

Exploring the Role of Memory for Self-Selected Ad Experiences: Are Some Advertising Media Better Liked Than Others?

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ABSTRACT

Advertising media are associated with different degrees of self-selected versus intrusive ad experiences. The role of such media differences in attitudes toward advertising was explored in a nationwide survey. The survey provides a national picture of attitudes toward specific ad media ranging from advertising media that deliver highly self-selected ad experiences (catalogs and business classifieds) to highly intrusive ones (TV). A total of 2,514 adults were surveyed regarding their opinions about ads in (1) TV, (2) radio, (3) catalogs, (4) business classifieds, (5) out-of-home, or (6) advertising in general. Media that allow for self-selected experiences, where perceived interest in an ad is the basis for attention to it, were evaluated much more favorably than more intrusive advertising media. Catalogs and business classifieds elicited the most favorable opinions; TV advertising elicited the least, and these media differences generally cut across demographic lines. Also, although more educated and affluent consumers generally held less favorable views of advertising, preliminary results suggested that this did not hold true for media that allow for self-selected processing. An additional study suggested that memory for advertisements plays a significant role in the evaluation of a self-selected ad medium (catalogs). That is, consumers' strongest

memories are for those ads to which they paid the most attention, and consequently these engaging ads have a disproportionate influence on opinions toward the ad medium. © 2004 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

Advertising has long been criticized for being excessively intrusive (see Pollay, 1986). Indeed, studies of public attitudes toward advertising have convincingly demonstrated the degree to which negative perceptions regarding intrusiveness, clutter, and other communication disruptions predict unfavorable public opinion. Considerable progress has been made in recent years in conceptualizing *perceived intrusiveness* and understanding its significant consequences for advertising exposure and effectiveness (e.g., Bauer & Greyser, 1968; Edwards, Hairong, & Lee, 2002; Elliott & Speck, 1998; Ha, 1996; Li, Edwards, & Lee, 2002; Speck & Elliott, 1997). By contrast, the complementary concept of *self-selection* has received little research attention. This is despite the fact that, for some ads, exposure and attention are not especially intrusive, but are instead self-selected based on perceived correspondence with the consumer's goals or perceived enjoyment of the advertisement itself. Advertising media differ substantially in the degree to which they deliver self-selected versus intrusive ad experiences. The goal of the present study is to assess differences across self-selected versus intrusive ad media in the nature of American public opinion toward advertising. A further goal of this study is to explore the impact of self-selection on the psychological processes underlying evaluations of ad media.

The experience associated with processing an ad may itself impact upon its perceived value (Ducoffe, 1996). Because media such as television and catalogs differ vastly in their characteristics, people may experience their exposure to advertising in those media very differently. Self-selected ad media, where perceived interest in ads is the basis for attention to them, may be evaluated much more favorably than more intrusive advertising media, where ads interrupt other programming or activities (see Ducoffe, 1995, 1996; Mittal, 1994). As will be reviewed presently, intrusive advertisements may elicit feelings of frustration, reactance, and irritation.

In contrast, ads in media that allow for more self-selected attention may elicit relatively favorable perceptions not only because such ads are perceived to be less intrusive, but for other reasons as well. Self-selection allows consumers to obtain the information that they consider most relevant to their needs and interests (Elliott & Speck, 1998). Moreover, in media that allow for self-selected attention, not only is it easy to ignore the ads that hold little interest, but one can also give detailed attention to those ads that *are* of interest. Examination of such ads takes place on one's own timetable. Thus, for instance, consumers can ignore or throw away those catalogs that are not deemed relevant to their needs, and spend extensive time poring over those that are relevant.

Because one's memory for an item is related to how extensively one has processed the item (Craik & Tulving, 1975), consumers are less likely to remember the ads that they ignored than the ones that they considered at length. Thus, when there is self-selection in attention and time spent with advertising, consumers are likely to remember best the ads that engaged them the most. This is important because the opinions that respondents provide in surveys are often strongly influenced by their retrieval of particular information from memory (Sudman, Bradburn, & Schwarz, 1996). For instance, when asked about one's opinion toward catalog advertising, a person is less likely to remember any of the countless catalogs that were thrown away than the two that he or she sat down with and leafed through for an hour. Those latter ad experiences should therefore exert a disproportionate influence on a person's reported opinion toward catalog advertising.

In contrast to the relatively favorable processes described above, ads that one perceives as intrusive have been shown to elicit an array of negative feelings and effects. Indeed, intrusiveness is an important predictor of negative attitudes toward advertising (e.g., Li, Edwards, & Lee, 2002). Further, unfavorable attitudes engendered by perceived advertising intrusiveness increase ad avoidance (e.g., Edwards et al., 2002; Lee & Katz, 1993). As might be expected, perceptions of ad intrusiveness or disruptiveness appear to vary across media. For instance, Elliott and Speck (1998) asked a national panel of over 900 adults to report the degree to which ads in various media disrupt their media-exposure experience. TV received the highest disruption ratings, along with magazines. Ratings of radio were intermediate, followed by newspapers, direct mail, and the Yellow Pages. Elliott and Speck (1998) suggested that, although radio is an intrusive ad medium, listeners are more tolerant of disruptions in radio compared to TV because program units are shorter and programming involvement is lower.

Although little is known about the role of self-selection in the evaluation of advertising media, one can expect that media that allow for self-selected attention, *ceteris paribus*, will elicit more favorable public opinion than will other ad media. This contention is explored here in a large national survey of the general public. In this survey, separate samples of Americans were polled about their opinion toward advertising in specific ad media that differ in their self-selected versus intrusive nature. Moreover, the role of selective memory in the evaluation of one highly self-selected ad medium, catalogs, was explored. Because it is difficult to obtain direct evidence in a nationwide telephone survey regarding the psychological processes that underlie public opinions, this issue was examined in a follow-up laboratory study in which consumers were asked open-ended questions about their attitudes toward catalogs as well as their memory for them.

