Significant Influences on Advertising Research
In The United States

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The study of advertising by academicians in the United States began in earnest in the early 1900s. The artifacts of the discipline and external issues that influence the decisions of researchers in their choice of research streams on which to focus are presented.

As the field of advertising has flourished, researchers have cross-pollinated (i.e., borrow from one discipline and apply in another discipline) concepts and theories. The rightness of theory borrowing has often been debated. Many significant theories and concepts have been borrowed successful. Articles are presented as examples of the successful borrowing of concepts and theories. An overview of the influence of these concepts and theory on advertising research is presented.

Advertising's roots reach back deep into ancient Greece. Yet, the study of advertising in the United States by academicians was just a seedling at the dawn of the 20th century. In the U.S., advertising research emerged from the fertile minds of marketing academicians and grew throughout the 20th century through the encouragement of the artifacts of the marketing disciple (e.g., journals, course offerings, awards, etc.) as well as the economic, legal, political and social environmental constraints and encouragements.

Inductive research (i.e., from specific observation to broad generalizations and theories) grew into statements of general theory such as the "Theory of Advertising" by Walter Dill Scott in 1903. As advertising thought spread, specialized studies provided fertile ground for "verification, elaboration, and penetration of the phenomenon of advertising" (Bartels, 1962, p. 56).

Marketing academicians have debated the "rightness" of theory borrowing (i.e., cross-pollination). Zaltman, LeMasters and Heffring (1982) believed cross-pollination of theory does "not always prove fruitful" (p. 6). Fider and Bourgeois (1982), Jones (1987). Murray and Evers (1989) suggest that one reason cross-pollination of concepts and theories fail to reach their potential is that the concept or theory is planted in the wrong context. Murray, Evers and Swinder (1995) find that theory borrowing is too often a random opportunistic process that overlooks the borrowed theory's social roots. Nevertheless, marketing researchers have successfully borrowed theory (i.e., cross-pollination) from many disciplines. Two disciplines from which theories and concepts have been successfully borrowed include communications and psychology.

Advertising is a form of communication and as such it benefits from the concepts and theories offered by the communications discipline. The communication discipline provides marketing with the tools to predict and explain advertising phenomena. Advertising has the potential to inform, persuade and/or manipulate. The effectiveness of an advertising strategy lies in the researcher's knowledge of potential consumers' wants and needs combined with an understanding of the communications process including the areas of information processing and source credibility.

The communications model (Figure 1) offers insights into advertising. Within the communication's channel there are many distractors. One distractor is noise in the channel (e.g., information overload). Information overload has been of particular interest to the advertising researcher (E.g., American Forecaster Almanac, 1993; Brown and Rothschild, 1993; Ha, 1996; Ha and Litman, 1997). Daily consumers weed through a multitude of advertisements in newspapers, magazines, television, radio and the Internet to name a few.

Another distractor that has received a great deal of attention is the source of the message itself (i.e., source credibility dimensions of: perceived expertise, flexibility, knowledge, sincerity, power and trustworthiness) (e.g., Goldsmith, Lafferty and Newell, 2000; Hovaland and Weiss, 1951; Sternthal, Dholakia and Leavitt, 1978)

![Communication Process Diagram](image)

**Figure 1 - Communication Process** (Lasswell, 1948)
The communications field has also offered other communications models. The action-oriented AIDA model (attention, interest, desire, action) is an adapted communications model that allows marketers to focusing on advertising, promotions, and/or sales. This model is found in many Basic Marketing textbooks offering the marketing scholar a means to better understand communications and marketing processes.

The marketing discipline has many branches that are fed by concepts and theories from deep within their roots (e.g., pricing roots - economics). Psychological concepts and theories provide support for branches such as consumer behavior, relationship marketing, sales, social marketing, promotions, and advertising to name a few.

Concepts and theories from the Psychology discipline have offered marketers many ways in which to explain and predict human behavior. In the early 1900s, the functionalist of psychology focused their attention on how humans adjust to their environment and behaviorism became the “flavor of the day.” Gestalt theory integrated physical, biological, and psychological factors in an attempt to understand and predict human behavior.

Successful cross-pollination in the plant world (i.e., the transfer of pollen from the anther of one flower to the flowers of a different plant) depends on many factors and so does the cross-pollination of academic concepts and theory (i.e., transfer from one academic discipline to that of another academic discipline).

Within the confines of this article, some concepts and theories that have been cross-pollinated, survive, and flourish within the area of marketing’s sub-field of advertising are presented along with elements from the external environment and artifacts of the discipline pertinent to the development of the advertising discipline.

