Measuring the Cultural Values Manifest in Advertising

Richard W. Pollay, University of British Columbia

Available at: https://works.bepress.com/richard_pollay/25/
Measuring the Cultural Values Manifest in Advertising

Richard W. Pollay

Much of the critical discussion of advertising revolves around its cultural consequences. Even though advertising is a particularly persuasive proponent of a specific value system, a methodology for measuring the values manifest in advertising has not existed. A content analytic methodology synthesizing the work of previous authors and applicable to all media is presented, with detailed definitions. Procedures for an application to magazine advertising and reliability statistics from this application are discussed. The results suggest a methodology capable of describing the cultural character of commercialism. Potential applications to problems in advertising management and scholarly research in a number of inquiry areas are discussed. The first application, on a historical sample, is described, illustrating the potential benefits of the measurement scheme.

No method now exists for measuring the values manifest in advertising, despite the fact that the cultural consequences of advertising have been the subject of much discussion from both thoughtful scholars in diverse social science fields and more hostile critics of society and advertising. Recognizing the persuasive and pervasive character of contemporary advertising, many have wondered what advertising might be doing to our cultural evolution. Many also presume specific consequences, apparently flowing from their impressionistic perspective on advertising. In direct contrast to the economic consequences, which are researched repeatedly, the cultural char-

The research reported here is a portion of a large content analysis of magazine ads funded by Canada's Social Science and Humanities Research Council. Access to this database, which now measures over 170 variables, is readily available to interested scholars. Current scholars include researchers from economics, sociology, anthropology, English, and nutrition, as well as history. Inquiries welcomed.
acter of advertising has not been well studied, in large measure because of the absence of an appropriate methodology.

In recent years a growing number of studies have reported content analyses of the advertising in various contemporary media (for reviews, see [12] and [15]). Motivated by the contemporary social criticisms of agism, racism, and sexism, these studies have examined the portrayal of the elderly, minority groups, and women, and in so doing have touched upon the social character of advertising. Even the best of these studies, however, has not dealt satisfactorily with the larger issue of the value content. Thus, while we may know the frequency and character of the portrayals of various social roles, we do not know the extent to which the advertising is encouraging behaviors that value maturity versus youth, safety versus adventure, humility versus pride, affiliation versus independence, etc.

What Are Values?

In a general manner of speaking, values are those properties of objects, individuals, or communities that make them good, worthy, or respectable. It is difficult to write a definition that avoids the tautological circularity of such terms as "ought" or "should", etc., but we can borrow from the work of Rokeach [25], who defines values as:

A value is an enduring belief that a specific mode of conduct or end state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end state of existence. A value system is an enduring organization of beliefs concerning preferable modes of conduct or end states of existence along a continuum of relative importance. [p. 5]

As the definition of the value system suggests, both personalities and cultures can be characterized by the priorities attached to several coexisting values, the hierarchy of these values and the rules of dominance in their application, and the general balancing of apparently contradictory value states, e.g., pride versus modesty, or the natural versus the technological.

A value is a selective orientation toward experience, implying deep commitment or repudiation, which influences the ordering of "choices" between possible alternatives in action. These orientations may be cognitive and expressed verbally or merely inferable from recurrent trends in behavior. [13, p. 18]

Values are determinants of virtually all kinds of behavior and attitudes, from simple purchasing acts to political and religious ideology. They restrain or canalize individual impulse toward culturally approved acts and attitudes. They guide the presentation of self and the evaluation and judging of both self and others. They are standards that govern what beliefs and behaviors are worth preserving, trying to change, and even going to war and dying for.

Values, then, are images formulating positive or negative action commitments, a set of hierarchically ordered prescriptions and proscriptions. Without a hierarchy of values human behavior could be described by a list of instincts and a probabilistic calculus. Human life would become a sequence of reactions to unconfigurated stimuli. [13, p. 20]

It is because of their far reaching significance that values are worthy of study.

Why Study Values in Advertising?