PUBLIC OPINION TOWARD ADVERTISING

Why investigate public attitudes toward advertising? Numerous studies have indicated that attitudes toward advertising in general are valid

predictors of important advertising outcomes. For instance, attitudes toward advertising in general predict consumers' level of involvement in specific ads (James & Kover, 1992), and attitudes toward advertising in general predict attitudes toward specific ads (Mittal, 1994). Those attitudes toward ads, in turn, predict brand attitudes in many cases (e.g., Brown & Stayman, 1992; MacKenzie, Lutz, & Belch, 1986). Moreover, copy research has indicated that attitudes toward ads predict the incremental product sales attributable to advertising (Haley & Baldinger, 1991). Thus, understanding public opinion toward ads can have direct implications for understanding ad effectiveness.

Similarly, understanding medium-specific public opinion toward ads also has important implications for ad effectiveness. As noted earlier, attitudes toward advertising in a given medium predict exposure to versus avoidance of advertisements in the medium (e.g., Elliott & Speck, 1998). In an era of increasingly cluttered media environments, and increasingly available ad-avoidance technology, avoidance behavior represents a significant problem for advertisers. It has been suggested that, for TV, various ad-avoidance strategies reduce ad exposure by as much as 30% (Abernethy, 1991). Consumers have more and more control over their ad exposure and they make their exposure choices based in part on their opinions of advertising in the medium. It is argued, therefore, that a good understanding of consumers' attitudes and perceptions toward advertising in specific media is essential.

Public attitudes toward advertising have been the focus of numerous surveys over the years (see, for example, O'Donohoe, 1985; Pollay & Mittal, 1993; Zanut, 1981, for detailed reviews of past research). Some of the recent surveys have focused on attitudes toward advertising in a specific medium, such as television (e.g., Alwitt & Prabhakar, 1992, 1994; Mittal, 1994) or the Internet (e.g., Schlosser, Shavitt, & Kanfer, 1999). Others have examined public attitudes toward advertising in general (e.g., Andrews, 1989; Shavitt, Lowrey, & Haefner, 1998).

There has been considerably less research on media differences in public opinion. A number of previous surveys used students as their respondents (e.g., Bush, Smith, & Martin, 1999; Haller, 1974; Somasundaran & Light, 1991), making it difficult to draw conclusions for the general population. Still, some important studies with representative panel samples have been reported. For instance, Mittal (1994) polled approximately 200 members of a consumer mail panel in the southern United States. Although the survey focused primarily on an in-depth analysis of consumer attitudes toward television advertising, a few questions requesting explicit comparisons between ads on TV, radio, and newspapers/magazines were included. These showed that print ads were perceived substantially more favorably than radio and TV ads, presumably because of the relative intrusiveness of broadcast media. However, in another large-scale survey described earlier (Elliott & Speck, 1998), no significant differences were found across broadcast or print categories, whereas direct-

mail advertising was evaluated less favorably than any other advertising medium.

The latter results, especially those regarding direct mail, might appear surprising in light of the argument that media that offer more self-selected opportunities to attend to ads will be evaluated more favorably than will other media. However, direct mail that is not in catalog format may be intrusive, at least to the extent that recipients have to process it in order to get to the real mail. Further, the evaluations obtained in the Elliott and Speck study may have reflected perceptions of direct-mail or print advertising as an institution rather than perceptions driven by one's positive and negative personal experiences with individual ads. The attitudinal measures used were rather general compared to previous studies (semantic-differential scales anchored by interesting/not interesting, enjoyable/not enjoyable, etc.) and the label of *direct mail* was broad enough that generalized as opposed to personalized responses might have been elicited (see Sandage & Leckenby, 1980).

In the current study, the media categories were selected and the survey questionnaire was designed in a way that would elicit judgments based on *personal experiences*. In this way, it was possible to assess the contention that media categories that allow for self-selected ad experiences, where perceived interest in an ad is the basis for attention to it, will be evaluated more favorably than will relatively intrusive advertising media. A follow-up study explored the role of memory for personal experiences in this effect, assessing whether, in a highly self-selected ad medium, consumers are likely to remember best the ads that engaged them the most, and to judge the medium accordingly.

RESEARCH FOCUS: STUDY ONE

This survey provides a national picture of public attitudes toward advertising in a number of specific media. These media were selected as part of a larger, commercial data set that dealt with a wide variety of issues. Fortunately, these media effectively serve as exemplars that vary in the degree of self-selected versus intrusive ad experiences that they offer: TV (intrusive), radio (intrusive/intermediate), catalogs (self-selected), business classifieds (self-selected), and out-of-home (intermediate). The business classified and catalog categories relate to the broader print and direct-mail advertising categories but provided a more specific focus on self-selected ad experiences. Although business classifieds are more appropriately referred to as a type of advertising and not a medium *per se* (they appear in multiple print media), for this study they provided a specific self-selection focus to the more general print categories.

Public opinions toward advertising were assessed in terms of respondents' liking of, trust in, and reliance upon advertising stemming from their own personal experiences with advertisements and advertised prod-

ucts (Shavitt et al., 1998). Thus, this study was designed to determine, for each ad medium, how much people like advertising, how useful and reliable people find ad information to be when making their own purchase decisions, to what extent they feel the products that they have bought have lived up to their advertised claims, what effect they feel advertising has had on the prices of products they buy, and to what extent they have personally felt offended by ads. These dimensions of enjoyment, usefulness, trustworthiness, impact on prices, and offensiveness directly parallel those that have been assessed in seminal public-opinion surveys (see Zanot, 1981, for a review).

