

Research Connection...

IPSOS-ASI THE ADVERTISING RESEARCH COMPANY

RESEARCH ARTICLE ONE

Choosing the Right Persuasion Measure

Persuasion is a key determinant of an ad's effectiveness. Of course, it's not the only factor. First, the ad has to reach consumers through a media plan that provides adequate exposure to the relevant audience. Given exposure, the ad has to gain viewers' attention and leave an impression associated with the brand. That's why a comprehensive pretest includes Recall measures, to ensure that *exposure* translates to *delivery* of a branded message.

But it's not enough to be noticed and remembered. When you spend money for advertising, you expect it to influence consumers' behavior — or at least their beliefs, their attitudes, or their perceptions of your brand. In fact, that's our definition of advertising persuasion: the ability to *change* consumer behavior, beliefs, or attitudes.

For branded consumer package goods, persuasion usually means a direct influence on consumers' short-term purchase behavior. Research shows that brands that consistently win consumer response in the short run are the ones that build and sustain their markets in the long run, and consistent delivery of effective advertising is one of the key

characteristics of a winning brand. In turn, validation studies demonstrate that copy test measures can effectively differentiate ads that are persuasive from those that are not — giving the advertiser the opportunity to concentrate spending on the most effective ads, and to insist on minimum standards of effectiveness before investing in media. Beyond package goods, ads for durables and services or image-oriented campaigns may not be expected to produce an immediate behavioral response; but appropriate persuasion measures can help ensure that exposure is having the intended effect on consumers' beliefs, attitudes, or perceptions. Because persuasion is a decisive factor in advertising effectiveness, Ipsos-ASI uses not a single persuasion measure but a *range* of techniques to evaluate an ad's persuasive impact.

Ipsos-ASI offers two primary measures of persuasion — one based on Brand Shift, the other based on Purchase Intent ratings. Both measures are validated in relation to sales results, and one or the other is appropriate for most fast-moving consumer goods. But why are there two different measures? How do we know which one to use? The general

answer is that we use the measure that best fits the brand's market situation and advertising objectives. To see how this principle is applied in practice, we have to understand how the measures work, what they measure, and how they differ.

Brand Shift measures an ad's ability to influence brand preference in a simulated choice situation where products are offered as a "sweepstakes" prize. Consumers are presented with a set of brand choices in a specified category, and asked to choose the one they prefer to receive. Brand share after exposure to the test ad is compared with share prior to exposure [or share among a separate matched control group] to quantify the effect of the test ad.

Brand Shift is appropriate and valid under a very specific set of conditions, when:

- [1] the brand competes for share in a *clearly defined product category* [competitive set] that's consistently recognizable among consumers, where *brands replace each other directly* for a given purchase or usage occasion; and
- [2] *the sole objective is to influence brand preference among current users* of the category.

Intent ratings as Persuasion Measures. Intent ratings measure persuasion when they are compared with response from a Control group not exposed to the test ad: the *change* reflects persuasion. This approach offers considerable flexibility because it doesn't depend on competitive set definitions or category usage, so it works in situations where Brand Choice measures are inadequate or inappropriate.

For established consumer products, the *Purchase Probability Score* measures persuasion based on Purchase Intent and Intended Frequency of Purchase. A Purchase Probability Model is calculated for the no-stimulus Control group, quantifying the relationship between expressed intent and reported purchase. This brand-specific model is then applied to test-sample data to quantify persuasion in a single score, expressed in terms of reported purchase. The resulting Purchase Probability Score reflects both measures, full scale, and expresses the net change in likelihood of purchase.

New Products require a different analytic approach. The same basic Intent ratings still apply, but the Purchase Probability Model described above is not directly applicable because there is no "past purchase" to use as a point of reference. The simplest analysis is to omit the Control group altogether, and evaluate the Intent ratings in direct comparison with category-specific norms.

A more sophisticated analysis is possible, however, in cases where the product concept itself has been formally evaluated prior

to creative development. In a disciplined product development process, concept evaluation typically takes the form of a quantified concept test with known benchmarks, or volumetric projections from a Simulated Test Market (STM). At the creative stage, the question is not whether the ad is "average," but whether it delivers (or fails to deliver) the levels of consumer interest implied in response to the concept. This tested concept can be presented to Control group respondents for the copy test. Intent ratings for the test ad are then evaluated in comparison with ratings for the concept to determine whether the ad delivers the levels of consumer interest implied by the original concept research or STM. When a tested concept is available, this analysis is preferable to a comparison with normative averages which might be too high or too low for a given concept.

Which One? The guiding principle is that selection and design of the persuasion measure should be based on the brand's market situation. To choose the right measure, we need to understand the consumer's *frame of reference* — the broader context in which they consider purchase or consumption of the product or brand.

A *closed* frame of reference describes situations where a consistent consumer base chooses among a clearly defined set of product alternatives at a stable volume or rate of consumption. The most obvious examples are often considered commodities, such as toothpaste or toilet tissue. In a closed

frame of reference, brand choice is usually the right persuasion measure.

An *open* frame of reference describes situations where consumers' alternatives are not clearly circumscribed. Examples abound: in foods, beverages, or household cleaning products, the range of choices is almost endless — crossing traditional category boundaries, including alternatives from outside the store, varying by individual and depending on their specific situation. If the frame of reference is open, the best persuasion measure uses Intent ratings.