(As the maintenance, enhancement, and transmission of values within a culture typically become institutionalized, then an identification of the major institutions of a society should provide us with a reasonable point of departure for a comprehensive compilation and classification of human values. [25, p. 25]

While there are many institutions that carry out value transmission, such as the family, church, military, courts, universities, etc., there is good reason to pay particularly close attention to advertising as a carrier of cultural values. Unlike other institutions, advertising is the only institution that plays a major role in the mass media, thereby giving it a far more universal influence. It is also the only institution with a cadre of applied behavioral scientists working continually to enhance the effectiveness of its influence. It is also unique as an institution in that it possesses no well-recognized and accepted prerogatives for its cultural role, making all of its cultural influence ethically suspect. Lastly, while most institutions play an inherently conservative role, preserving and protecting long-established received values, the role of advertising is quite obviously to precipitate change of at least behavior and presumably of standards for behavior as well.

Thus, study of advertising's cultural character may be very important in understanding the cultural evolution of commercialized societies. The thesis that business institutions are the key carriers of American values has been often expressed, with both pleasure and regret. Chamberlain [4] makes this idea the cornerstone of his analysis. Historians, led largely by Potter's influential People of Plenty [22], feel that despite the relatively pedestrian motivation of advertisers to simply sell more, advertising's greater significance lies in its aggregate impact, providing an omnipresent rhetorical environment which surrounds people of all ages, classes, and interests.

Advertising has joined the charmed circle of institutions which fix the values and standards of society and it has done this without being linked to any of the socially defined objectives which usually guide such institutions in the use of their power;
then it becomes necessary to consider with special care the extent and nature of its influence, how far it extends, and in what way it makes itself felt. [22, p. 177]

This challenge remains unmet, largely because of the lack of an appropriate methodological approach to the immensity and complexity of the issues involved.

How Are Values Manifest in Advertising?

The glib answer is "in every way possible." It is exactly the business of the creative process to create value in such a way that products become "goods." Contemporary advertising takes a slightly different tack toward the same end by portraying the manner in which the consumers of products become "good," either to themselves or to others. The creative process uses everything at its disposal, all the tools of rhetoric and the artistry of illustration, to portray the product or its consumers as idealized and deserving of adoration or envy.

This process has been long recognized, although rarely discussed in careful detail. Hayakawa [11] likens advertising to poetry and notes that the "copywriter, like the poet, must invest (the product) with significance so that it becomes symbolic of something beyond itself.... The task of the copywriter is the poetizing of consumer goods" (p. 262). Price [23] describes commercials as contemporary myths encouraging us to perform a symbolic act, trading tokens for a totem. Levi-Strauss [14] uses the concept of bricolage to describe the process by which the creators of advertisements assemble the oddments of cultural symbols to invest products with new meanings. Let us examine how this is done.

Copywriting often manifests values by simple assertion, stating quite plainly that such and such a product is good because it has certain properties. It is in the nature of values to be self-evident to individuals receiving such a communication. If we share a value with the author, we ask no further questions when he says that the product is worthy because it is cheap, or modern, or popular. Thus, a simple claim that a soap will get you clean presumes the valuation of cleanliness.

Often, however, such a valuation is not presumed, and the argument is extended to demonstrate how such a property is instrumental to the attaining of some other valued end-state. For example, cleanliness might be instrumental towards social acceptance among peers, sexuality and romance, or economic achievement, not to mention health. In these cases it is the ultimate rationale, the ulterior motive, that manifests the value presumed by the copywriter. It is this rhetorical frontier, where the goodness of the product goes without further saying, that identifies the principal values that the ad depends upon, implicitly ratifies, and hence reinforces.

The manifestation of values in the imagery of the advertisement is also often quite direct. The property being communicated can be displayed in a manner that parallels the direct rhetorical assertion. The classic styling of dinnerware may be displayed, or the capacity of a product to enhance the consumer's sexual attractiveness may be evidenced. Often the process relies on simple association, where a mood, feeling, or affect communicated by the art is (hopefully) associated with the product, like so much sugar coating on a pill.

Sometimes, however, the imagery works in a more oblique fashion. The artistic presentation of a person, object, setting, or event which contains the properties to be transferred to the product simply brings the source and the recipient of these properties into a contiguous relationship. This contiguity asks us to see an essential similarity between the product and this presented reference, and to treat this similarity as a metaphorical one. Visual metaphors, like their verbal counterparts, are often quite evocative, transmitting multiple meanings or dimensions of both similarity and difference. To prevent ambiguity in the communication, the property to be transferred to the product is often reiterated or clarified in the text. Cues from the captioning and copy, as well as a general redundancy, typically clarify which properties of the referent are to be transferred to the product or manufacturer.