Note that one's opinions toward an ad medium may also be influenced by one's judgments of the products one has purchased through the medium. However, to the extent that similar products tend to be advertised across media, and the same integrated marketing communications campaigns often appear across an array of media, any differences that are observed in attitudes toward ads between media become particularly meaningful because they are more likely due to the medium itself.

Public attitudes toward different ad media may or may not be consistent across demographic groups. Although previous studies have suggested that demographic factors do not contribute substantially or consistently to public opinion toward specific ad media (e.g., Alwitt & Prabhakar, 1994), factors such as age, education, income, and to some extent gender do predict attitudes toward advertising in general (e.g., Shavitt et al., 1998). Thus, in addition to examining the perceptions of the general public toward specific ad media, whether those perceptions differ across demographic groups was explored. There were no specific predictions made about demographic differences in attitudes toward ad medium. However, given the growing emphasis on strategic and highly refined targeting of ad campaigns, it is important to attend to any differences in advertising-media attitudes that emerge as a function of gender, age, education, and income. On the other hand, if differences in attitudes as a function of medium hold true regardless of demographics, this strengthens the importance of understanding public opinion at the medium-specific level.

Methods and Design

The survey was conducted by the research department of a major U.S. advertising agency and all data were provided to the investigators for analysis. The survey was designed to address a number of issues pertaining to public attitudes toward advertising. However, the data set also lent itself well to exploring issues pertaining to self-selection. Still, some decisions involving survey and sample design were influenced by the supplier's proprietary needs and budget limitations.

The Samples. For each medium, a nationwide sample of U.S. adults was drawn from a list balanced by estimated telephone households. Respon-

dents were contacted with the use of a computer-assisted telephone interviewing (CATI) system. Up to three callbacks were made in an attempt to reach prospective respondents if they could not be reached initially.

Prospective respondents were screened for age and only those between 18 and 64 were surveyed. They were also screened for media usage and only those reporting that they personally watch/read/listen to the relevant medium were surveyed. The sample characteristics for each survey sample are reported in Table 1.

Separate surveys were conducted for each of the following advertising media: television ($N = 202$), radio ($N = 502$), catalogs ($N = 200$), business classifieds ($N = 205$), and out of home ($N = 397$). The results reported here represent a subset of a much larger data set, which included two additional surveys: a large study ($N = 1008$) on advertising in general (reported in Shavitt et al., 1998) and a survey regarding advertising on the Internet ($N = 402$; reported in Schlosser et al., 1999).

Internet advertising data are not reported in this article for a number of reasons. First, the skewed demographics of Internet users complicate any comparisons to more mainstream media users. Direct comparisons between attitudes toward Internet advertising and attitudes toward advertising in other media cannot readily be made because any differences in attitudes that are observed could be as much a function of sample characteristics as of media characteristics. Second, for purposes of the present analysis, it is difficult to classify the degree to which Internet advertising is a self-selected medium because of the variety of forms it takes. E-mail and newsgroup advertising can be perceived as unwelcome (Mehta & Sivadas, 1995). Web advertising offers much more self-selected ad experiences, but pop-up ads and animated banners are rel-

Table 1. Sample Demographics.

	General ($N = 1008$)	Television ($N = 202$)	Catalog ($N = 200$)	Classified ($N = 205$)	Radio ($N = 502$)	OOH ($N = 397$)
Gender						
Male	36.8	43.6	33.5	33.7	48.2	49.1
Female	63.2	56.4	66.5	66.3	51.8	50.9
Age						
18–34	33.8	39.0	32.0	39.2	37.3	38.8
35–54	49.7	41.5	50.5	44.6	45.0	50.1
55–65	16.5	19.5	17.5	16.2	17.7	11.1
Education						
Nongraduate	66.7	60.8	67.2	73.9	61.2	59.8
College grad.	33.3	39.2	32.8	26.1	38.8	40.2
Income						
< \$35,000	39.7	40.8	41.4	46.8	38.9	35.8
\$35,000+	60.3	59.2	58.6	53.2	61.1	64.2

atively intrusive (Li et al., 2002). Thus, public attitudes toward Internet advertising are not examined here, but the reader is referred to Schlosser et al. (1999) for a parallel assessment of public opinion toward Internet ads. In that study, comparisons are made with a sample from a survey of attitudes toward advertising in general that was carefully postweighted to approximate Internet user demographics.

Survey Content. In each survey, respondents were asked the same questions about their overall attitudes toward advertising in the given medium, their specific perceptions about it, and their demographic classifications. Before these questions, respondents were read a statement defining the nature of the advertising medium being asked about. For instance, the classified sample was told:

This is a survey of your thoughts and feelings about some of the advertisements you encounter every day. Many of these advertisements include ads for products and services businesses place in the classified section of magazines, newspapers, and other publications you might read. When we ask you about “advertising” in this survey, we’re only referring to what you see in the classified ads in publications you read, and not to any other forms of advertising.

For each survey, a similar statement was included defining the medium in question. A series of attitudinal questions followed this statement (shown in Table 2). Respondents were first asked about their overall evaluation of advertising in the given medium. Then they were asked 16 additional questions assessing their specific perceptions. The content of many of these questions was based on previous published surveys (see especially Bauer & Greyser, 1968) and focused on many of the same dimensions measured in most previous research, including the utility, informativeness, trustworthiness, offensiveness, and harmfulness of advertising, as well as views regarding government regulation of advertising, and perceptions of the impact of advertising on the price/value of advertised products.

