
Pretesting TV Commercials: Methods, Measures, and Changing Agency Roles

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Research directors with the largest 200 agencies and advertising executives with the largest 200 advertisers were surveyed to examine their views on the current state of TV commercial pretesting. One-hundred and one agency researchers and 89 ad executives returned completed questionnaires (adjusted response rates of 52% and 49.7%), which asked them 23 closed-ended questions about (1) the methods and measures used to pretest TV commercial executions; (2) the perceived role of the agency versus the client in the selection of pretest methods; and (3) perceived changes in the role of the agency research department in TV commercial pretest research. Of those responding, 18 percent of the agency researchers and 19 percent of the advertising executives indicated that their agencies do not pretest TV commercials for assigned brands. Based on the responses of the 83 agency researchers and 72 advertising executives whose agencies pretest commercial executions, the findings suggest that the role of the agency research department has changed over the past 10 years. Most notably, there has been a proliferation in the use of qualitative methods and measures in TV commercial pretest research.

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The methods and measures currently used for copy testing advertisements and commercials have a long history in advertising. Historical reviews by two prominent advertising researchers, Benjamin Lipstein (1984-85) and John E. Maloney (1987), trace the roots of contemporary copy testing methods and measures back before the turn of the twentieth century, when recall and memory were measured to test the effectiveness of print advertisements. However, it was not until 1965, when Adler, Greenberg, and Lucas published an American Association of Advertising Agencies sponsored survey of agency research directors, that research appeared in the literature which systematically recorded industry-wide copy testing trends and practices.

Since 1965, a number of researchers have surveyed agency and advertising executives to document and trace popular television copy testing practices (e.g., Adler, Greenberg, and Lucas 1965; Boyd and Ray 1971; Coe and MacLachlan 1980; Jobber and Kilbride 1986; Lipstein and Neelankavil 1984; Ostlund and Clancy 1982; and Ostlund, Clancy, and Sapra 1980). These surveys, which are profiled in Table 1, are important because they provide empirical points of reference for an industry often criticized for its "historical amnesia" (Fox 1984; Kreshel 1986; Marchand 1985; Pollay 1978; and Pope 1983).

The survey reported in this article represents another point of reference. Research directors with the largest 200 agencies and advertising executives with the largest 200 advertisers were surveyed about their views on the methods and measures of television commercial pretesting. Although there are other areas of advertising copy testing, the survey was confined to television commercial pretesting for three primary reasons: (1) a huge amount of money is invested each year in the production and testing of TV commercials; (2) the demand placed on the respondents had to be limited to a reasonable response task; and (3) most of the previously published studies have focused on television copy research. The latter reason is particularly important, for the previously published surveys provide a comparative base for observing changes in television commercial pretesting over time.

Table 1
Major Surveys of Copy Research Practices

Study

Adler, Greenberg, and Lucas (1965)

Sample

Research directors of the 50 top billing U.S. ad agencies

Method

Mail survey asking respondents to evaluate copy testing methods

Results

Copy testing methods perceived as "high value" were comprehension tests, behavioral recall, and attitude tests. Attitude measures were the highest rated of campaign evaluation methods

Study

Boyd and Ray (1971)

Sample

Research directors of the 50 largest European agencies

Method

Mail survey duplicating Adler et al.'s questionnaire

Results

European opinions about copy testing were similar to those in the U.S. The greatest difference: Europeans did not support buying predisposition and sales effect measures for campaign measurement as much as Americans.

Study

Coe and MacLachlan (1980)

Sample

VPs responsible for evaluation of advertising at 37 of the largest U.S. advertisers

Method

Mail survey focusing on pretesting techniques employed for evaluation of TV commercials

Results

Focus groups, day-after recall, theater testing and Adtel were most commonly used techniques. Most advertisers see these techniques as being of substantial value.

Study

Ostlund, Clancy, and Sapra (1980)

Sample

Top 100 U.S. advertisers and agencies

Method

Questionnaire focusing on TV copy testing methods

Results

Multiple testing of ads found to be an uncommon practice. Respondents admit to absence of standards for reliability, sensitivity, or validity. On-air testing and forced exposure in theater most commonly used methods.

Study

Ostlund and Clancy (1982)

Sample

Marketing research or ad directors at top 100 U.S. advertisers and ad agencies

continued . . .

