

Gallup Meets Madison Avenue: Media Research and the Depression

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Before he initiated the political polls for which he is most well known, George Gallup enjoyed a successful career as an advertising executive at Young & Rubicam in New York. This paper draws on materials from the agency's archive to examine Gallup's research into magazine and newspaper readership during the early 1930s. Like other advertising agencies during the Depression, Young & Rubicam viewed empirical research as a way to prove the effectiveness of its ads to clients. Gallup's studies provided detailed evidence of readers' responses to specific visual features and persuasive strategies. His analyses of reader psychology also demonstrate the value advertisers placed on appeals to the subconscious during this time, as a way to circumvent customers' cautious attitudes about spending.

The name "Gallup" has become synonymous with opinion polling. Yet several years before he initiated the surveys of political opinion that made him known throughout the world, George Gallup had a flourishing career in advertising research. Gallup first drew attention from advertisers as a result of his doctoral dissertation at the University of Iowa, in which he proposed a new method for studying what people read in the newspaper. Using this approach, in which interviewers gave people a copy of a newspaper and asked them to point out everything they had read, Gallup found that more people read the comics section than the leading front page news story (Gallup 1928). This finding provided evidence of a "tabloid mind" among the American public, and spurred advertisers to consider comics as a forum for their sales pitches (Marchand 1985, p. 110).

In the spring of 1932, after a flurry of articles about his work appeared in advertising publications, Gallup accepted a position as Director of Research for the Madison Avenue advertising agency Young & Rubicam (Brandenburg 1932; Gallup 1932). Though Gallup had intended to stay with the agency for only a few years, he remained until 1947, when he left to work full time on his political polls. During his fifteen years at Young & Rubicam, Gallup supervised all of the agency's work in newspaper, magazine and radio research. This paper draws on records of his work from Young & Rubicam's archives to develop an in-depth understanding of the issues he confronted, the

methodologies he employed, and the conclusions he drew about people's responses to media texts.

Gallup's earlier newspaper and magazine studies were mainly concerned with learning what general features people enjoyed. What distinguished his work at Young & Rubicam, however, was the detail with which he analyzed media texts. At Young & Rubicam, it was his responsibility to determine the exact features of a text that evoked audiences' responses, as minute as they might be. The studies he supervised delved into every possible component of a text, in search of the basic elements that awakened audiences' interest. In his advertising research, a text became a bundle of marketable components. In studying readers' responses, Gallup's research at Young & Rubicam incorporated many assumptions about the subconscious and the power of suggestion that were dominant ideologies in advertising during the 1920s and 1930s. This precision approach to media analysis, and attention to subconscious responses, can be seen as an attempt to control the unpredictable economic and marketing environment of the Depression.

PROVEN FACTS AND HONEST COMPARISONS

John Orr Young and Raymond Rubicam established the agency which bears their name in Philadelphia in 1923 and moved their offices to New York three years later (Benson 1944, p. 14-15). Its major accounts during Gallup's tenure included Borden's and General Foods, manufacturers of Jell-O, Sanka and Grape Nuts; the pharmaceutical firm Bristol Myers and the consumer products company Johnson and Johnson; as well as Packard cars, Gulf Oil and Arrow shirts (*Current Biography* 1943). The agency earned a permanent place in advertising history when one of its copywriters thought of naming Borden's trademark cow "Elsie" (Fox 1984, p. 140). Among other Madison Avenue firms, Young & Rubicam had a reputation for honesty and professional integrity. It refused to accept accounts from competing companies, and once resigned an account when a client asked them to change their interpretation of some data (Rounds 1962, p. 53-54). The advertising field held Raymond Rubicam in high esteem. Even the head of the Consumers' Union, an organization not known for warm remarks about advertising executives,

admitted that "when Raymond Rubicam was in the room, one could think of advertising as a profession" (Fox 1984, p. 127).