Perhaps an example will illustrate. Kodak, desiring to communicate the trustworthiness of their film products, ran a magazine advertisement with a charming picture of a farmer surrounded by small children all gently stroking a baby pig. The entire text read, "Trust Kodak," but the power of the communication is contained in the trust displayed in the pictorial imagery at several levels. The small children are entrusted to the care of the farmer, and the baby pig is similarly entrusted to the care of all of those present. Thus, the value of "trustworthiness" is communicated in a metaphorical way. The same group of children might be used to lend their youth, innocence, or excitement to the product, but the text, sparse as it is, explicates any ambiguity in the photograph and makes clear the advertiser's intent.

Thus, advertising works to draw attention to values inherent in the product, to point to values that may be realized by the buyer via consumption of the product, and at times invokes values so that they become cognitively associated with the product, brand, or corporate identity—part of its image. Different ads, therefore, vary in the manner in which values are utilized just as much as they vary in terms of which values get utilized. Just as ads differ in their relative emphasis on the product vs. the promise, the benefits of consumption, so too do they differ in terms of whether they utilize values intrinsic to the product or values realized in the experience of
consumption. This distinction is not unlike the one between instrumental and terminal values that Rokeach [25] employed. The study of values manifest in advertising needs to take account of all of these various means of employing and invoking values.

**What Values Should Be Measured?**

There are many sources that might be drawn upon to develop a universe of value concepts. Starch [28] identified 48 different motives utilized in advertising, ranging in apparent effectiveness from hunger, appetite, and love of offspring to shyness and teasing. Andren et al. [1] generated an ad hoc list of 24 rhetorical approaches. Berger [2] raises many provocative questions, although he provides no specific methods. A much more widely known and recognized list of motives is Henry Murray's list of needs [18]. Fowles [8] used an abbreviated form of Murray's 26 needs and coded advertisements according to these 18 needs. Fowles was attempting to develop a methodology for futures research, using advertising as a barometer for forecasting, but unfortunately his results were not convincing. Murray's needs were more extensively adapted for the content analysis of values by White [29]. Adapting the original material to both the analysis of propaganda and to the clinical analysis of personality, White elaborated the list so that over 50 different categories were identified. These can be seen in Exhibit 1, where his goals and standards of judgment have been integrated into a single master list.

The most widely cited and recognized contemporary work on value analysis is Rokeach's [25]. He identifies 18 "instrumental" and 18 "terminal" values, as displayed in Exhibit 2. The terminal values were distilled from a large list drawn from a literature review and an interview process not unlike focus groups in which citizens' own values were elicited. Several hundred concepts were identified and ultimately reduced through recognition of synonymous meanings and the elimination of items that were too specific or that did not represent end-states of existence. The instrumental values were a result of a pruning from 555 personality traits. Again, the pruning is on the basis of judgment of synonyms; the values apparently most important in American society; those likely to be maximally discriminating across social status, race, age, and other demographic variables; and those minimally intercorrelated. The final set of values used by Rokeach was organized into the two lists presented to respondents for their self-descriptive ranking—clearly a different task from the coding of content. Munson and McIntyre [17] suggested that these personal values can also be measured with Likert scales, although Reynolds and Jolly [24] reject this

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physiological</th>
<th>Egotistic</th>
<th>Practical</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>Independence</td>
<td>Practicality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sex</td>
<td>Achievement</td>
<td>Prosperity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rest</td>
<td>Recognition</td>
<td>Ownership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Activity</td>
<td>Self-regard</td>
<td>Work</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health</td>
<td>Dominance</td>
<td>Mental</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety</td>
<td>Aggression</td>
<td>Adjustment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Comfort</td>
<td>Strength</td>
<td>Cognitive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cleanliness</td>
<td>Determination</td>
<td>Knowledge</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Social**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Fearful</th>
<th>Security</th>
<th>Moral</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sex-Love</td>
<td>Carelessness</td>
<td>Morality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family-Love</td>
<td>Playful</td>
<td>Truthfulness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Friendship</td>
<td></td>
<td>Justice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appearance</td>
<td></td>
<td>Obedience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pleasant personality</td>
<td></td>
<td>Purity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conformity</td>
<td></td>
<td>Religion</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manners</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modesty</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generosity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tolerance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Group unity</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Culture</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Exhibit 1. Goals and Standards of Judgment**

methodology as less reliable than either rank ordering or paired comparison methods.