Method

Mail survey

Results

Both groups depend upon either single exposure multiple market on-air testing or forced exposure testing in a theater setting. Agreement that these methods are adequate for their needs shows that agencies and, especially, advertisers have an apparent lack of information about alternative methods. Their reliance on the above methods is surprising in that the respondents cited "scientific" criteria of sensitivity, reliability and validity as the most important factors in selecting a research method.

Study

Lipstein and Neelankavil (1984)

Sample

Research directors of 100 largest U.S. advertisers and 50 largest U.S. agencies

Method

Mail survey

Results

Principal guidelines set by PACT were used selectively. Agencies use greater diversity of research methods than advertisers. Use of multiple measures by both groups suggests lack of confidence in any single measure. Predominately high use of mall intercept interviewing and focus groups.

Study

Jobber and Kilbride (1986)

Sample

Research directors at the top 75 British ad agencies

Method

Mail survey focusing on usage of pretesting and post-testing measures for TV advertising

Results

Focus groups and "hall tests" were the most useful techniques for pretesting ads. Most useful post-testing methods were image/attitude surveys, statistical analysis of sales data, and usage surveys.

Since the last survey was published in 1986 (Jobber and Kilbride 1986), questions have been raised in trade and academic publications about the destiny of the advertising agency research department (Levin 1989; Schlossberg 1989). Some industry observers have suggested that agency research departments are on the "endangered species" lists, faced with the prospect of total elimination as an agency service function. Others, calling the deathwatch premature, have countered that agency research departments are merely experiencing a natural evolution as managers are forced to adapt to the changing demands of the marketplace. Several observers have noted that terms such as strategic research, strategic planning, and account planning have come to represent the new direction that agency research seems to be heading (Barry, Peterson, and Todd 1987; Freeman 1988; and Stewart 1986). Regardless of individual positions, however, there seems to be general agreement among most observers that corporate mergers and cutbacks have changed the character of agency research de-

partments over the past five years.

Three major research questions, developed from the previously published surveys of television advertising copy research practices, are addressed in the survey reported here:

1. Is there perceived value in pretesting television commercial executions, and if so, what is the perceived role of the agency versus the client in selecting pretest methods?
2. What methods and measures are used most frequently by advertising agencies to pretest television commercial executions?
3. Has the role of the agency research department in pretesting television commercial executions changed significantly over the past ten years? If so, how?

Answers to these questions will of course not explain "why" TV pretesting practices have changed, if changes are indeed found. Other research must provide explanations for why agency research depart-

ments have changed, including the previously noted trend toward strategic planning in the agency business. This research will provide an empirical account of how agency research directors and client executives perceive the current state of television commercial pretesting.

Method

Sample

A mail survey was conducted among the top 200 advertising agencies and the top 200 advertisers. Large agencies and advertisers were selected for the sample because, as previously mentioned, they are responsible for the majority of television advertising spending and are, therefore, more likely than smaller agencies to be involved in television commercial testing.

The agency sample was drawn from an *Advertising Age* list of the top U.S. advertising agencies according to 1989 annual domestic billings (*Advertising Age* 1990). Where possible, names and titles of those in charge of the research function at the U.S. Headquarters of these agencies were obtained from the *Standard Directory of Advertising Agencies* (1990). When names and titles were not available, the correspondence was addressed to "Research Director." The advertiser sample was drawn from a *Marketing and Media Decisions* list of the top 200 advertised brands based on 1989 annual domestic billings (*Marketing and Media Decisions* 1990). As this list contained several overlapping brands, questionnaires were mailed to 191 different individuals. Names and titles of brand managers or, where available, advertising managers were obtained for the top 191 advertised brands from *Marketing and Media Decisions*. Where names were not available, correspondence was directed to the brand managers.

Questionnaire

The majority of questions used in the questionnaire were derived and developed from previously published research. While several studies provided grounding for this research, Ostlund and Clancy (1982); Ostlund, Clancy, and Sapra (1980); and Barry, Peterson, and Todd (1987) were instrumental in formulating the questions which formed the bulk of the questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of 23 closed-end questions addressing the following four areas: (1) the methods used to pretest television commercial executions (Ostlund, Clancy, and Sapra 1980;

Ostlund and Clancy 1982); (2) the measures used to pretest television commercial executions; (3) the perceived role of the ad agency versus the client in the selection of pretesting methods (Ostlund and Clancy 1982; and (4) the perceived role of the ad agency research department today vs. ten years ago (Barry et al. 1987). In addition, respondents were asked to indicate their ad agency's 1989 annual domestic billings.