However, as noted earlier, the goal of the present research was to tap attitudes based on personal experiences with advertising. Therefore, many of the questions were worded to emphasize personal experiences and reactions to advertising, as opposed to societal effects. For instance, respondents were asked to consider whether the products that they have used usually live up to the promises of quality and performance made in their advertisements, how often they feel offended by advertisements, etc. (see also Gallup, 1959, for early examples of personally focused survey items).

In the TV, catalog, and classified surveys, as well as in the advertising-in-general survey, respondents were first asked to report their overall attitude toward advertising in the given medium. This was done in a two-part question, which asked whether they generally like/dislike the advertising and then assessed the degree of liking/disliking. There followed a block of nine attitudinal questions that were in 5-point Likert-type format

Table 2. Factor Loadings for Attitudinal Questions.

Question	Factor 1 Use	Factor 2 Harm	Factor 3 Regulation	Factor 4 Cost	Factor 5 Trust
Most advertising is informative.	0.49				
I like to look at most of the advertisements that I am exposed to.	0.51				
How often do you use information from advertising to help you make your purchase decisions?	0.69				
In general, how confident do you generally feel about using information you see in an ad to make a purchase decision?	0.57				
How comfortable are you about purchasing an item directly through an address or phone number in an advertisement—for example, by using a 1-800 number?	0.20				
Most advertising insults my intelligence.		-0.43			
How often do you feel offended by advertisements?		-0.82			
I think the government should put less effort into regulating the content of the advertising I see.			0.66		
Regulations placed on advertising should be done by the advertising industry through its member associations, rather than by the government.			0.52		
How do you feel about the amount of regulation which the government currently places on advertising?			0.64		
I usually get better value for my money in advertised brands or products than in unadvertised brands.				-0.26	
In general, advertising results in lower prices for the products I buy.				-0.82	
What effects do you think advertising has on the prices of advertised products?				-0.49	
In general, I feel that I can trust advertising.					0.37
The products that I have usually live up to the promises of quality and performance made in their advertisements.					0.46
How often have you felt misled by advertising?					0.34

(*strongly agree / disagree*). These nine items were presented in randomized order. For six of these items, the wording was varied to be either positive or negative toward advertising (e.g., "In general, advertising results in lower [higher] prices for the products I buy"). From item to item the positive/negative versions were selected randomly. Responses across the dual-version items were collapsed after recoding in the direction of favorable attitudes. In the radio and out-of-home surveys, the same basic questions were asked but specific aspects of the question order, format, and content varied.¹ The remaining attitude items used a variety of response scales, including scales anchored by *sometimes to never* (4-point scale), *too little to too much* (3-point scale), and *very to not at all* (4-point scale).

Results

Attitudes as a Function of Medium. The 16 specific attitude items were submitted to an exploratory factor analysis, for the combined sample ($N = 2514$) including the media-specific and advertising-in-general sample, using maximum likelihood extraction. The scree plot (discontinuity method) revealed that a best-fitting model might include five factors. Because the factors associated with respondents' attitudes toward advertising were expected to be correlated with one another, an oblique rotation was applied (direct oblimin). Factor loadings, as well as the complete wording for each attitude item, are presented in Table 2. Factor loadings were acceptably large, particularly given the sample size (Briggs & Cheeks, 1986). These loadings reveal five factors: (1) usefulness/informativeness, (2) harmfulness/offensiveness, (3) trustworthiness, (4) government regulation, and (5) cost/effect on prices.

The subsequent analyses therefore focused upon these five themes. For each participant in the survey, responses on the items that loaded on a given factor were used to create a factor index. Because different response scales (from 5-point to 3-point scales) were used in the items comprising each factor, scores were standardized before they were averaged to create the five factor indices for each participant. For each medium, the mean standardized factor indices as well as the overall attitude score are in Table 3.

As these data reveal, public attitudes toward advertising depended greatly on the nature of the advertising medium being considered. Attitudes were much more favorable toward catalog advertising than toward

¹ In the radio and out-of-home surveys, the media-specific attitude questions were preceded by 25 other questions of interest to the research supplier but not relevant to the present study. Twenty-two concerned media exposure patterns, and three items assessed respondents' attitudes toward advertising in general. In addition, the nine Likert-type items used a 4-point (no midpoint) rather than a 5-point response scale. Responses on these nine items were recoded to the corresponding 5-point scale values (with no responses at the midpoint of 3) prior to analysis. Finally, the six dual-version items were only presented in one version in these two surveys, because analysis of the prior advertising-in-general survey had shown negligible effects of item version on responses. All of these items were worded favorably toward advertising, except for the item, "The government should put more effort into regulating the radio [out-of-home] advertising I see."

Table 3. Mean Factor Index Scores by Medium.

	General	Television	Catalog	Classifieds	Radio	Out-of-Home
Overall Attitude						
Toward						
Advertising	-0.05 _{ad}	-0.29 _a	0.56 _b	0.28 _{bc}	-0.18 _a	0.08 _{cd}
Use	-0.01 _{ab}	-0.22 _c	0.44 _d	0.12 _a	-0.1 _{bc}	-0.02 _{ab}
Harm	-0.20 _a	-0.18 _a	0.45 _c	0.17 _b	0.17 _b	0.08 _b
Trust	-0.22 _a	-0.17 _a	0.28 _{bc}	0.08 _c	0.31 _b	0.11 _c
Regulation	-0.14 _a	-0.02 _{ab}	0.21 _b	-0.01 _{ab}	0.14 _b	0.11 _b
Cost	-0.12 _{ab}	-0.23 _a	0.29 _c	0.27 _c	0.10 _{cd}	0.01 _{bd}

Note: Within each row, means that do not share a subscript are significantly different at $p \leq 0.05$.

any other ad medium that was asked about. This was true for overall attitudes toward catalogs as well as for perceptions of the usefulness and harmfulness of catalogs. Business classifieds were generally the next most favorably rated. Ratings were high both for overall attitudes and for the perceived effects of business classifieds on product prices. This latter result makes sense, given that used products (especially cars) are often sold at significant savings via classified ads. Classifieds encourage and enable price comparisons.