Stephen Fox describes the qualities that distinguished the agency's work during the 1930s. "At a time of grim hard selling, Rubicam favored stylish, indirect persuasion, well crafted and visually attractive, that even used humor to make its pitch." "Instead of large ads and repetitive slogans, a typical Young & Rubicam ad offered a light, skillful use of indirect headlines and intriguing leads: a carrot instead of a cudgel." The agency's famous slogan was "resist the usual" (1984, p. 127, 137). Young & Rubicam believed that advertising should be unobtrusive and should speak directly to the potential customer for a product. As Rubicam himself described it, "the way to sell is to get read first, and the way to get read is to say more about the reader and less about yourself and your product. Mirror the reader to himself; then show him afterwards how your product fits his needs" (*Current Biography* 1943).

Rubicam believed that "to be able to talk more intelligently about the customer, you must know more about him or her." He did not believe that copywriters could rely on personal experience to understand their customers, but needed to use research to support their assumptions with facts (Benson, 1944). "Research is and must be advertising's chief reliance in questions of product, market, sales policy, and information for copy" (Firth, 1934, p. 268-69). In addition, he felt that a scientific analysis of the public's responses would also reduce the risks involved in advertising for the agency's clients (*Advertising Age* 1932).

Young & Rubicam's decision to hire Gallup in 1932 clearly reflected the agency's belief that research should form the backbone of its campaigns. At the same time, Gallup's hiring was also intended to combat the financial crisis that Young & Rubicam and the field of advertising as a whole was facing at that time. During the Depression advertising came under attack from various groups for what were felt to be deceptive and manipulative practices. The Federal Trade Commission and consumer groups criticized campaigns that they believed spread false information. Former advertising executives expressed their disgust in novels and essays with what they saw as the field's cynicism and corruption (Woodward 1926; Chase and Schlink 1927). Articles in popular magazines satirized advertising as deceitful and a waste of money and portrayed the public as dupes of its manipulations (Wood 1958). As historian Ralph Hower noted, "more magazine articles on consumers and their problems were published during twelve months in 1933-34 than in the twenty-year period from 1900-1920" (1939, p. 186).

In addition to these social and ideological attacks, advertising suffered from the economic slowdown of the early years of the Depression. Many businesses did not have enough money to advertise, and this, combined with growing doubts about advertising's effectiveness, caused a dramatic decline in the number of ads published. The

amount of money spent on national advertising in general magazines and those aimed at farmers dropped by half between 1929 and 1933, with the biggest year-to-year declines occurring in 1930-1931, which saw a drop of 18%, and in 1931-32, when money spent on advertising fell 30% (Peterson 1956, p. 25). *The Saturday Evening Post* provides a vivid example. What is considered to be the high-water mark of national advertising occurred on December 6, 1929, when the *Post* published an issue with 168 pages of ads out of a total of 272 pages. Its issue of July 2, 1932, by contrast, consisted of only 76 pages, of which less than 25 contained ads. Though it is true, as George Burton Hotchkiss pointed out, that the December 1929 issue came out right before Christmas, and the summer 1932 issue would have reflected the traditional summer slump, the contrast between these two issues illustrates the enormous drop in advertising volume during this time period. Some newspapers simply could not attract enough advertising to stay in business. Pulitzer's *New York World* and Hearst's *New York American* stopped publishing for this reason (Hotchkiss 1940, p. 66-67).

These economic pressures spurred advertisers to demand more from the agencies who designed their campaigns. One full-page ad in *Advertising & Selling* quoted an archetypal client who insisted:

let's not spend money on opinion...let's use the FACTS!..When I spend cold hard cash for advertising I want to know that I'm reaching a lot of people with money to spend--and that I'm doing it economically (1933, p. 9).

As a result of this insistence on "proof", and to counter the criticisms raised by consumer groups and government investigations, agencies began to beef up their research services and hired experts with advanced degrees in psychology and statistics. By adopting empirical methods, advertisers hoped they could shore up their declining reputations and boost confidence in their work among business executives. Ralph Hower noted that agencies "had to retrench on the one hand and improve service on the other. Thus it was no accident that substantial gains were made after 1930 in the application of scientific methods to the analysis of marketing and advertising results" (1939, p. 184).