During October 1990, the questionnaire was pretested with a convenience sample of five advertising agency researchers from agencies with annual billings from under \$75 million to over \$300 million. No serious problems with the questionnaire were identified. However, based on insights gained from telephone interviews with the pretest sample, minor revisions were made. These changes were then cross-checked with the pretest participants.

Procedure

A notification letter was sent to each of the selected agency research directors and advertising executives one week prior to the mailing of the survey. The letter informed the respondents of the nature of the study, requested their participation, and told them that the questionnaire would be arriving in seven to ten days. One week following the notification letters, the questionnaires were sent. In 1990, Questionnaires were mailed to the agency researchers the third week in October and to advertisers the first week in December. Each questionnaire was accompanied by a cover letter and a postage-paid return envelope. As an incentive to participate in the study, respondents were offered a copy of the study's results.

Four weeks after the initial mailing of questionnaires, a second questionnaire was mailed to non-respondents. All questionnaires analyzed for this study were received within four weeks of the final questionnaire mailing.

A total of 190 completed, usable questionnaires were returned. This resulted in an overall response rate of 48.6%. Twelve questionnaires were returned as undeliverable by the post office with no forwarding address available. Six were returned with notes saying that the respondent could not complete the questionnaire or that it was not appropriate for them. This resulted in a total survey adjusted response rate of 50.9%. The adjusted response rate was 52% (101) for agency researchers and 49.7% (89) for advertisers.

The sample of advertising agency researchers was representative of the annual billings of the top 200

advertising agencies, based on annual domestic billings for 1989. The proportion of agency respondents from ad agencies with billings under \$150 million (63.3%), between \$150 to \$300 million (18.8%), and over \$300 million (17.8%) was similar (n.s., $p \leq .05$) to the reported billings of the top 200 U.S. advertising agencies. The respondents from the top 200 advertised brand companies tended to skew heavily toward agencies with annual domestic billings over \$300 million (67.9%), followed by those with agency billings less than \$150 million (21%), and those billings \$150 million to \$300 million (11.1%). Following are the results as they relate to the three research questions. For each question, differences between the perceptions of the two practitioner groups are reported.

Results

Only those agency researchers and ad executives whose agencies pretest television advertising were asked to complete the entire questionnaire. The others were asked to provide estimates of their agency's annual billings, and then instructed to return the questionnaire in the envelope provided.

Eighty-two percent of the agency researchers and 81 percent of the advertising executives indicated that their agencies pretest television commercial executions for assigned brands. Somewhat surprisingly, almost one of every five of the large agencies returning questionnaires reported that they did not engage in pretesting commercials for assigned brands. Following are the results, based on the responses of the 83 agency researchers and 72 advertising executives whose agencies pretest TV commercial executions.

Perceived Value and Pretest Method Selection

The first research question was explored by asking the respondents to rate the perceived value of pretesting TV commercial executions, followed by a question about the roles of agency and client in the selection of pretest methods.

Both agency researchers and advertising executives who indicated that their agencies pretested TV commercials felt there was value in pretesting executions. Over 75% of the responses for both groups clustered on the positive end of the 5-point rating scale, where 5 meant "extremely valuable" and 1 meant "not at all valuable." There was a small, but statistically significant difference (two-tailed t-test) between the groups. On average, the advertising executives

were more likely to rate the value of pretesting higher than agency researchers (4.16 vs. 3.84, $t = 2.28$, 155 df, $p \leq .05$). This statistical difference suggests that television commercial pretesting is somewhat more important to advertising executives than to agency researchers, although agency researchers claimed that commercial executions were pretested more frequently than their client colleagues.

When asked to report whether the agency or the advertiser makes the decision most often about the method used for pretesting, perceptual differences were found between the two groups of executives. As shown in Table 2, 45% of the agency researchers and 58% of the ad executives indicated that selection of pretest methods was a joint decision. However, agencies saw more involvement on their part than did advertisers. Almost 31% of the agency researchers responded that the agency usually or always made the method selection decision. In contrast, less than 3% of the ad executives reported that method selection was an agency decision. In fact, nearly 39% of the advertising executives reported that method selection was a client decision. Almost 22% of the agency researchers agreed with their client counterparts.

Pretest Methods and Measures Used

A series of questions was asked to explore the second research question on which methods and measures are used most frequently to pretest TV commercial executions. The first question in the series provided a list of test formats and asked the respondents to indicate the formats commonly used by their agencies to pretest executions.