Before we attempt to integrate these various conceptual schemes and adapt them to the coding of advertising content, we should consider the criteria to be met by our end product.

**Criteria for Coding Categorization**

Consistency with the literature

Our final set of categories ought to be consistent with the literature that discusses the measurement of values in other contexts, and with the literature commenting on the social role of advertising. The best known of these works is Greyser's "Advertising: Attacks and Counters" [10], but a more

---

1Source: [29]
Recent and thorough discussion focusing on the cultural consequences of advertising as presumed by the contemporary scholarly community is presented by Sangha and Pollay [26]. It might even be suggested that categories be consistent with such classic conceptualizations as the seven deadly sins and the seven cardinal virtues.

Relevance and richness

The category scheme should be exhaustive and should include a coding category for all of the common advertising appeals. The frequency with which these appeals occur will also determine the breadth or narrowness in the elaboration of coding categories. Some underutilized categories will no doubt persist, as advertising’s cultural role may be well characterized by those values that are conspicuous by their absence. The coding scheme should also have concepts appropriate to the values attached to objects, self, and/or society, for all of these are used in advertising. Lastly, the richness of advertising as a communication can be captured only to the extent that a procedure permits the coding of both art and copy, and the recognition of both dominant and subordinate themes.

Analytical flexibility

Concepts should be identified to provide for minimal intercorrelation between categories, making each category unique and the coding task minimally ambiguous. Categories will also hopefully provide for maximal discrimination between the cultural content of advertising and the values promoted by other social institutions. The more detailed the coding system, the greater the opportunity for a refactoring, the recognition of the patterns of joint utilization of values in the promotional process. Lastly, the categories should facilitate the ready identification of the changing relative utilizations of those values which occur in natural dualisms. This means that items such as safety and adventure must be independently measured, and cannot be jointly used to anchor a single scale, as in such methodologies as the semantic differential.

Reliability

The need for reliability suggests some parsimony in the length of the list, although everything else being equal, reliability can be increased by making the coding task easier through a structural organization of the list into clear cognitive patterns and through consistency of definitions. The maximizing of reliability also calls for the careful training of coders and a procedure which minimizes coding fatigue.

In the effort to develop a set of content categories which best met these criteria, pilot testing on a sample of 100 ads was performed using each of the schemes of Fowles, White, and Rokeach. This experience identified categories which were rarely utilized and which might be collapsed with little loss of information retrieval capacity. It also identified the need to partition some very frequently used categories into subcategories, such as the isolation of passive and active modalities of leisure, or the delineation of the various kinds of practicality possessed by various products. The difficulty and apparent inexactness of coding of some ads suggested the need for additional categories not found on previous lists, such as the valuation of products for their “magical” properties.

Meetings and workshops with colleagues in sociology, anthropology, and consumer behavior refined certain of the conceptual boundaries between categories and encouraged a crystallization of the concepts into dualistic pairs of naturally competitive values, such as cheap versus dear, or practical versus ornamental. The application of the evolved sets of definitions to a large convenience sample of contemporary ads added further key words to the definitions and additional illustrations and examples that contemporary coders would be likely to recognize.

The final system of concepts, together with their definitions and illustrative examples, can be seen in Exhibit 3.
PRACTICAL (PRACT)
EFFECTIVE (EFFECT)
- feasible, workable, useful, pragmatic, appropriate, functional, consistent, efficient, helpful, comfortable (clothes), tasty (food)

NOTE: includes strength and longevity of effect

DURABLE (RUGGED)
- long-lasting, permanent, stable, enduring, strong, powerful, hearty, tough

CONVENIENT (HANDY)
- handy, time-saving, quick, easy, suitable, accessible, versatile

ORNAMENTAL (PRETTY)
- beautiful, decorative, ornate, adorned, embellished, detailed, designed, styled

CHEAP (CHEAP)
- economical, inexpensive, bargain, cut-rate, penny-pinching, discounted, at cost, undervalued, a good value

UNIQUE (UNIQUE)
DEAR (DEAR)
- expensive, rich, valuable, highly regarded, costly, extravagant, exorbitant, luxurious, priceless

DISTINCTIVE (RARE)
- rare, unique, unusual, scarce, infrequent, exclusive, tasteful, elegant, subtle, esoteric, hand-crafted

Examples: The “only . . . .,” the “best . . . .,” “At leading drug stores.”