**ADVERTISING DEFINED**

“Advertising is defined as any paid form of nonpersonal communication about an organization, product, service, or idea by an identified sponsor” (Alexander 1965, p. 9). Alexander’s (1965) definition has been changed slightly to include the area of public service announcements through elimination of “paid” from the definition.

**HISTORICAL EVENTS AND ARTIFACTS OF THE DISCIPLINE**

In the late 1800s, newspaper advertising was growing rapidly in the United States. By 1856, nationally distributed magazines began carrying full page advertisements and in 1888 Printer’s Ink, a prestigious magazine targeted to advertisers, agencies and copywriters came into existence. These events are just a few that form the backdrop for advertising's introduction and successful growth in the United States during the 20th century.

During the presidency of William Howard Taft (1909 – 1913), excess business inventory and a lack of demand for products necessitated that demand be stimulated in order for the economy to move forward. Advertising was considered a viable tool for stimulation of demand. Upton Sinclair wrote in *The Jungle* in 1906 of the deplorable conditions in the Chicago stockyards. Just as important to consumers was Sinclair’s reporting of the widespread deception in sales and advertising. His work did not go unnoticed by the U.S. government or its citizens. President Woodrow Wilson pushed the Federal Trade Commission Act (1914) to regulate advertising. This act set up a Federal Trade Commission of five members to be appointed by the President. If the commission found a business involved in illegal or unfair practices such as deceptive advertising, it could issue cease and desist orders against it.

During President Calvin Coolidge’s tenancy in office (1924-1929) he gave tax cuts to the rich, which resulted in an imbalance in economic wealth and overproduction of goods. During this time period, in the United States, industry leaders funneled money back into plant expansion, machinery and increased the workforce fueling even greater overproduction. Marketers dealt with overproduction aggressively to avoid large losses. During this period in U.S. history, companies were functioning under what later proved to be a “false” sense of security (Home 2002). Industries and citizens alike lost their sense of security in October of 1929 when the U.S. stock market crashed turning the economic drought into widespread economic famine. While the U.S. economy was struggling through a devastating economic famine (i.e., economic imbalance), advertising was the tool of choice by industry to cultivate the consumption soil and stimulate demand.

As the country struggled through hard economic times, weeds in the garden of marketing (e.g., false claims in advertising) were surfacing that if left alone would soon choke out the positive effects of advertising and require attention from the legal arena (i.e., legislation). However, while the practitioner world drew negative attention to advertising, marketing academics saw the first publication of the peer-reviewed “Journal of Marketing.” The journal became an outlet in which issues in advertising could surface and be examined.

As time marched on, the issue of “truth in advertising” became more and more important as new advertising mediums came into existence (e.g., television – end of WWII) and existing mediums increased their reach (e.g., radio, newspaper, magazine) providing many new or expanded channels of distribution for advertisers (both honest and dishonest). The issue of truth in advertising was to rise to the surface many more times in 20th Century.

The United States left the production era of the 1930s and by necessity entered the sales era (i.e., emphasis is on selling because of increased competition and overproduction from the production era) that lasted through
the 1950s. The period of business and social integration began in 1945. This was the time in history when advertising became recognized and accepted as an essential part of the total business (Sandage and Fryburger, 1963) and not as a mere appendage. In the early 1950s, a market orientation encompassing the marketing concept (i.e., an organization should aim all its efforts at satisfying its customer at a profit) broke ground and has flourished ever since. Therefore, a market-oriented philosophy is that the customer’s want satisfaction is the economic and social justification for a firm’s existence (Perrault, Jr., and McCarthy, 2002).

With market orientation in its infancy in the 1960s, the consumer became the focal point and “Consumerism” was introduced. Consumerism is a social movement that seeks to increase the rights and powers of consumers (Perreault, Jr., and McCarthy, 2002, p. 109). Consumerism was fueled by structural conduciveness (i.e., advancing incomes, education, complexity of technology and marketing, exploitation of the environment), structural strains (i.e., economic, ecological, marketing systems, political, and social discontent) as well as precipitating factors (e.g., professional agitation and spontaneous agitation – Ralph Nader/housewives picketing). The availability of mass media to cover the movement as well as politicians seeking votes were joined by consumer interest groups and organizations to bring attention to the injustices “big business” forced upon the “little” consumer (Kotler, 1972).

