

Advertising effectiveness has been captured by 'liking'

By [mike broom](#)

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Whatever has happened to the idea of advertising effectiveness?



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There used to be interesting discussions of how much an advertising budget should be, nowadays there is not even a murmur about how much it can be cut without affecting the brand. All of these discussions about adspend, as opposed to advertising communication, AKA 'creative', require one idea that appears to have got lost. Namely, the idea of advertising effectiveness as a way of improving profitability.

Track through all the literature relating to how advertising works and there's not a shred of evidence that says 'if you do this, that will happen'. There is an interesting article in the June 2009 *Journal of Advertising Research*, where G T Tellis sums up as follows:

“ Based on over 260 estimates, the mean elasticity of sales or market share to advertising is **0.1 percent**. Another 450 field experiments suggest that changes in **media, product, target segments, advertising scheduling, and advertising content** are more likely to yield changes in sales than do changes in advertising weight. Numerous other studies suggest that advertising wear-in does not exist or occurs quite rapidly while advertising wear-out occurs more slowly. ”

(Emphasis added by author).

What this **0.1%** means is that for every 1% of increase or decrease of adspend, sales will on average increase or decrease by 0.1%. Put another way, if the advertising budget is cut by 10%, there could be a decrease in sales of about 1%. This advertising elasticity is often thought to be largely driven by the executional AKA 'creative' values of a particular

campaign. But it is not measured for a particular campaign or advertisement!

Instead, what we see and read is commentary and hype about what the campaign does, says or worse... 'is liked'.

Adweek publishes daily lists of ads that were liked. As do Kantar and other research companies. Robert Cialdini has carved out a niche with his 'liking principle', but most of the underlying thinking is speculative and anecdotal with little application in identifying or measuring advertising elasticity.

More useful is the idea of **attitude toward the ad**, defined as 'a predisposition to respond in a favourable or unfavourable manner to a particular advertising stimulus during a particular exposure occasion.' Papers by Mitchell and Olsen (1981) and Shimp (1981) failed to explain how to measure this.

They did say that it was intimately related to *attitude* to the brand – i.e.: you may like an advert because you like a brand and not necessarily the other way round. This is very much like saying that attitude to the brands is a predictor of the predisposition to buy a particular brand on a particular occasion.

This only becomes useful when we dig down and define how to use an attitude to a brand for practical purposes. We identify attributes of a brand, try to measure their importance and then try to engineer a belief that a brand owns a particular bundle of attributes – which then becomes the brand communication strategy.

Is attitude toward the ad the same as 'liking'?

Not so, said Lutz, MacKenzie and Belch in 1983 – liking an ad is one of six different dimensions. Without reference to the other five, 'liking' on its own is meaningless.

The other point that has been missed by many commentators is the importance of attitude to the brand in the evaluation of advertising. As outlined above, this relates to the brand communication strategy.

So liking of an advertisement has very little to do with the advertisement effectiveness. What's more, liking may have absolutely nothing to do with the brand communication strategy and we have come across a number of campaigns that actively undermine it, although they have huge Liking scores. Remember the 1987 Sanlam 'Babies' commercial? Highest ever liking scores on the Impact Information Liking database. Work I was involved with at the time showed that it compromised the strategic values of the corporation and the brokers who represented it.

So, what should advertisers be doing to understand how to measure, and by doing so, improve their advertising effectiveness? I suggest the following points:

1. Make sure you understand and measure all six dimensions that determine attitude toward the ad in the category.
2. Use mathematical scoring, so you can learn what works and what doesn't.
3. Measure how alternatives work in communicating the brand communication strategy.

4. Measure how alternatives work in shaping the attitude toward the ad.
5. Look for segments that respond differently to different stimuli. Entrenched brand users may take offence (as happened with Sanlam).

Finally, I strongly recommend that everybody who works in advertising, marketing and in business reads [this article](#).

ABOUT MIKE BROOM

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