POPULAR (COMMON)
- commonplace, customary, well-known, conventional, regular, usual, ordinary, normal, standard, typical, universal, general, everyday

Examples: “Largest seller,” the “ubiquitous comestible”

TRADITIONAL (OLD)
- classic, historical, antique, old, legendary, time-honored, long-standing, venerable, nostalgic

Example: “80 years of experience”

MODERN (NEW)
- contemporary, modern, new, improved, progressive, advanced
- introducing, announcing . . .

Example: “Slightly ahead of our time”

NATURAL (NATURE)
- references to the elements, animals, vegetables, minerals, farming
- unadulterated, purity (of product), organic, grown, nutritious

Exhibit 3. Definitions of Values

TECHNOLOGICAL (TECH)
- engineered, fabricated, formulated, manufactured, constructed, processed
- resulting from science, invention, discovery, research
- containing secret ingredients

Examples: “Factory-Fresh,” “Includes XK-17”

WISDOM (WISDOM)
- knowledge, education, awareness, intelligence, curiosity, satisfaction, comprehension, sagacity, expertise, judgment, experience

Examples: “Judge for yourself,” “Experts agree . . . .”

NOTE: Detailed information, instructions, or recipes imply “wisdom” as at least subsidiary theme.

MAGIC (MAGIC)
- miracles, magic, mysticism, mystery, witchcraft, wizardry, superstition, occult sciences, mythic characters
- to mesmerize, astonish, bewitch, fill with wonder

Examples: “Bewitch your man with . . . .,” “Cleans like magic”

PRODUCTIVITY (WORK)
- references to achievement, accomplishment, ambition, success, careers, self-development
- being skilled, accomplished, proficient
- pulling your weight, contributing, doing your share

Examples: “Develop your potential,” “Get ahead.”

NOTE: Social recognition of achievement codes as STATUS.

LEISURE (PLAY)
RELAXATION (RELAX)
- rest, retire, retreat, loaf, contentment, be at ease, be laid-back, vacations, holidays, to observe

ENJOYMENT (ENJOY)
- to have fun, laugh, be happy, celebrate, to enjoy games, parties, feasts and festivities, to participate

MATURITY (MATURE)
- being adult, grown-up, middle-aged, senior, elderly
- having associated insight, wisdom, mellowness, adjustment
- references to aging, death, retirement, or age-related disabilities or compensations

Example: “You’re getting better with age.”

Exhibit 3. Definitions of Values (continued)
YOUTH (YOUTH)
- being young or rejuvenated, children, kids
- immature, undeveloped, junior, adolescent

Example: “Feel young again.”

MILD (MILD)
SAFETY (SAFE)
- security (from external threats), carefulness, caution, stability, absence of hazards, potential injury, or other risks
- guarantees, warranties are manufacturers' reassurances

Examples: “Be sure with Allstate,” “Contains no harmful ingredients.”

TAMED (TAMED)
- docile, civilized, restrained, obedient, compliant, faithful, reliable, responsible, domesticated, sacrificing, self-denying

MORALITY (MORAL)
- humane, just, fair, honest, ethical, reputable, principled, religious, devoted, spiritual

MODESTY (MODEST)
- being modest, naive, demure, innocent, inhibited, bashful, reserved, timid, coy, virtuous, pure, shy, virginal

HUMILITY (HUMBLE)
- unaffected, unassuming, unobtrusive, patient, fate-accepting, resigned, meek, plain-folk, down-to-earth

PLAIN (PLAIN)
- unaffected, natural, prosaic, homespun, simple, artless, unpretentious

FRAIL (FRAIL)
- delicate, frail, dainty, sensitive, tender, susceptible, vulnerable, soft, genteel

WILDERNESS (WILD)
ADVENTURE (BOLD)
- boldness, daring, bravery, courage
- seeking adventure, thrill, or excitement

Example: “Go for the Gusto.”