Pretest Format. As shown in Table 3, both agency researchers (79.5%) and advertising executives (65.3%) reported that the animatic format was most often used, followed by the storyboard format (74.7% vs. 59.7%) and the finished version of the commercial (53% vs. 52.8%). Agency researchers reported a greater use of photomatic (41% vs. 22.2%), ripamatic (37.3% vs. 23.6%), and liveamatic (26.5% vs. 8.3%) formats than did ad executives. These findings suggest that TV commercial executions are more likely to be pretested in unfinished rather than finished form, even though more than half of the respondents reported that finished commercials were pretested.

Pretest Methods Used and Frequency of Use. The next question provided a list of commonly used pretest methods. The respondents were asked to rank the methods based on frequency of use by their agencies for pretesting commercial executions. Table 4

Table 2
Who Makes Decisions Most Often About
The Method Used For Pretesting

Decision Maker	% Agency Researchers (N = 82)	% Advertisers (N = 72)
Agency/Client Jointly	45.1 (37)	58.3 (42)
Agency Usually/Always	30.5 (25)	2.8 (2)
Client Usually/Always	21.9 (18)	38.9 (28)
Other	2.5 (2)	0
Total	100 %	100 %

presents the methods ranked as frequently used and the first and second mentions.

Focus groups, mall intercepts, and one-on-one depth interviews were the most often used methods, although there was a difference in rankings between the two practitioner groups. Agency researchers reported that focus groups and mall intercepts were the two most often used methods (79.5% each), followed by one-on-one depth interviews (67.5%) and laboratory/theater tests (39.8%). Ad executives agreed with their agency colleagues about focus group usage (81.9%), but reported that one-on-one depth interviews (50.0%) were used by about the same percentage as mall intercepts (48.6%). Less than 6 percent of either practitioner group reported use of single source scanner data, mobile trailer testing, or physiological testing.

The types of television commercial pretesting methods frequently used did not tend to vary significantly by agency size (1989 billings). Chi-square analysis revealed only one pretesting method was significantly related to agency size ($p \leq .05$). On-air multiple market tests were more likely ($X^2 = 6.1$, 2 df) to be frequently used when advertising agencies had billings of \$150-\$300 million (45.8%) or over \$300 million than when agency billings were less than \$150 million (21%). Only one other method, mall intercepts, approached significance ($p \leq .10$, $X^2 = 4.6$, 2 df). Agencies billing \$150-\$300 million (83.3%) were somewhat more likely to frequently use mall intercepts than those less than \$150 million (66.1%) and those over \$300 million (58.6%).

Pretesting Measures Used. The final question in the

three-part series asked respondents which measures they most frequently used in conjunction with their top-ranked pretest method. Table 5 reports the responses of agency researchers and advertising executives who ranked focus groups and mall intercepts as their most frequently used pretest methods.

Both agency researchers and advertising executives reported frequent use of communication of main point (96% vs. 78.6%), believability (88% vs. 78.6%), and likes/dislikes of commercial (76% vs. 85.7%) with focus groups. Measures of confusion with commercial were reported more frequently used with focus groups by agency researchers than by ad executives (64% vs. 50%). Advertising executives reported more frequent use of various measures of recognition, recall, preference, and purchase intent with focus groups than agency researchers.

Similar results were found for the measures reported used in conjunction with mall intercepts. However, like their client colleagues, agency researchers reported more frequent use of preference and purchase intent measures with mall intercepts than with focus groups.

Based on these results, it would seem that there is an interesting difference between ad executives and agency researchers regarding choice of pretest measures. Caution must be exercised in generalizing about this finding, however. The difference between the two practitioner groups may not be a function of volition (i.e., individual choice as a reflection of interest, beliefs about appropriateness, etc.). Rather, the difference may be a function of dictum, tradition, policy, or a myriad of other factors.

Table 3
Forms of Television Commercials Pretested by Advertising Agencies

	Agency Researchers (N = 83)* %	Advertising Executives (N = 72)* %
Animatic - film or videotape of a series of drawings with audio used to represent a proposed commercial.	79.5 (66)	65.3 (47)
Storyboard - series of visual frames and script of key audio used to represent a proposed commercial.	74.5 (62)	59.7 (43)
Finished Version	53.0 (44)	52.8 (38)
Photomatic - film or videotape of a series of photographs with audio used to represent a proposed commercial.	41.0 (34)	22.2 (16)
Ripamatic - footage taken from other existing commercials and spliced together. It is used sometimes for experimentation on video techniques.	37.3 (31)	23.6 (17)
Liveamatic - rough film or video of live talent shot for a proposed commercial. Can be close to finished commercial but doesn't necessarily use actual sets or talent who will be used in the finished commercial.	26.5 (22)	8.3 (6)
Other**	10.8 (9)	4.2 (3)

Notes: *Includes multiple responses.