When Young & Rubicam hired Gallup in the spring of 1932, the agency was in the throes of the advertising Depression. Gallup met the staff on February 6, 1932, and officially joined the agency on July 1, right before the low point in *Saturday Evening Post* advertising, and ten days before the worst stock market crash since October 1929 (Gallup 1982). Money spent on advertising had fallen by 30% over the prior year. Young & Rubicam had just cut salaries to avoid layoffs, and no one was even sure whether or not the expense of a research department could be justified (Larmon 1949, p. 111-113).

MILESTONES IN MARKETING HISTORY

WOVEN INTO THE FABRIC

Agency memos indicate what Young & Rubicam hoped Gallup would accomplish:

We all know that the first requirement of an advertisement is to attract attention . . . I think we would all be interested in finding out what kind of advertising combines maximum attention value with maximum conviction and sales response, and what kind--if any--gets a lot of attention and comment, but doesn't seem to make people skurry [sic] around to buy the product (Young & Rubicam 1932b).

Young & Rubicam hoped Gallup's research would provide general information that the agency could apply to all its accounts. "The final result of all this testing should be to give us just such findings--generalizations which can guide us in the preparation of copy" (Young & Rubicam 1932b). It was also hoped that his studies would have a predictive value, that they would "discover... new trends in the public's reading appetite and advertising predilections--trends which a client of ours can take advantage of in their early stages, thus helping to keep his copy in the van of the advertising procession" (Young & Rubicam 1932?a). The economic imperative was crucial.

In these times the elimination of every waste in advertising, which can by any means be discovered, is the imperative duty of the agent to his client. Likewise, these are times when the agent owes it more than ever to his client to uncover and report new and more effective possibilities in copy preparation [and] media use...that directly effect [sic] the advertiser's return from his investment (Young & Rubicam 1932?a).

When Gallup joined the agency, Young & Rubicam circulated a bibliography of his published work. Memos summarized his newspaper research and earlier study for *Liberty* magazine and noted the "profound effect" his work had had on journalism and advertising (Young & Rubicam 1932?a; 1932b). Gallup's first assignment was to analyze interest in the editorial and advertising contents of seven women's magazines, to determine how each magazine compared in terms of reader interest, and how Young & Rubicam's ads ranked in relation to their competitors'. The agency also wanted Gallup to identify the specific textual features of the ads that attracted readers' attention, such as its typeface, headline, color, size and position on the page. Gallup's research was viewed an "an additional store of information--more dependable, it is believed, than much that has been obtained in the past" (Young & Rubicam 1932?a). The memos made clear what was at stake in Gallup's work, arguing that only with "proven facts and honest comparisons can we expect to build new and convincing ideas, so necessary in these highly critical, highly competitive times" (Young & Rubicam 1932c).

Media texts can be analyzed for a number of reasons. Journalism students might take apart newspaper articles or television broadcasts to understand how they are constructed and to imitate them in their own work. A media theorist might want to analyze these same texts in order to unpack the ideologies they conceal. In either case, the analyst dissects a text into its signifying components in order to understand it better.

At Young & Rubicam, Gallup analyzed media texts in order to pinpoint the sources of their success. He and his colleagues believed that it was possible to define, down to the smallest unit, which aspects of a text produced an audiences' feelings of enjoyment, and use this knowledge to design other texts that would evoke similar feelings. Media analysis, in this case, was a form of audience management: it assumed that one could scientifically manipulate texts in order to manipulate audiences. This section demonstrates where this model of textual analysis originated, and the implications it carried.