NOTE: Code general confidence and psychological security as SECURE.

NOTE: Code sweepstakes, lotteries, etc., for which nothing is risked according to “value” of prizes.

UNTAMED (UNTAME)
- primitive, untamed, fierce, coarse, rowdy, ribald, obscene, voracious, glutinous, frenzied, uncontrolled, unreliable, corrupt, obscene, deceitful, savage

Exhibit 3. Definitions of Values (continued)
NOTE: Romantic affiliations code as SEXUAL or FAMILY based on context.

NURTURANCE (NURTURE)
- to give gifts, especially sympathy, help, love, charity, support, comfort, protection, nursing, consolation, or otherwise care for the weak, disabled, inexperienced, tired, young, elderly, etc.

NOTE: When given within the family code under FAMILY.

SUCCORANCE (SUCCOR)
- to receive expressions of love (all expressions except sexuality), gratitude, pats on the back
- to feel deserving

NOTE: The desire to be married code under FAMILY and self-respect code under SECURE.

Example: “You deserve a break today.”

FAMILY (FAMILY)
- nurturance within the family, having a home, being at home, family privacy, companionship of siblings, kinship
- getting married

NOTE: References to ancestry code as TRADITIONAL.

COMMUNITY (STATE)
- relating to community, state, or national publics, public spiritedness, group unity, national identity, society, patriotism, civic and community organizations of other than social purpose

HEALTHY (FIT)
- fitness, vim, vigor, vitality, strength, heartiness, to be active, athletic, robust, peppy, free from disease, illness, infection, or addiction

NEAT (NEAT)
- orderly, neat, precise, tidy
- clean, spotless, unsoiled, sweet-smelling, bright
- free from dirt, refuse, pests, vermin, stains and smells, sanitary

Exhibit 3. Definitions of Values (continued)

Procedure

To test the applicability of this category system, a procedure was developed for coding print advertisements. Magazine ads were drawn from the best-selling magazines of each decade from the turn of the century to contemporary times. This longitudinal sample was chosen to challenge the methodology with advertisements of diverse character. The coders, two graduate students who had been coding these ads on other, admittedly more mundane attributes, were trained for this task in an introductory session at which the concepts were introduced and discussed. As preparation for this session the coders had read Hayakawa’s poeticizing of advertising [11]. They then rated an orientation sample of 100 ads, attempting to identify primary, secondary, and tertiary themes, and discussing with each other challenges and clarifications being experienced. Difficulties with tri-chotomizing content levels led to a “dominant/subordinate” dichotomy. It was verified that the clarifications of definitions and examples involved no serious digressions or misunderstandings. Since learning seemed to be continuing, the coders then independently rated a second orientation sample of 50 ads, and the results of this rating were discussed after the ratings were completed. All coding was recorded on the form shown in Exhibit 4 and carried out under the following instructions:

Dominant themes are those that are key elements of the ads’ “gestalt,” or first impression. They are manifest in illustrations and headings, titling and major captions. Code up to three thematic elements. Code all elements manifest in both illustration and key words. Code no more than one theme as dominant that is manifest in solely the illustration. Subsidiary themes are those additional themes manifest in the illustration, or embodied in the fine print of the body copy.

The procedure for this coding is as follows:

1. Look at the illustration and headings and code for dominant themes.
2. Read body copy and code subsidiary themes based upon key words and phrases.
3. Examine illustration alone for any additional subsidiary themes manifest.
4. Review list of values as check-list for final cross-check of subsidiary themes.

Because the coding of value content is an inherently judgmental task, it was felt that the best data would reflect a group consensus rather than an individual’s coding. Thus the independent ratings of the two student raters were subjected to an arbitration procedure. Any differences in the dominant categories identified by the two coders were detected and the conflict resolved, thereby producing a single integrated rating reflecting the collective judgment of the two student raters and the author.