With the focus squarely on the consumer, psychological constructs and theories took on a greater importance. Marketing practitioners and academicians focused on the fulfillment of the ideals of the marketing concept (i.e., “the cornerstone of the marketing discipline” [Kohli and Jaworski, 1990]). Market orientation became the strategy of choice. Narver and Slater (1990) conceptualize market orientation by defining it as an organizational culture that most effectively and efficiently creates the necessary behaviors for the creation of superior value for buyers. Market orientation is synonymous with customer orientation therefore; psychological concepts and theory become a nature aside to the focus on satisfying the customer.

In the late 1960s and early 1970s many researchers were focusing on many of the same micro level issues of advertising mechanics (e.g., measuring advertising effectiveness – Lavidge and Steiner 1961 to satisfaction issues involving the effects of television commercials – Grass and Wallace 1969). Other researchers were looking at larger issues such as persuasion and communication processes (e.g., Robertson and Rossiter, 1974).

By the early 1970’s, focus turned once more to social/legal issues (e.g., truth in advertising). It was during this time that four associations became prominent [the American Advertising Federation (AAF), the American Association of Advertising Agencies (AAAA), the Association of National Advertisers (ANA), and the Council of Better Business Bureaus-joined forces to establish the National Advertising Review Council (NARC)]. The focus of these agencies along with the Federal Trade Commission were on sustaining high standards of truth, accuracy and social responsibility in national advertising (Belch and Belch 1998). With so much attention being given to truth in advertising by the government and advertising associations, research began to dwindle. An article published in 1975 by David Gardner, “Deception in Advertising: A Conceptual Approach” and another in 1981, Shimp and Preston wrote, “Deceptive and Nondeceptive Consequences of Evaluative Advertising” signaled the end of the research stream. However, academicians were still showing sporadic interest in “truth in advertising” as late as 1983 when Hunt, Kernana, and Mizerski co-authored, Causal Inference in Consumer Response to Inequitable Exchange: A Case of Deceptive Advertisings. The publication of this book closed out a period where “deceptive advertising” had been in the forefront for practitioners through enacted legislation and regulation. Truth in advertising rears its ugly head from time to time (e.g., “Federal Trade Commission is cracking down on the media to monitor weight-loss ad content” – Ambroz, 2003), but has not captured a research stream for some time.

Alderson presented us with segmentation by household unit in the 1950s. By the 1970s, consumer advocates began to see children as a segment of the consuming population to be protected. The term children’s market represents a market segment that is an important part of the market throughout the remainder of the 20th Century and into the 21st Century (Macklin, 1998). Children are considered to be “vulnerable” consumers and warrant special attention by the industry. Advertising to children as a segment of the market has spawned a lengthy research stream (e.g., Barcus, 1980; Limnett, 2000; Paine, 1993; Pollay 1993).

As the 1970s came to a close, academicians were researching communication issues such as source credibility and information processing (e.g., Dholakia and Sterndhal, 1977 and Greenwald and Leavitt 1984). Today this research stream goes on with investigation of the corporation’s role as a source of “source credibility” (Goldsmith, Lafferty, and Newell, 2000).

By the end of the period of scientific development (late 1980s), many advertisers had established their own research department and specialized research firms had been organized to make independent and unbiased investigation for advertisers and media (Sandage and Fryburger, 1963). Academicians focused on involvement (e.g., Greenwald and Leavitt 1984) as well as the understanding how the consumer assigns attributions (Farh and Dobbins 1989).

The 1990s saw an advertising boom through use of a challenging outlet known as the Worldwide Web. Electronic marketing has been proclaimed the “staple of electronic business” (Sweat and Whiting, 1999, p. 18). Conferences have devoted sessions to electronic marketing (e.g., Marketing and Public Policy, 2000; Society for Marketing Advance, 1999; Society for Marketing Advance,
on Consumer Reaction to Advertisements and Brands” adds value to the discipline. In their study, the researchers look at the influence of spokespersons as credible sources on attitudes and purchase intentions. They add to the mix the possibility of “corporate credibility (i.e., the reputation of a company for honesty and expertise) as another type of credibility that can “influence consumer reactions to ads and shape brand attitude-towards-the-brand” (p. 43). The researchers successfully extended the study of credibility by examining the source in light of the company’s reputation and not just the perceived credibility of the spokesperson. This work adds valuable insights to the discipline and is a seminal piece in the area of corporate credibility as it relates to source credibility. If external events (e.g., Firestone, Enron, etc.) and artifacts of the discipline drive research streams, then much more research centered on corporate credibility should surface in the future.