Gallup earned his graduate and undergraduate degrees at the University of Iowa in psychology, and he later recalled that one of the theorists whose work influenced him was Walter Dill Scott (Rounds 1962). Gallup's research at Young & Rubicam illustrates the continuing impact of Scott's theory that the power of suggestion could overcome customers' resistance. A fundamental tenet of Scott's work was that appeals are not rational, but sensory. "We can not depend on people's imagination or memory or reasoning alone in making an appeal" (Scott 1903/1931, p. 8). Scott believed that whether people paid attention to ads depended not only on the psychological appeals used in them, but also on specific design elements such as an ad's color, size, shape and position on a page. These elements, he believed, could exercise an effect on viewers comparable to the process of hypnosis and induce them to buy an object (Kuna 1976; Lynch 1968). According to Scott, by manipulating various components of an ad, it was possible to increase interest in it and make sure it was noticed and remembered (McMahon 1972).

At Young & Rubicam Gallup and his colleagues conducted extensive tests with different kinds of layout and typography to see how they affected readers. One area of research examined how people's interest varied in relation to the shape of an ad or its position on a page. Memos cited "eye-movement studies" which found that "the eye does not like to move in a verticle [sic] plane." From this Gallup concluded that an ad or logo had a better chance of being seen if it appeared higher up on a page (Gallup 1938). Young & Rubicam found evidence to support a popular belief among advertisers that ads appearing "above the fold" attracted more attention than those appearing below it on the page (Gallup 1935c).

In addition to researching the effect of vertical positioning, Gallup also examined the merits of the right and left sides of a page. He concluded that there was no

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guarantee that ads would be read more often if they appeared on the right side, and suggested that it might not be worth the premium price advertisers had traditionally paid for this position. A more important consideration was whether or not the features around an ad attracted attention (*Advertising Age* 1936). Gallup found that ads were noticed less if they were placed on a page that was crowded with other announcements. This finding generated debates within the agency about whether to place ads in the evening papers, which had a larger circulation but whose pages carried more advertising, or in the morning papers, which had a smaller circulation and therefore fewer ads, but where each ad would be more visible (Gallup 1935?a).

These studies about the effects of different layouts were matched in detail by the agency's research on the impact of different kinds of typography. Before Gallup began working at the agency, Young & Rubicam followed the accepted practice of presenting advertising in blocks of text that required close reading. At Gallup's urging, the agency began experimenting with text that was broken into smaller units, put in italics or underlined, and that made extensive use of asterisks and boldface. Young & Rubicam's art designers used more white spaces within ads, to make them easier to read and to break up the monolithic appearance of the selling copy. Rhymes and shorter headlines were also employed to keep readers' attention (Gallup 1938; 1982). Walter Dill Scott's *Psychology of Advertising* had also drawn attention to the value of using white space to guide the reader's eye through a page (1931, pp. 11-16).

The assumption behind this approach to typography was to develop designs that would overcome readers' "mental inertia" and prevent them from realizing they were reading an ad until they had become absorbed in it. These theories operated from the assumption that viewers had to be lured or seduced into reading ads, and that their resistance could only be overcome by non-verbal means (Rounds 1962, pp. 85-86; Gallup 1938). The visual components of an ad were designed to get attention and create interest, then the text could make the sales pitch.

An attractive typography and intriguing layout could entice readers' attention towards an advertisement, but once they began reading it, the ad needed to hold their interest. Gallup and Young & Rubicam also explored ways of drawing the reader into the world of an ad. Gallup's memos often referred to his earlier studies of newspaper and magazine readers, and in particular, to his discovery about the importance of the picture page (Gallup 1928; 1933). To take advantage of the finding that people paid more attention to visual images, Gallup recommended that Young & Rubicam place ads in a newspaper's rotogravure section and use small illustrations and photographic sequences for ads in other sections (Gallup 1935?b; 1938). Using images was another way to draw readers into ads before they realized what was happening. An ideal ad, in Gallup's view, was one that looked so much like the rest of the paper or magazine that readers couldn't tell them apart.

In one memo Gallup praised an issue of *Life* in which some of the ads were built around groups of photos, with a minimal amount of text. These ads, he pointed out, looked just like the rest of the magazine, and readers paid more attention to them because the layout did not broadcast their identity (Gallup 1937c). As a result of this research, Young & Rubicam clients who had not used photos before began to do so (*Advertising Age* 1936).