Reliability Results

A test-retest reliability measure was calculated as the percent agreement in the repeated measure of 50 items embedded in the larger sample of 2,000 ads. Spuriously high reliability figures are sometimes reported when the reliability calculus incorporates all of the “agreements” as to properties not
judgment between the two raters. A similar reliability measure was calculated for the arbitrated codings, measuring the internal consistency of the entire arbitration and coding process. The intrarater reliabilities were .75 and .85 for the two preliminary codings and the interrater reliability score was .70. The arbitrated coding had a reliability coefficient of .79, representing 74 agreements out of 94 possible. (If the replication sample with 80 identified dominant themes is treated as the referent, 74 agreements constitutes a score of .93.)

These figures compare very favorably with Nunnally’s [19] acceptability criterion and with those studies cited by Peter [21], who reports that of the fewer than 5 percent of studies even measuring reliabilities, the vast majority had reliability measures of .7 or less. In comparison to the reliability scores obtained for other codings of the same sample by the same coders, however, these reliability statistics are modest. This is not surprising, since this task is far more complex in terms of both the number and the subtlety of concepts to be applied.

**Discussion**

The complexity of the coding task is considerable. Coders need to hold some 40 concepts in mind. Even implicit recognition of the dyadic polarities of some of the concepts still leaves a coder with 20 pseudo-scales, several of which might be appropriate for any particular item. While the reliability statistics suggest that the task is manageable, our experience suggests that considerable training is needed before this level of reliability can be obtained. In addition to extensive training, the task must also be organized in a way that inhibits boredom. Periodic breaks from the task are necessary, as is a procedure which ends with a review of the total universe of potential categories so that each ad is approached afresh with the full set of codes in mind.

The complexity of this task might be reduced by asking coders to rate subsets of these categories, but this is potentially risky. It greatly confounds the problem of identifying dominant versus subordinate themes, and it would tempt raters to identify something in each of the component tasks, thereby overstating the total cultural message content. Alternatively, task complexity could be reduced by collapsing categories into larger domains. While this would eliminate the problem of discrimination between finely drawn categorical distinctions, and probably produce increased reliability scores, it would also sacrifice descriptive richness.

No doubt more operational experience with the scale will suggest various minor modifications of this type. A quite fully elaborated system was developed in hopes that opportunities for categorical compression would be more likely than the necessity for categorical expansions. The former can be done
retroactively in analysis, while the latter cannot. Comparability of results is also far easier if future studies used reduced forms of this method than if they required greatly expanded measurements.

The complexity of the task is a natural correlate to the complexity of the concepts. While higher reliability is always preferred, we have at the least a measure capable of characterizing the cultural content of commercial communications. The applicability of these categories to an analysis of magazine ads has been demonstrated, and it would seem to require very little effort to adapt this to advertising in other media.

Current research increasingly calls attention to the potential role of editorial context in shaping viewers' perceptions of and reactions to advertisements. The particular magazine, television show, or other media vehicle can create mental sets and attitudinal predispositions that potentially influence viewers' comprehension of subtleties, sense of product relevance, salience of needs, and aesthetic evaluation of specific ads. Context might therefore be an important factor in the cultural and value content actually received from ads. Thus, a methodology which takes context into account might be highly desirable, especially for those studies which have very heterogeneous media in their samples. Unfortunately, this is far easier to suggest than to execute. Despite its general appeal, too little is known at this stage about the specific role of context to incorporate it satisfactorily. Asking coders in a content analytic task to adopt the presumed mental set of users of specific media forces them into very suppositional judgments and makes the measurement subjective. This loss of objectivity surely threatens both reliability and validity, creating data likely to be indefensibly idiosyncratic. Appraising the context issue from a different perspective, Cannon [3] reports a method of measuring value profiles of both ads and their context and using the comparison as a measure of contextual congruence, a predictor of readership.

Applications

The accomplishment of reliable measurement of values manifest in advertising now permits the objective study of many issues and hypotheses long relegated to subjective judgments and contentions. At the most general and perhaps most important level, it will permit the validation or refutation of much of conventional wisdom concerning advertising's cultural character. Scholars from many disciplines, especially the various social sciences, have held forth that advertising has this or that common attribute and hence some effect, usually an undesirable one. It will now be possible to express much of this conventional wisdom as a set of hypotheses testable with the values data, which will verify at least the character question, even if not the concerns over consequences.