The articles referenced above are examples of the importance placed throughout the years in the marketing discipline of Hovland, Janis, and Kelley’s (1953) offering of the communications theory model in, Communication and Persuasion: Psychological Studies of Opinion Change. The research presented covers only one aspect of the model, nevertheless in the area of advertising “credibility of the communicator” has offered valuable insights to the research stream and to the discipline.

INvolvement and Persuasion

Hovland, Janis, and Kelley’s (1953) approach to persuasion depends on sequential steps of attention to, comprehension of, and acceptance of the message. Greenwald and Leavitt (1984) extend the concept by “adding preattention as another stage, or level, of processing; basing the differences between levels on concepts of attentional capacity and level of processing; and relating the levels to qualitatively different—and increasingly abstract systems of mental representations” (p. 584). The Hovland, Janis and Kelley (1953) model has been examined by many marketing researchers and today we can find examples of the action-oriented communication model AIDA in Basic Marketing textbooks.

Carl Hovland also made several important contributions to experimental, social, and cognitive psychology (focusing respectively on human learning, attitude change, and concept acquisition); which are considered important contributions by researchers in advertising such as Greenwald and Leavitt (1984) “Audience Involvement in Advertising: Four Levels.” Greenwald and Leavitt (1984) cite one such contribution, the study of involvement by Sherif and Hovland’s (1961) in which the consequences of high involvement as it relates to resistance to persuasion is examined (Greenwald and Leavitt 1984). Greenwald and Leavitt (1984) state that their, “analysis of involvement has some resemblance to the well-known information-processing approach to communication” of the 1953 work of Hovland, Janis, and Kelley (Greenwald and Leavitt 1984, p. 584). This article exemplifies how closely tied communications and psychology are to the marketing discipline.

Marketers communicate product ideas through promotions, personal selling, and mass selling (i.e., advertising). Examining the involvement construct as well as how humans process information (i.e., systematically or heuristically) lends valuable insights to the marketing effort (Bettman, 1979). Marketers stand to gain valuable insights into how consumers’ process information (e.g., advertisements) and which consumers (e.g., high involvement/low involvement) are most receptive to a type advertisement based on their level of involvement with the product.

ATtribution Theory

Attribution theory has been successfully “borrowed” and adapted from psychology into marketing and the subfield of advertising. Attribution theory emerged as a reaction to the overarching framework formally provided by consistency theory. Consistency theory, “posits that individuals perceive their behavior to be consistent with their self-esteem in order to maintain a consistent self-image” (Farh and Dobbins 1989, p. 836). However, attribution theory is primarily concerned with social perceptions (i.e., how a person perceives and ascribes characteristics to themselves and others) and is based in a social setting in which a person observes another person performing a behavior (Fiske and Taylor 1991). Although it is believed that attribution theory’s roots go back almost 300 years (“...date of birth depends on one’s philosophical view of whether the beginning of life is defined as the moment of conception or the time when certain structures are formed. In any case, depending on the accepted date of birth, attribution theory is anywhere between 112 and 294 years old” Weiner and Kukla, 2000 p. 382). Nevertheless, the focus on attribution theory in modern psychology began in 1944 with Fritz Heider, followed closely by Sociology in 1949 with the work of Gustav Ichheiser.

Attribution-based marketing literature includes Robertson and Rossiter (1974) “Children and Commercial Persuasion – An Attribution Theory.” Robertson and Rossiter (1974) take attribution theory into the context that at the time of the writing was up for much debate - children and television. A sample taken of elementary school children demonstrates that children are perceptive and when they attribute persuasive intent to commercials, they “believe them less like them and are less likely to want the products advertised” (p. 13). This study was both relevant to the discipline and the time (focusing on consumer responses to advertising while other researchers were still focusing on the mechanics of advertisement).

Sparkman, Jr. and Locander (1980) wrote, “Attribution Theory and Advertising Effectiveness.” These coauthors point out the many faces of “attribution theory” presenting it as an “amorphous collection of observations about naïve
causal inferences" (p. 219). Sparkman and Locander (1980) agree that, in "an advertising situation, the ad itself is usually considered the behavioral event. With this approach, research that investigates the effects of manipulations of the content of single advertisement clearly falls into what Kelley calls the single observation case" (p. 219). Smith and Hunt (1978) confer. In the final analysis of this pilot study, only the first hypothesis (H₁: Attribution to the product will increase with increasing consensus) of their four hypotheses, supported and they are unable to determine which model best expresses these attributions, but believe that Kelley's 1972 ANOVA model does have some usefulness when investigating within an advertising context.