Public attitudes were consistently the least favorable for television advertising—both for overall attitudes and for perceptions along the specific dimensions. Advertising on TV was rated significantly more negatively than ads in any other medium in terms of perceived harmfulness, trustworthiness, and effects on prices. Overall attitudes toward advertising on TV and on radio were significantly lower than attitudes toward ads in any other medium. The same was true for perceptions of the usefulness of TV and radio advertising. These results are consistent with Mittal's (1994) comparative study and with surveys focused specifically on TV advertising that have revealed negative public opinions (e.g., Alwitt & Prabhakar, 1992). The reason for the negativity observed here toward TV ads (and to a lesser extent, toward radio ads) likely lies in the intrusiveness of ads in these media.

Unlike ads in these broadcast media, catalogs and classifieds allow for largely self-selected ad experiences, where one's interest in the ad is the basis for attention to it. This should enhance evaluations for a number of reasons. The most evident is that self-selection allows consumers to obtain the information that they consider most relevant to their needs (Elliott & Speck, 1998). Thus, ads that are of no interest can readily be ignored, whereas ads that are of interest can receive detailed processing. Because one's memory for an item is related to how extensively one has processed it (Craik & Tulving, 1975), consumers are likely to remember best the ads that engaged them the most. These ads may therefore have a disproportionate influence on one's reported opinion. This contention is addressed directly in a follow-up study, described below.

As expected, broadcast media were not always on the bottom of the list. Radio advertising, being moderate in intrusiveness, was expected to elicit intermediate ratings. Indeed, on some dimensions, radio ads ranked relatively highly. For instance, radio ads were similar to catalogs in their high ratings for trustworthiness. Radio ads also tied with business classifieds in rated harmfulness—neither ad medium was seen as particularly harmful. And, although radio ads were rated less favorably than most other ad media in terms of perceived effects on prices or perceived need for regulation, radio did not differ significantly from them. In short, radio advertising was seen as neither useful nor harmful. And, although this ad medium was not generally liked, it was highly trusted. This ambivalent attitude may be due to the intrusive yet local nature of radio advertising, whose client lists often consist of familiar hometown retailers and service providers, and whose advertising often uses local celebrities as spokespeople. The results are also consistent with the findings of Elliott and Speck (1998), as well as their theorizing that, although radio is an intrusive ad medium, listeners are more tolerant of disruptions in radio compared to TV because program units are shorter and programming involvement is lower.

Finally, out-of-home advertising ranked somewhere in between the other media. It was seen as not particularly likable or useful, yet not particularly harmful either. Again, these intermediate ratings are consistent with expectations for this relatively nonintrusive medium. Although out-of-home advertisements do not provide highly self-selected experiences, they are not typically disruptive of other media experiences either.

Although not central to the goals of this survey, there are a number of other aspects of the results that are worth noting. For instance, it is instructive to compare perceptions about advertising in general to those of advertising in specific media. First, it should be noted that attitudes toward advertising in general did not equal public opinion toward most of the specific ad media that were asked about. Attitudes often differed significantly. In a business environment where increasing importance is placed on a mix of different advertising media, this underscores the importance of taking into consideration differences in public perceptions regarding those media. However, in many cases, evaluations of advertising in general most closely resembled those for TV advertising. This was true for perceptions regarding harmfulness, trustworthiness, need for regulation, and effects on prices. It seems that on these dimensions, TV advertising is top of mind when evaluating advertising-in-general, even though the instructions for the advertising-in-general survey made it clear that the questions referred to various types of ad media. This is unfortunate for the advertising industry, considering the relatively low confidence that the public appears to place in TV ads.

Attitudes toward Ad Media as a Function of Demographic Segment. Next, the role of gender, age, education level, and income in influ-

encing confidence in advertising media was explored. For each of the five factor indices, as well as for overall attitudes, a two-way analysis of variance was conducted in which the first independent variable was medium (six levels: advertising in general, TV, catalog, classifieds, radio, and out-of-home) and the second independent variable was a demographic factor. The number of levels of the demographic factor varied—that is, two levels for gender (male, female), education (college degree, less than college degree), and household income (above or below \$35,000), and three levels for age (18–34, 35–54, 55–65). Table 4 shows the mean standardized factor indices by each medium and demographic category.

Given the number of analyses involved, a stringent $p < .01$ criterion for statistical significance was adopted to minimize the error rate across all analyses. Those effects that emerged as significant were primarily main effects, indicating some direct effects of demographic factors on public opinion that did not differ by ad medium. The main effects of ad medium were also significant in all of these analyses, and these were discussed in the previous section. For gender, the findings indicated that, overall, women had somewhat less favorable perceptions of advertising than men did with respect to the need for government regulation, $F(1, 2496) = 18.38$, $p < .0001$, and advertising's effect on prices, $F(1, 2499) = 7.91$, $p = .005$. These perceptions did not differ significantly by ad medium.

Age affected overall confidence in advertising, $F(2, 2415) = 12.57$, $p < .0001$; perceptions of advertising's usefulness, $F(2, 2489) = 4.77$, $p < .01$; harmfulness, $F(2, 2488) = 26.71$, $p < .001$; and effects on product prices, $F(2, 2486) = 14.05$, $p < .0001$. Younger people (those aged 18–34) had the most favorable perceptions. This finding did not differ significantly by ad medium.