**None listed by more than 2 respondents.

Changing Role of the Agency Research Department

Thirteen statements about agency research departments were used to explore the third research question on how the respondents' agency's research department has changed over the past ten years. Both groups of respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with each of the thirteen statements on a five-point scale, ranging from "strongly agree" to "strongly disagree."

As shown in Table 6, both agency researchers and advertising executives thought that the role of research in their agencies had changed over the past

ten years. Generally speaking, however, as indicated by their responses to the global statement included in the series, agency researchers perceived more change in the agency research department than did ad executives. Agency researchers (4.13) were significantly more likely to agree that the role of research in their agency had changed over the time period than ad executives (3.52). Other evidence that agency researchers saw more change than ad executives is evident in the statements about specific aspects of the agency research function.

Both agency researchers and advertising executives tended to agree that their advertising agency focused more on communicating consumer-based information

Table 4
Top Ranked Methods Used Most Frequently for
Television Advertising Pretesting

	% Agency Researchers (N = 83)			% Advertising Executives (N = 72)		
	Frequently Used	Ranked 1	Ranked 2	Frequently Used	Ranked 1	Ranked 2
• Focus Groups	79.5 (66)	30.1 (25)	12.0 (10)	81.9 (59)	38.9 (28)	20.8 (15)
• Mall Intercept	79.5 (66)	27.7 (23)	25.3 (21)	48.6 (35)	20.8 (15)	8.3 (6)
• One-On-One Depth Interviews	67.5 (56)	16.9 (14)	26.5 (22)	50.0 (36)	8.3 (6)	22.2 (16)
• Laboratory or Theater Test	39.8 (33)	10.8 (9)	6.0 (5)	30.6 (22)	13.9 (10)	9.7 (7)
• On-Air Multiple Markets	34.9 (29)	3.6 (3)	15.7 (13)	26.4 (19)	5.6 (4)	13.9 (10)
• On-Air Single Markets	19.3 (16)	1.2 (1)	2.4 (2)	15.3 (11)	4.2 (3)	1.4 (1)
• In-Home Force Exposure	9.6 (8)	2.4 (2)	2.4 (2)	9.6 (7)	6.9 (5)	0 (0)
• Split Cable Television	8.4 (7)	0 (0)	2.4 (2)	6.9 (5)	1.4 (1)	1.4 (1)
• Single Source Scanner Data	6.0 (5)	0 (0)	1.2 (1)	4.2 (3)	1.4 (1)	1.4 (1)
• Mobile Trailer	4.8 (4)	0 (0)	1.2 (1)	1.4 (1)	0 (0)	1.4 (1)
• Physiological Response	1.2 (1)	0 (0)	0 (0)	2.8 (2)	0 (0)	1.4 (1)

Table 5
Measures Used in Conjunction with Top-Ranked Methods

Measures	Focus Groups % Use		Z	Mall Intercepts % Use		Z
	Agency Researchers (N = 25)	Advertising Executives (N = 28)		Agency Researchers (N = 23)	Advertising Executives (N = 15)	
• Communication of Main Point	96.0	78.6	1.87	95.7	80.0	1.54
• Believability of Commercial	88.0	78.6	.91	91.3	80.0	1.01
• Likes/Dislikes of Commercial	76.0	85.7	-.90	87.0	80.0	.58
• Confusion Within Commercial	64.0	50.0	1.03	91.3	53.3	2.69*
• Unaided Recall of Key Copy Points	60.0	67.9	-.60	56.5	73.3	-1.05
• Persuasion	52.0	50.0	.14	60.9	53.3	.46
• Aided Recall of Key Copy Points	48.0	60.7	-.93	34.8	73.3	-2.32*
• Aided Recall of Brand	44.0	50.0	-.44	34.8	60.0	-1.53
• Unaided Recall of Brand	44.0	71.4	-2.02*	56.5	73.3	-1.05
• Aided Recall of Commercial	40.0	50.0	-.73	39.1	66.7	-1.66
• Unaided Recall of Commercial	40.0	64.3	-1.77	43.5	66.7	-1.40
• Product Uniqueness	36.0	21.4	1.18	60.9	13.3	2.90*
• Purchase Intent	28.0	42.9	-1.13	65.2	73.3	-.52
• Pre/Post Change in Brand Preference	20.0	32.1	-1.00	34.8	33.3	.09
• Pre/Post Change in	12.0	32.1	-1.75	13.0	20.0	-.58

