

Editor's Desk

Finding Insights on Hard-to-Reach Targets

GEOFFREY PRECOURT

Editor Emeritus
geoffrey.precourt@
warc.com



The more we learn how to use the massive infusion of data driven by a new digital ecosystem, so do tools of marketing research become richer, more tactical, and better channeled to understand specific issues. Indeed, advertising strategists now can depend on inventive, highly focused studies to learn more about targets that traditionally have been hard to reach.

Case in point: Kids smoke. And even though the numbers are in decline, kids still smoke. For decades, the obstinacy of youth in the face of overwhelming evidence of risk has puzzled health-care specialists and marketers.

Truth Initiative describes itself as “America’s largest non-profit public health organization dedicated to making tobacco use a thing of the past... through education, tobacco-control research and policy studies, [as well as] community activism and engagement.” And it’s just that sort of research that’s detailed in **“Agents of Social Change: A Model for Targeting and Engaging Generation Z across Platforms: How a Nonprofit Rebuilt an Advertising Campaign to Curb Smoking by Teens and Young Adults”** (please see page 414).

Seven Truth Initiative authors—Donna Vallone, Alexandria Smith, Tricia Kenney, Marisa Greenberg, Elizabeth Hair, Jennifer Cantrell, Jessica Rath, and Robin Koval—relate how messaging about the organization’s mission—“to deliver the facts about the health effects and social consequences of tobacco use, while exposing the marketing tactics of the tobacco industry”—has evolved.

Gen X seems to have gotten the message, the authors report: “‘Big Tobacco’ is no longer in the negative national spotlight, tobacco advertising has been restricted, and smoking has been banned in most public spaces.” But with Gen Z comes a new group of would-be smokers, and new social-media tools provide new means of engaging this new audience.

“By broadening the new audience of Generation Z to include nonsmoking youths,” the authors write, the reinvented “‘truth campaign’ was able to ignite enthusiasm with facts about tobacco use and tobacco industry practices. Messages gained further impact by creatively seizing cultural moments as vehicles for maximum reach. These efforts collectively have helped the ‘truth’ campaign further render the perception of smoking as an abnormal activity by creating a popular movement for youths and young adults to end tobacco use.”

The implications for marketing practitioners, of course, extend beyond the use of tobacco. The Advertising Research Foundation—the publisher of this journal—acclaimed the Truth Initiative a “Gold” winner at the 2016 David Ogilvy Awards, citing its efficacy in connecting with new audiences with fresh means of peer-to-peer influencers.

Kids are at one end of a hard-to-reach marketing spectrum. And the old folks at the end of the line can be every bit as difficult to understand. Strains of socioemotional-selectivity theory suggest that when people age—and begin to perceive their time as limited—they pursue emotionally orientated (rather than knowledge-focused) goals. Authors Lynn Sudbury-Riley at the University of Liverpool and Lisa Edgar of The Big Window Consulting Limited tested the theory among 2,550 adults between the ages of 19 and 90 years. And, in **“Why Older Adults Show Preference for Rational Over Emotional Advertising Appeals: A U.K. Brand Study Challenges the Applicability of Socioemotional Selectivity Theory to Advertising”** (please see page 441), they come up with some new lessons about theories of the old.

Contrary to expectations and prior socioemotional-selectivity theory research, the authors found that older adults demonstrated clear preferences for rational over emotional appeals.

More specifically, they write, “Almost the same number of people under the age of 50 preferred the rational advertisement (49.7 percent), compared to the emotional advertisement (50.3 percent). In contrast, and contrary to expectations, 63 percent of over-50s preferred the rational advertisement.”

Once upon a not very long time ago, marketers felt compelled to walk a thin line with messages between appealing to both LGBT and mainstream consumers. The challenge, they felt, was to do so without alienating one or the other—particularly the latter, as they are a much larger group. In short, gay and lesbian audiences were recognized as hard-to-reach targets.

New tools empowered by total-market cultural insights have generated new confidence. But, as authors Kathryn Pounders and Amanda Mabry from the University of Texas at Austin note in “**Consumer Response to Gay and Lesbian Imagery: How Product Type and Stereotypes Affect Consumers’ Perceptions**” (please see page 426): “Brands increasingly recognize gays and lesbians as a lucrative market that needs to be advertised to beyond a few niche channels. Although prior research documents that mainstream consumers prefer advertisements that feature heterosexual imagery, there is a need to identify when heterosexual consumers are more accepting of explicit gay and lesbian imagery.”

Their findings from three studies include:

- A brand plays a role in understanding consumer stereotypes about gays and lesbians because...

- ... advertisements featuring a product more consistent with gay and lesbian stereotypes generated more positive responses and stronger intentions to spread positive word-of-mouth endorsements.

- When consumers view gay and lesbian imagery in advertisements, both advertisement schema and sexual-orientation schema influence their evaluation of the advertisement.

The tough nuts to crack in hard-to-reach categories extend beyond age and lifestyle considerations. There are cohorts that defy any easy audience access, and even the tools of modern marketing science are challenged to provide the kind of actionable insights that marketers need.

Consider any number of tiers of charity; with each one, is a taxonomy of appeals. The solicitation for a holiday donation to my local food pantry gets the job done: An e-mail arrives. I read the appeal. I learn people are hungry. I have the chance to help feed them and, driven by guilt or compassion, I respond with a check. Such exchanges are classified as low-cognitive-elaboration donations—one-off, low-risk behavior.

But not all charity is so casual in nature. Fostering a child, for instance, involves major, long-term decisions. And such choices require substantial consideration—emotional concerns that may be anchored in cognitive processing as well as financial planning, which may require third-party insight. And, whereas quick rational processes put pen to paper in support of the food pantry, eliciting positive emotions is far more important in

high-cognitive-elaboration donations, which are major, long-term decisions.

In “**Framing Advertisements to Elicit Positive Emotions and Attract Foster Carers: An Investigation Into the Effects of Advertising on High-Cognitive-Elaboration Donations**” (please see page 456), three authors from the University of Wollongong (Melanie Randle, Leonie Miller, and Joanna Stirling) and the University of Queensland’s Sara Dolnicar examine the power of positive emotion in such cases with an advertising experiment conducted with 470 respondents.

Key findings from this study include that guilt—a negative emotion shown to be highly effective in eliciting monetary donations—has no impact on reaction to an advertisement in the context of foster care. Sadness had only a small impact. The authors’ research, however, did reveal that positive emotions in support of high-cognitive-elaboration donations engendered a stronger reaction to the advertisement than negative emotions in similar circumstances.

In more detail, the authors write, “Positive emotions caused stronger reactions to the ads, with processing motivation and pre-existing attitudes playing a critical role. Implications for marketing foster care—and possibly other, similar high-cognitive elaboration donations—include that ongoing communication and elicitation of positive emotions is essential to first form the right processing motivations and attitudes, which then more likely will lead to behavioral change on later advertising exposures.”

As always, we appreciate your response. **JAR**