A final strategy that Young & Rubicam employed to entice readers' attention was even more subtle. During the 1930s Young & Rubicam, along with other agencies, believed that advertising worked best if it was personalized. The head of the agency's radio department, Hubbell Robinson, presented this view in a 1932 essay in *The Advertising Agency Looks at Radio*, a collection of writings designed to persuade companies to use radio as an advertising medium. Robinson argued that what people wanted most was entertainment they could personalize, that they could relate to their own experiences. They enjoyed narratives with situations where they could see themselves or someone they knew.

Young & Rubicam used this same selling strategy in its print media. Gallup and Young & Rubicam promoted the idea that in order to sell a product, ads had to make contact with readers' everyday experiences, and indicate how the product would affect those needs. Ideally, ads should create a vivid scenario that demonstrated how the product would solve the problem, through images rather than words (Rounds, 1962, pp. 59-60). This, too, reflected the impact of Walter Dill Scott, who argued that ads should "find a means for picturing or representing the article in use, so clear, vivid, and unambiguous that it will catch the reader's attention strongly, and make an intense impression by reason of its seeming realness or actuality" (1931, p. 136).

As examples of the dramatic use of visuals to draw viewers in, Gallup often pointed to the ads Young & Rubicam designed for Packard, which featured drawings of a young boy sitting on a fence gazing at the car, and a caption reading, "when he grows up, that's what he wants." The ad created a detailed visual context in which the viewer could fantasize for a moment that the car was his, and implied that possessing it was the fulfillment of a childhood dream. Another campaign used an image of the Venus de Milo to raise the question of what to do when the coffee you had drunk kept you awake. In the ad the statue, usually seen in an upright position, was shown laying on its side, and the caption read, "Drink Sanka and sleep." By presenting a familiar object in a unfamiliar pose, the ad awakened readers' curiosity and created an indelible impression that would be associated with the product in the future. Presumably readers would think of Sanka the next time they found themselves drinking coffee late in the day. Both ads avoided a "reason why" approach based on words, and worked on a purely visual level to attract attention. They bypassed conscious reasoning to awaken subconscious desires (Rounds 1962, pp. 80-81).

TRAFFIC PATTERNS AND COST PER THOUSAND

Gallup and Young & Rubicam's study of readership patterns enabled them to correlate reader interest with specific textual components. A memo written in 1935 asserted that:

By analysis, we can tell to a great extent what makes an ad click or what can hurt it, from the standpoint of makeup, position, etc. We have data on editorial trends, and information which can be of tremendous value in exploiting new ideas and new forms of advertising presentation (Copy Research Department).

As part of its research, Young & Rubicam also measured what percentage of an ad people read, that is, whether they just noticed it, or whether they read part or all of it. As these studies accumulated, the agency began to calculate average "noting and reading" scores for ads of comparable size and color. Then Young & Rubicam took the scores from earlier ads and compared them to later ones, to determine whether new ads performed above or below the "par" values for previous ones (Copy Research Department).

Using numbers also introduced the possibility of competition: once Young & Rubicam calculated these averages or "par" values for different ads, it could compare its ads with those from other agencies, and ads from its recent campaigns with those from earlier ones. In a memo from August 1937, for example, Gallup noted that Young & Rubicam's full page magazine ads had an average readership of 14% compared with an average of 9% for ads produced by other companies. Gallup then used these numbers to establish performance benchmarks for the agency. For instance, he announced that, instead of a 14% "notice rate," the company should aim for a 20% rate (Gallup 1937b).