For education, the findings were more complex than for the other demographic variables. Less-educated people, compared to college graduates, had more favorable overall opinions of advertising, $F(1, 2410) = 10.11$, $p = .001$, and saw advertising as more useful, $F(1, 2482) = 20.40$, $p < .0001$. Again, these perceptions replicate earlier findings (Shavitt et al., 1998). However, the interaction of education and ad medium on overall opinions was also significant, $F(5, 2410) = 3.38$, $p = .005$. Although more education was generally associated with less favorable overall opinions about advertising, such was not the case for business classifieds. Here, educated respondents had at least as favorable an overall opinion as did less-educated people. Also, there was no real effect of education on overall opinions about advertising in general or about TV advertising.

There was also an interaction of education and ad medium on perceptions regarding price effects, $F(5, 2479) = 4.24$, $p = .001$. Although more education was typically associated with a more negative perception of advertising's effect on prices, such was not the case for TV advertising, where perceptions were equally negative for both educational groups. It was also not the case for catalogs. More interesting, the effect of education on price perceptions seemed to reverse for business classifieds. There, more

Table 4. Mean Factor Composite Z-Scores by Demographics for Each Medium.

	Gender		Age		Education		Income		
	Male	Female	18–34	35–54	55–65	< C. Grad	Coll. Grad	< \$35K	\$35K+
All samples									
Overall attitude toward advertising	-0.03	0.02	0.15	-0.06	-0.15	0.06	-0.10	0.08	0.00
Factor 1: Usefulness/informativeness	-0.01	0.01	0.06	-0.03	-0.06	0.06	-0.10	0.07	0.00
Factor 2: Harmfulness/offensiveness	0.05	-0.03	0.19	-0.10	-0.13	0.03	-0.06	0.06	-0.01
Factor 3: Trustworthiness	0.04	-0.02	0.07	-0.03	-0.04	-0.01	0.03	0.04	0.02
Factor 4: Government regulation	0.13	-0.08	-0.01	-0.01	0.07	-0.01	0.02	0.01	0.01
Factor 5: Cost	0.03	-0.03	0.11	-0.08	0.00	0.05	-0.10	0.10	-0.05
General sample									
Overall attitude toward advertising	-0.09	-0.03	0.12	-0.09	-0.26	-0.05	-0.05	0.02	-0.06
Factor 1: Usefulness/informativeness	-0.01	-0.02	0.07	-0.04	-0.10	0.03	-0.09	0.05	-0.01
Factor 2: Harmfulness/offensiveness	-0.13	-0.24	0.01	-0.30	-0.33	-0.18	-0.23	-0.12	-0.22
Factor 3: Trustworthiness	-0.21	-0.23	-0.11	-0.28	-0.30	-0.25	-0.18	-0.19	-0.21
Factor 4: Government regulation	0.01	-0.22	-0.18	-0.14	-0.04	-0.13	-0.15	-0.14	-0.14
Factor 5: Cost	-0.14	-0.21	-0.04	-0.19	-0.11	-0.08	-0.21	0.00	-0.18
Television sample									
Overall attitude toward advertising	-0.34	-0.25	0.01	-0.46	-0.58	-0.28	-0.31	-0.23	-0.26
Factor 1: Usefulness/informativeness	-0.29	-0.17	-0.11	-0.31	-0.24	-0.19	-0.27	-0.15	-0.24
Factor 2: Harmfulness/offensiveness	-0.16	-0.20	0.13	-0.41	-0.37	-0.15	-0.25	-0.28	-0.05
Factor 3: Trustworthiness	-0.11	-0.22	-0.18	-0.22	-0.05	-0.26	-0.04	-0.11	-0.12
Factor 4: Government regulation	0.10	-0.12	-0.10	-0.07	0.20	-0.10	0.10	0.04	-0.01
Factor 5: Cost	-0.15	-0.29	-0.12	-0.40	-0.11	-0.24	-0.23	-0.17	-0.29
Catalog sample									
Overall attitude toward advertising	0.51	0.59	0.55	0.54	0.65	0.67	0.36	0.45	0.72
Factor 1: Usefulness/informativeness	0.37	0.48	0.45	0.43	0.45	0.52	0.25	0.37	0.50
Factor 2: Harmfulness/offensiveness	0.37	0.49	0.49	0.42	0.44	0.51	0.34	0.38	0.46
Factor 3: Trustworthiness	0.23	0.30	0.19	0.31	0.35	0.30	0.24	0.19	0.32
Factor 4: Government regulation	0.18	0.23	0.12	0.24	0.33	0.25	0.13	0.30	0.21
Factor 5: Cost	0.29	0.28	0.34	0.24	0.32	0.31	0.25	0.29	0.31

(continued)

Table 4. (continued).