In addition to this broad-spectrum research thrust, many more specific research questions can be more directly assessed as the result of the existence of this measure. Since the first application (described below) is on a historical sample of ads, consider the various lines of history-related inquiry that the values data can permit or facilitate. Examination of the changing bases of appeal will elucidate marketing history, potentially evidencing the competitive and strategic process over time. In theory, market maturation leads to a segmentation process as individual brands seek uniqueness and "position" in the competitive array. Examination of the appeals utilized within a specific product category will potentially demonstrate this process and identify the specific appeals which are the universals and which become the bases for specific segments. Theory also holds that the adoption of the marketing orientation by an increasingly large proportion of firms, especially consumer goods manufacturers, should be reflected in the relative tendency to use appeals based on product attributes as opposed to consumer benefits. Since our measures of values cover both types, it will be a simple matter to monitor the proportions selling the "steak vs. the sizzle."

Advertising history is currently a field of inquiry with only scattered, unintegrated scholarly efforts. Values data which document the changing intensity of appeals can be related to some of the existing work, like Curti's report of the advertising community's changing conception of human nature [6] or Olson's study of the values of the individual in the trade [20]. In addition to the specific hypotheses these works may suggest, the data can be used to document whether or not the evolution of consumer behavior has led to changes in the values utilized in advertising appeals. Psychological theory for advertising had its beginning with Scott's pioneering psychology of advertising texts [27]; continued through the contributions of well-known psychologists such as J. B. Watson, whose applied work included a vice presidency with J. Walter Thompson agency; and moved into the modern era where consumer behavior emerged as a discipline in its own right (see [7]). Now that the ads themselves can be measured for values, as well as other dimensions, it will be possible to observe the extent to which the practice has or has not followed the evolution of the behavioral theories.

The same historical data might be interpreted in different frameworks by those with disciplinary interests. For example, social historians often use advertisements as documentary evidence of the life-styles typified in various eras. They can now also observe more systematically the nature of the motivational goals presumed by the advertisers to be commonplace. This study of the apparent shifts of aspirations of the consumer population potentially identifies far more fundamental aspects of the society than do the current observations of fashion and style. Anthropologists might use the measurement of values in advertising as a means of understanding the changing meaning of products as symbolic objects, for apparently these objects are held by advertisers to contain different symbolic properties in
different eras. Nutritionists might find interest in this sort of information for food ads.

Even though advertising already has a large arsenal of methodologies and measures for identifying what factors lead to advertising effectiveness, this measure might supplement the existing tools. It might be used to identify those values that are durable bases for appeals versus those that are more temporal, either because they have been exhausted through overuse or because historical circumstances have changed. Practitioners might find that certain combinations of employed values lead to more effective messages than other combinations, for it is clear that virtually all ads attempt to evoke more than one value.

The first application of this measurement will be on a historical sample of print advertisements spanning the twentieth century, and many of the above concerns will be addressed. A total of 2,000 ads distributed equally over the first eight decades of the century and drawn randomly from the magazines with the largest circulation and Sunday newspaper magazine supplements for each decade will be studied for manifest values as well as a number of other attributes. Separate measures will produce multiple measures for various aspects of the ads along the following dimensions: strategy and tactics; format, layout, and artwork; copy style and language usage; social roles and relationships, covering both the personnel and the activities depicted; institutional references, etc. The total database already includes some 170 measurement dimensions and others will no doubt be added as more scholars work on the project. At the moment, the database is being considered by researchers from the fields of anthropology, English rhetoric, nutrition, consumer behavior, and history, in addition to those from marketing and advertising, and most are finding the value data an important cornerstone of their analysis. The historical and multidimensional nature of this database permits analyses not otherwise possible.

**Summary**

Much of the critical discussion of advertising revolves around its cultural consequences. Even though advertising is a particularly persuasive component of a specific value system, a methodology for measuring the values manifest in advertising has not previously existed. A content analytic methodology synthesizing the work of previous authors and applicable to all media was presented, with detailed definitions. Procedures for an application to magazine advertising and reliability statistics from this application were discussed. The results suggest a methodology capable of describing the cultural character of commercialism. Potential applications to problems in advertising management and scholarly research in a number of inquiry areas were discussed. The first application, on a historical sample, was described, illustrating the potential benefits of the measurement scheme.

**REFERENCES**