The main purpose of these reading and noting numbers was to prove the effectiveness of Young & Rubicam's ads to their clients, and to make the agency's advertising more cost effective. This overriding concern for cost-effectiveness reflected the impact of the Depression. Agencies aimed to buy the least amount of space for the least amount of money to achieve the greatest effect on sales. At Young & Rubicam, Gallup wrote memos debating whether six or eight column inches would be better for an ad, considering the cost. "An advertisement for a patent medicine might be most effective in five column inches, whereas an oil advertisement might be most effective in 60 column inches, judged by cost per thousand noters and readers" (Gallup 1935b). Similarly, Gallup noted that ads gained more attention when they appeared in the first quarter of a magazine rather than the last, and since there was no additional cost associated with this position, the agency could get an additional benefit for its clients at

no extra cost. With newspapers, on the other hand, ads on different pages cost different amounts, so it was important to determine exactly which position and which page drew the most attention in return for the money that was spent (Larmon 1949). The agency measured reader "traffic" through each section of the paper and calculated noting and reading scores relative to the overall traffic for that section (Gallup 1935a). An ad that was well-read had more value in a section that attracted a lot of readers or "traffic" than if it was in a section without many readers (Gallup 1935f).

Advertising agencies had been gathering information about newspaper and magazine audiences since the late 19th century (Lockley 1952). What distinguished advertising during the Depression was its focus on cost effectiveness and determination to control every element that could help sales, at a time when the American economy seemed beyond anyone's grasp. This absolute determination to control costs and regulate "traffic flow" is symptomatic of economic crisis, and can be viewed as an implicit recognition of an inability to regulate the very thing one is seeking to control.

THE SHEEP AND THE GOATS

The media research that Gallup carried out at Young & Rubicam analyzed both texts and audiences with a level of precision not reached in advertising before. As we've seen, the agency's goal was to understand exactly which factors influenced audiences favorably in order to duplicate them as much as possible. By finding out what types of programs and ads attracted attention from readers and listeners, the agency believed it could design others with similar characteristics and increase profits for its clients. This research also proved the value of the agency's work to its clients. The focus of its research was at all times profit and cost-effectiveness.

Gallup's research findings circulated throughout Young & Rubicam. In 1935 and 1937, for example, he prepared weekly reports for Raymond Rubicam that discussed new methodologies, differences among media, cost factors, attention-getting devices, and research strategies used by other agencies (Gallup 1935a; 1935e; 1937b). With Garrit Lydecker, he reviewed previous Young & Rubicam ad campaigns to see whether those with high test scores resulted in actual sales, and found a strong correlation (Gallup 1982). His work played an integral role in the agency's day to day activities. In later interviews Gallup recalled that when the research department came up with new findings, executives from other parts of the agency would stay late and come in on Saturdays to review their results and formulate ways to implement them (Fox 1984, p. 139).

Gallup and Young & Rubicam also changed the way advertising was done throughout the rest of the industry. Gallup's idea that blocks of advertising copy should be broken up became standard industry practice within five years. In one memo to Raymond Rubicam, Gallup noted

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that in 1932 nearly two-thirds of all the ads published in *Good Housekeeping* used large blocks of copy, while by 1937 the same percentage of ads was broken into smaller units and used livelier copy. There was also an increase in ads that used images rather than words, a practice that Gallup advocated in many speeches and articles.

By the mid 1930s, Young & Rubicam had emerged as an advertising powerhouse. As Stephen Fox describes: "in the Depression decade, with other agencies failing and cutting staffs, Rubicam drove his agency from nowhere to second place in annual billings, behind only J. Walter Thompson. Billings almost doubled at Young & Rubicam from 1935 to 1937, from \$12 million to \$22 million" (1984, p. 139). A good part of this success can be attributed to the research Gallup conducted for the agency. He and Young & Rubicam were often given awards together. In 1936, for example, an industry-wide committee awarded Gallup a medal for his "distinguished contribution to advertising research." At the same time, Young & Rubicam also won an award for excellence in copy research and technical excellence, areas which Gallup directed (*New York Times* 1936; *Fortune* 1936; Daniels 1969). Throughout his life Raymond Rubicam said that he considered his decision to hire Gallup as one of his greatest professional accomplishments (Rounds 1962; Benson 1944; *Current Biography* 1943).