	Gender		Age			Education		Income	
	Male	Female	18-34	35-54	55-65	< C. Grad	Coll. Grad	< \$35K	\$35K+
Classifieds sample									
Overall attitude toward advertising	0.31	0.26	0.44	0.20	0.08	0.27	0.29	0.29	0.37
Factor 1: Usefulness/informativeness	0.08	0.14	0.17	0.10	0.04	0.12	0.13	0.23	0.14
Factor 2: Harmfulness/offensiveness	0.27	0.12	0.38	0.09	-0.13	0.12	0.31	0.18	0.28
Factor 3: Trustworthiness	0.07	0.08	0.16	0.04	-0.01	0.08	0.10	0.27	0.02
Factor 4: Government regulation	0.06	-0.05	0.00	0.06	-0.20	-0.01	0.00	0.00	0.02
Factor 5: Cost	0.42	0.20	0.44	0.21	0.06	0.22	0.44	0.31	0.32
Radio sample									
Overall attitude toward advertising	-0.17	-0.19	-0.14	-0.20	-0.22	-0.11	-0.29	-0.09	-0.18
Factor 1: Usefulness/informativeness	-0.06	-0.13	-0.08	-0.11	-0.11	-0.04	-0.19	-0.07	-0.07
Factor 2: Harmfulness/offensiveness	0.16	0.18	0.33	0.08	0.06	0.23	0.07	0.30	0.11
Factor 3: Trustworthiness	0.35	0.27	0.37	0.29	0.22	0.31	0.31	0.32	0.34
Factor 4: Government regulation	0.24	0.04	0.16	0.14	0.08	0.08	0.23	0.05	0.19
Factor 5: Cost	0.14	0.07	0.29	-0.04	0.08	0.20	-0.04	0.20	0.06
Out-of-home sample									
Overall attitude toward advertising	0.08	0.08	0.31	-0.06	-0.10	0.26	-0.19	0.29	0.00
Factor 1: Usefulness/informativeness	0.02	-0.05	0.08	-0.08	-0.11	0.09	-0.18	0.15	-0.07
Factor 2: Harmfulness/offensiveness	0.17	-0.01	0.22	-0.03	0.04	0.15	-0.04	0.15	0.03
Factor 3: Trustworthiness	0.15	0.08	0.12	0.11	0.11	0.13	0.08	0.12	0.11
Factor 4: Government regulation	0.23	0.00	0.13	0.05	0.33	0.15	0.06	0.19	0.08
Factor 5: Cost	0.09	-0.07	0.05	-0.03	0.01	0.13	-0.18	0.14	-0.08

Note. Within each row and demographic category, boxed means are significantly different from each other at $p < 0.001$. Within the age demographic category, if only one mean is boxed, it is significantly different from the other two. If two means are boxed, they are significantly different from each other, but not the unboxed mean.

educated respondents had somewhat more favorable views of advertising than did those with less education. Given that business classifieds are a medium that encourages and enables price comparisons (e.g., for cars, real estate), it is a source of consumer information that educated respondents may feel more confident using in making their buying decisions.

In sum, more education was generally associated with less confidence in advertising—but not for every ad medium. Business classifieds were viewed somewhat more favorably by highly educated compared to less-educated respondents. Given the large number of analyses conducted involving demographics, however, these few significant findings should be viewed as preliminary pending replication.

For income, the only significant finding was that having a higher income (above \$35,000) was associated with less favorable views about advertising's effect on prices $F(1, 2109) = 7.95, p = .005$. Finally, although the interactions of income with medium did not reach the stringent criterion set here for statistical significance, there is a pattern worth noting. The less favorable views of advertising by those with higher incomes held true for most media—except for catalogs. Here, higher-income people held opinions that appeared consistently (though not significantly) more favorable than did people with lower incomes. This may reflect the proliferation of catalogs marketing luxury items to affluent consumers.

Discussion

As expected, the most self-selected ad media (catalogs and business classifieds) elicited the most favorable public attitudes. Respondents gave very high overall attitude ratings to catalogs, as well as rating them high in usefulness and low in harmfulness. Business classifieds were also highly rated, both overall and for their perceived effects on product prices. Meanwhile, one of the most intrusive ad media (TV) consistently elicited the lowest public opinions. These differences emerged consistently across demographic groups, although some demographic analyses suggested that self-selected ad media (business classifieds, catalogs) are more favorably perceived by relatively educated or affluent consumers.

RESEARCH FOCUS: STUDY TWO

A follow-up study was conducted to explore the role of selective memory in the relatively high ratings given to self-selected ad media. The role of selective retrieval in influencing judgments and attitudes is a core theme of psychological research on the cognitive dynamics of judgment and evaluation (e.g., Morwitz & Fitzsimons, 2004; see Srull, 1989, for a review) and survey responding (e.g., Sudman et al., 1996). In line with those assumptions, this study directly tested the contention that, for an ad medium that allows self-selected exposure, such as catalogs, (a) the ads

that one chooses to spend time on are more likely to be remembered when judging the ad medium, and (b) these recalled ad experiences may therefore have a disproportionate influence on one's reported opinion.

Methods and Design

The Sample. A sample of 103 university students participated for extra credit in an advertising class. Because the goal of this study was to examine the relations between variables, rather than to generalize any responses to the broader population, students were deemed an appropriate population for follow-up research. Moreover, students are frequently targeted by catalog advertisers and make regular purchases from catalogs, as the sample's responses to the questionnaire revealed.

Questionnaire Content. Participants first responded to the same overall attitude question toward catalog advertising used in the national survey. Next, in order to assess which catalogs had influenced their attitude judgment, participants were asked to list in open-ended format which catalogs they had thought of when answering the attitude question. They were then asked to list in open-ended format which catalogs they had received during the previous semester, to circle those that they had actually opened and looked through. For each catalog that they circled they were also asked to write down how many minutes they spent looking through it and to indicate whether they ordered any merchandise from it. The list of catalogs that participants reported looking through was compared with the list that came to their minds as they evaluated the catalog medium.

Results and Discussion

Fully 48% of the catalogs participants reported that they thought of when answering the attitude question were catalogs that they had actually opened and read in recent months. In other words, participants based their catalog evaluations largely on the catalogs to which they attended. Moreover, the catalogs that were thought of when evaluating the medium received much more reading time in minutes (mean = 13.51) than the catalogs that did not come to mind when evaluating the medium (mean = 5.98), $F(1, 103) = 15.55, p < .0001$. In other words, the more time participants had spent looking through a catalog, the more likely that catalog was to be top of mind when evaluating the medium.

