, and is a problem that must be addressed in the future — they are purchasers too. And lastly let me conclude by quoting what Dick Lysaker said at the beginning of the week — if advertisers knew as much as we do about the subject of magazine audience research they would absolutely demand that we develop an audience measurement approach of specific validity as well as of high reliability.

I was not at New Orleans, but I think progress must be judged over time. I hope to be at the next symposium, and would like to look back and see where we are then. If we have not made any progress I would be sadly disappointed. I would not like to be condemned, as was Sisyphus in the Greek myth, to having to roll a boulder uphill for two years only to find it falling back again to the bottom and having to start again. I want to thank you for your really scholarly approach, and hope that in the next few years a lot of progress can be made.