For many products the distinction is clear, though it often requires a degree of subjective judgement and there may be some ambiguous or borderline cases. In practice, it may be helpful to define an "open" frame of reference as "not closed": i.e., if a closed frame of reference or competitive set cannot be clearly or readily defined, then it must be open. Getting the answer right is critically important to the validity of the persuasion measure.

For products that compete in a closed frame of reference, brand choice is usually the most sensitive measure of persuasion because it *only* measures brand preference within the specified context, and ignores everything else. For the many brands and marketing situations that fit this description, choice measures have a long track record in copy testing, supported by extensive validation.

Moreover, brand choice measures offer more flexibility than one might immediately recognize.

They can be applied for durables or services, provided the brands represent a clear set of substitutable alternatives to consumers in the market [for example, automobile tires among people who maintain a car]. They can also reflect an ad's potential to impact frequency of purchase in categories where "frequency" means share of requirements in direct substitution for other brands [as opposed to increased volume or frequency of category consumption, which are *not* directly measured with choice constructs].

For the many products that operate in an open frame of reference, however, the Brand Shift measure becomes less satisfactory or even inappropriate.

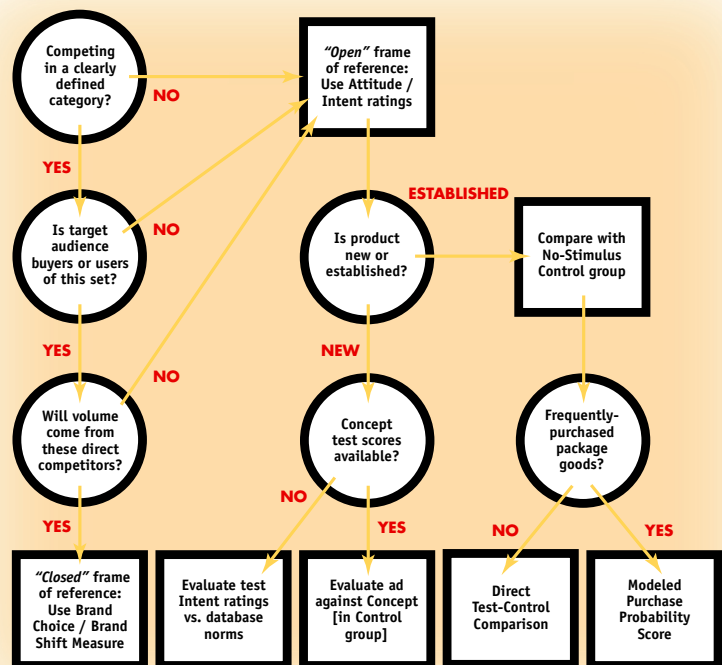
Here are some of the key issues that determine when a Brand Shift measure is appropriate, and when it's not:

Is there a clear competitive set for brand choice?

■ If there is no clear "competitive set" of directly substitutable brands, or if it depends on the individual consumer and varies according to their purchase or usage situation, the definition of a competitive frame for the measure becomes almost arbitrary — and may have an artificial effect on test results. This can be a problem for "one-of-a-kind" brands with no clear substitutes, and it can also happen in categories that are highly proliferated or segmented.

- If consumers buy or use multiple brands in a single purchase or usage occasion, the single choice demanded by the test measure may be inconsistent with their real behavior. Their single choices may be inconsistent or unpredictable, undermining the reliability and validity of the test measure.
- Advertising for a predominant brand can also present a problem for Brand Shift measures. High share in itself is not necessarily a problem, but in extreme cases a brand can predominate so completely that there is no room left to measure any significant increase.

Choosing the Right Persuasion Measure



Even when the category is clearly defined, Brand Shift measures *cannot* and *will not* measure an ad's ability...

- To sell to category non-users [because the choice construct treats every respondent as if they were a user];
- To sell to specific uses or usage occasions [because the occasion is, in fact, the test situation]; or
- To increase frequency or volume of *category* use [because for purposes of this measure, every consumer's volume or frequency is "one choice"]

In the situations described above the frame of reference is open, and brand choice simply won't do the job. Worse, it may measure change that is spurious or irrelevant to actual consumer behavior. Intent ratings are the better measure in any situation where the category or the advertising objectives are too broad to be measured by brand choice.

Since Intent measures don't rely on "share" constructs they don't require any assumptions about category definitions or category usage, and they are sensitive to usage frequency as well as brand preference. Intent ratings are also extremely flexible: they can be adapted for a wide range of advertisers including durables or other infrequent purchases, and they can even be modified for nonproducts such as retail outlets and services.

Beyond ratings of purchase intent and frequency, the test/control design can be used to turn other attitude ratings into custom measures of persuasion. When advertising objectives are defined in terms of brand image, for example, ratings for key attributes or overall product / brand ratings can be evaluated in comparison with Control group levels to measure persuasion in terms of consumer attitudes and perceptions.

Choosing the right measure.

The Brand Shift measure is the most precise, sensitive instrument when all of the necessary conditions are present to define a closed frame of reference. In other situations, the Purchase Probability measure and other test / control designs offer greater sensitivity because they measure consumer response beyond the range of brand choice. In some cases the choice is obvious, but most brand situations are more complicated and careful consideration is required to choose the right measure. The "decision tree" diagram presented [on page 3] is not intended to reduce this complex question to a mechanical choice, but it summarizes the key issues and it may provide a helpful framework for discussion.

Your Ipsos-ASI representative can help you select the right persuasion measure for your brand, because we offer the flexibility to *measure what matters*.

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