During his 15 years at the agency, Gallup became a prominent figure in the New York advertising world. In addition to directing projects at Young and Rubicam, he served on several advisory committees that afforded him a comprehensive view of research developments at other companies. From 1934-1935 he was President of the Market Research Council, which brought together representatives from advertisers, clients and radio stations to find ways to standardize audience measurements (James 1937-1938; *Broadcasting* 1938). He also served on the Copy Testing Committee that supervised research for the Advertising Research Foundation (Advertising Research Foundation 1939). The method he developed to study newspaper readership continued to be used, with modifications, in studies conducted by *Life* magazine (1938).

Within a few years after Gallup began working at Young & Rubicam, the agency thought enough of his research to highlight it in the institutional ads it ran in business magazines including *Fortune*, *Advertising & Selling*, *Printer's Ink* and *Tide* (Larmon 1949). A full page ad in *Fortune* published in October 1938 underscores the value the agency placed on his work:

Young & Rubicam's Copy Research Department (under Young & Rubicam Vice-President Dr. George H. Gallup) makes a continuous study of the public's reading and listening habits--of what gets people's attention, holds their interest, wins their confidence, and makes them buy. Young & Rubicam was a pioneer in this kind of work; has

been carrying it on without interruption for years; and has accumulated what we believe to be an unequalled reservoir of information on what attracts people, what convinces them, and what stirs them to action! Such knowledge is a major reason why we are particularly well-equipped to prepare advertising that sells the *greatest number* at the *lowest cost* [p. 89, emphasis in the original].

As research data accumulated, Young & Rubicam came to believe that "there *are* certain laws that determine the interest of an advertisement--and how many readers that advertisement will attract" (*Fortune* 1935). The agency's philosophy was articulated most clearly by Sigurd Larmon, who became president of Young & Rubicam after Raymond Rubicam retired. He asserted that:

Things that have interested people over and over again in the past will interest them over and over again in the future. By studying these recurrences over a long period of time, categories of likes and dislikes may be established. Thus, a great many advertising practices can be divided into sheep and goats. By avoiding the goats, the overall interest in advertising can be heightened...By cataloging a wide range of products, and charting the relative interest inherent in each, we know how much harder we have to work to get attention for a cake of soap than for a jar of beauty cream (Larmon, 1949, p. 115)

A MANAGED MARKETING PROCESS

This review of Gallup's work for Young & Rubicam illustrates how his early media research took shape within the larger matrix of American business and culture during the 1920s and 1930s. Gallup's work used quantitative forms--numbers, charts, and graphs--to summarize and compare what he believed were essential components of media and advertising texts. He and his staff analyzed these texts to the most minute degree, in an effort to pinpoint exactly which features were responsible for awakening audiences' interests. Readers themselves were also analyzed more closely. Winning their attention was desperately important during the Depression, and Young & Rubicam and others did this by appealing to them on a subconscious level. Through all of this, the agency's overriding aim was to maximize profits, to identify those features of texts and audiences that could be manipulated to achieve financial success. In his work, audience research became a means for stimulating the mass consumption of media products. With Gallup, research had to be useful and applicable to the needs of executives; it could not explore deeper philosophical or interpretive issues.

Historian Donald Hurwitz has described radio audience research of the 1930s in terms that can also be used to summarize market research in general at this time,

including Gallup's work for Young & Rubicam. Hurwitz argues that audience research in the 1930s supplied broadcasters and advertisers with "an edifice of rational procedures." It did this by "paring down the variety and complexity" of human response to a more manageable level. "By enumerating the fluid audience and making it appear fixed and static, ratings helped translate... differences into demographic descriptions... which managers then could preempt on behalf of the mass market." Audiences who had been "discrete, atomized psychological units" were endowed with the qualities of "uniform, averaged groups." In his view, "the enduring legacy" of broadcasting research has been "to instill a simple, and peculiarly neutral, conception of the audience and the mass media as bound together in a managed marketing process that is ministered to by professional social scientists" (1988, pp. 237-239) Gallup's work for Young & Rubicam during the 1930s translated the messy imprecision of human interests and reactions to useable, and manageable, data.

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