In 1991, Gotlieb and Sarel used attribution theory as a framework for their study on predicting consumer behavior, "Comparative Advertising Effectiveness: The Role of Involvement and Source Credibility." "Seen in terms of advertising, attribution theory would suggest that the recipients of a comparative advertising message might have a problem connecting and/or attributing the advertising message for a new brand to its causes" (p. 39). In order to test their hypothesis relating to the importance of "testing the impact of advertisement format (i.e. comparative vs. non-comparative) and source credibility on construction-motivated involvement for a new brand," (p. 40) a 2 x 2 factorial experimental design was employed. Attribution theory was found to be the proper framework in attempting to identify "variables which might activate higher levels of construction-motivated involvement" (p. 43).

Again, Gotlieb and Sarel (1992) examine attribution theory in the context of advertising. "The Influence of Type of Advertisement, Price, and Source Credibility on Perceived Quality." They employ a 2 x 2 factorial experimental designed to test the "effect of type of advertisement, price, and source credibility on perceived quality and purchase intention" (p. 253). The results of the study showed that "the direct-comparative ads had a more positive impact on the perceived quality of the new brand than the noncomparative ads" (p. 260). The finding of no interaction effect of type of ad and price on purchase intention when source credibility is low is consistent with attribution theory.

As evidence above, since its first introduction into the marketing discipline, researchers have integrated attribution theory successfully into the marketing discipline and the sub-field of advertising adding valuable insights to the discipline for both academicians and practitioners.

IMPLICATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH IDEAS

Examining historically the major external (e.g., economic, legal, political and social) as well as artifacts of the discipline’s influences on advertising as a practice and as a field of study, within the United States, offers the reader a sense of the changing face of advertising as a practice and as a discipline.

It is also the author’s intention to provide the reader with a sense of the importance of borrowed theories and concepts to clarify their place within the advertising field of study. Psychological and communication concepts and theories have been successfully synthesized into the marketing discipline and have added in a positive manner to the discipline since the early 1900s. These concepts and theories have enjoyed a long and successful history in marketing and its sub-field of advertising.

An investigation into the roots and adaptation of other theories and concepts from other academic disciplines into the sub-field of advertising would be a positive contribution to the understanding of the successful integration of borrowed theories and concepts.

A historical examination, of borrowed concepts and theories from psychology in the context of the United States into other sub-fields of marketing such as consumer behavior, retailing, sales, services, societal marketing, etc., would also add to the discipline.

An interesting area of future research would be to examining the psychological concepts and theories borrowed by the marketing discipline and their synthesis into the academic arena in countries other than the United States.

A comparison of the concepts and theory presented in this paper as well as other concepts and theories examined in a time line format of adoption and expansion within the discipline would add depth to our understanding of the external factors (e.g., economic, legal, political, and social) that shape the discipline. By comparing country timelines, it would be possible to gain a deeper understanding of how and why concepts and theories are adopted and extended within the marketing discipline in relationship to the social/economic and legal/political development of a country. It would be anticipated that timeline research would lend a valuable perspective as to similarities or differences of the sub-fields of marketing as they respond to the external environment.

CONCLUSION

It is the researcher’s belief that we do not engage in research in a vacuum, but research streams are driven by elements of the world in which we live. According to agenda setting theory, the media's real power lies in its ability to tell the public what to think about rather than what to think. Social, political, legal and economic environmental issues (i.e., disseminated through the media) as well as the artifacts of the discipline are believed to influence the research streams that are relevant to the discipline for any given place and time.

The author has presented examples of relevant economic, political, social and legal events as well as artifacts of the discipline that have contributed to the
formation and development of marketing thought as it relates to advertising. Within the framework of these events, the researcher has presented cross-pollination (i.e., adaptation of borrowed theory and concepts) that are relevant to the academic and practical development and that have advanced marketing thought within the discipline. By examining research endeavors in relationship to practical world events, it is the researchers intention to demonstrate how the discipline is driven by events that shape the world in which academicians and practitioners live.

It should also be noted that in order to explain and predict behavior within the discipline that researchers have looked to other disciplines for concepts and theories that are appropriate and adaptable and through which value is added to the discipline. Marketing researchers have specifically looked to their roots (e.g., Anthropology, Economics, Psychology and Sociology) for the tools needed to cultivate the sub-field of Advertising.

REFERENCES