How did these top-of-mind catalogs influence evaluations? Correlational analysis showed that, when answering the attitude question, the more frequently people thought about catalogs that they had read, the more favorable were their reported attitudes; $r = 0.21, p < .05$. The same held true for the frequency with which they thought about catalogs that they ordered from ($r = 0.22; p < .05$). In other words, when evaluating

catalog advertising, the more accessible in memory were the catalogs that had engaged participants' attention (and motivated them to buy), the more positive was their evaluation. Similarly, the number of minutes spent reading the top-of-mind catalogs also correlated significantly with attitudes; $r = 0.21, p < 0.05$.

Thus, the follow-up data indicate that memory for catalog exposure plays a significant role in the evaluation of catalog advertising. When one is asked to report an opinion toward catalog advertising, a medium in which exposure is highly self-selected, the most engaging or relevant ads—the ones to which one devoted the most time—are more likely to come to mind. This allows the engaging catalogs to exert a disproportionate influence on attitudes, enhancing the public's opinion of catalog ads.

GENERAL DISCUSSION

The results of a large national survey of the general public revealed that how people feel about advertisements depends on the medium in which the ads appear. Specifically, the data supported the contention that public opinion toward advertising in a medium varies with the degree to which the medium offers self-selected ad experiences. In general, as expected, the media that allow for highly self-selected ad experiences, catalogs and business classifieds, elicited the most favorable public attitudes. The medium that is the most intrusive, TV, elicited the least favorable opinions. Radio and out-of-home media, which are moderately disruptive or intrusive (e.g., Elliott & Speck, 1998), elicited ambivalent or middling attitudes. The present research is one of only a few surveys available that offers a national picture of public attitudes toward advertising focused at the level of several specific media. Thus, the results serve as a first step in addressing media differences in self-selection and intrusiveness with nationally projectable results.

As suggested earlier, the fact that consumers experience catalog and classified ads as being largely self-selected has important implications for the way consumers will evaluate such advertising. Even though people do not necessarily request the catalogs or classifieds that they receive—that is, these media may use a “push” strategy—consumers may experience these ads as self-selected and nonintrusive for a number of reasons. First, such ads do not interrupt other activities and entertainment experiences. Second, it is easy to ignore the ads that hold little interest. Finally, detailed attention to ads that are of interest takes place on one's own timetable.

As a result of this self-selected attention, consumers' strongest memories will be for those ads that they spent the most time with—that is, the ones that they found most engaging (but see Roehm, Roehm, & Boone, 2004, for a case where more intrusive advertising techniques provide a

retrieval advantage). The follow-up study indicated that, when one is asked to report an opinion toward catalog advertising, the catalogs that come to mind are those to which one devoted the most time. The data suggest that public opinion toward catalogs and classified ads will be disproportionately influenced by the most engaging ads.

The unfavorable public opinions observed here for TV advertising are consistent with the results of previous surveys that have reported negative views of TV advertising. Supporting the Alwitt and Prabhakar (1992) results, the present results showed that television was viewed as the most harmful or offensive and the least trustworthy ad medium. Moreover, advertising on TV—the medium with the largest and most publicized advertising budgets—was perceived to have the most negative impact of all media on product prices.

The intrusiveness of TV advertising may be largely responsible for these negative public attitudes. Still, it should be remembered that what makes TV ads intrusive also makes them effective at reaching the largest audience. Clearly, therefore, one would not want to base a media plan solely on public-opinion results. However, to the extent that unfavorable perceptions about TV advertising elicit ad-avoidance behavior, as the Speck and Elliott (1997) findings indicate, one should be careful in assuming that reach equals effectiveness in terms of media planning. Less intrusive forms of TV advertising, such as product placement, may be viewed more favorably (Law & Braun, 2000). It is worth considering the differences in public opinions across media that may impact upon the target audience's willingness to be exposed to one's advertisements.

It should also be emphasized that each medium is useful for—perhaps even uniquely suited to—particular marketing-communication purposes. Thus, for example, the finding that catalogs are highly favored by the public does not imply that they are ideal channels for any advertising situation. In many cases, only specific media, such as TV or out-of-home, would be suitable for reaching the desired target or for achieving certain communication goals.

The media-specific attitudes described here were generally observed across demographic lines. The findings are consistent with the demographic differences in public attitudes toward advertising in general reported by Shavitt et al. (1998), and are consistent with others' findings that demographic characteristics alone do not predict medium-specific advertising attitudes (Alwitt & Prabhakar, 1994; Elliott & Speck, 1998). Although males, people under 35, and people with less education or lower income reported more favorable attitudes toward advertising overall (regardless of ad medium), demographics generally did not influence the role of the medium in public opinion toward advertising. This broad-based difference in attitudes toward ad media suggests the importance of understanding the role of self-selected ad experiences in evaluations of advertising.

Although the present study provided a rare national picture of media-specific public opinions, one unfortunate limitation is that the degree to

which each medium is associated with (or is perceived to be associated with) self-selected ad experiences was not directly assessed. Instead, the present research has benefited from others' work, which has provided important evidence regarding media differences in perceived intrusiveness or disruptiveness (e.g., Elliott & Speck, 1998; Mittal, 1994). Still, the advertising media for which public opinions were surveyed differ along multiple dimensions, and the attitude differences observed here may therefore be due to characteristics other than self-selection. Although Study 2 provided some direct evidence for the contention regarding the role of memory for ads when ad experiences are self-selected, future research could address these processes further. For instance, research could investigate whether attitudes toward an ad medium vary with consumers' judgments about the degree to which it provides self-selected ad experiences. Research could also assess whether self-selection (or perceived self-selection) mediate the effects of other factors on advertising attitudes.

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