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Brand Recognition						
• Post-Only Brand Preference	8.0	17.9	-1.06	17.4	13.3	.34
• Post-Only Brand Recognition	0.0	17.9	-2.22*	13.0	6.7	.62

Note: *Indicates significance $p \leq .05$
NS = not significant $p \leq .05$

to agency creatives (4.15 vs. 3.65); performed more studies geared toward strategic development (4.05 vs. 3.39); served more as a research consultant than it did ten years ago (3.90 vs. 3.19); focused more on the interpretation of research data (3.84 vs. 3.33); conducted and used more qualitative research (3.82 vs. 3.43); and collected or supervised the collection of more primary data (3.41 vs. 3.64). However, agency researchers agreed with five of these six statements at a significantly higher level than ad executives.

Advertising executives perceived more change than the agency researchers in their agency's use of client-supplied research. Ad executives tended to agree significantly more with the statement that their advertising agency relied more on client-supplied research that it did ten years ago (3.04 vs. 3.88).

Agency researchers and advertising executives both tended to disagree with the statements that their agency functioned more as a research supplier than it did ten years ago (2.80 vs. 2.75); that the agency conducted less quantitative research (2.62 vs. 2.61); and that the agency performed more evaluations of finished commercials (2.83 vs. 2.61). They both tended to be neutral on whether their agency relied more on outside suppliers (3.14 vs. 3.16) and on whether their agency used more syndicated research (3.13 vs. 3.18). No statistically significant differences were found between the two groups on these five statements.

Summary and Research Suggestions

A description of the current state of TV commercial pretesting research is provided by the responses of the 83 agency research directors and the 72 client executives whose agencies pretest TV commercial executions. These survey results indicate, as suggested by industry observers, that changes in the methods and measures used to pretest TV commercial executions have occurred since the last studies were reported in the early 1980s.

In 1977, the most frequently used pretest methods were on-air single exposures in multiple markets or

laboratory/theater tests (Ostlund and Clancy 1982). Thirteen years later, these same methods were reported as being used most frequently by less than one-fifth of agency research and client executives. In the early 1990s, the most frequently used methods were focus groups, one-on-one depth interviews, and mall intercepts.

The measures used most often for pretesting commercial executions also shifted over the past decade. Diagnostic measures, such as communication of the main point, commercial believability, liking/disliking of the commercial, and confusion with the commercial, are used more often today than thirteen years ago. Measures used most often in the late 1970s, namely unaided recall of the key copy point and brand recognition (Ostlund and Clancy 1982), are no longer the most frequently used measures.

This shift among most often used pretest methods and measures should not be interpreted to mean that ad executives have abandoned quantitatively-oriented pretest research. In order to carry out their mission, agency researchers find themselves using more qualitative research than ten years earlier but, at the same time, not using less quantitative research. The marriage of methods such as the focus group, or other qualitative methods, with methods such as the mall intercept, which is typically used for gathering quantitative data, is indicative of a new enlightened approach toward TV advertising research. This blending of qualitative and quantitative research offers agency and client executives the "what" and the "why," both of which are necessary to better understand the consumers with whom they wish to communicate.

Following are six major conclusions about industry pretesting practices that can be drawn from the results:

1. TV commercial pretesting is valued by both agency researchers and ad executives; however, ad executives seem to value the research function more than their agency colleagues, despite the fact that agency researchers reported more involvement with the practice.

Table 6
Changes in the Role of the Agency Research Function Over the
Past Ten Years As Perceived by Agency Researchers and Ad Executives

Changes Over Past Ten Years	\bar{X} Agency Researchers (N = 82)	\bar{X} Advertising Executives (N = 68)	t	sd	df
Agency Communicates More Consumer Information to Creative Dept.	4.15	3.65	2.95*	1.1/1.0	148
Role of Research Changed Significantly	4.13	3.52	3.47*	1.1/1.0	150
Agency Conducts More Strategy-Development Research	4.05	3.39	3.70*	1.1/1.1	150
Agency Functions More as a Consultant	3.90	3.19	3.76*	1.1/1.2	149
Agency Focuses More on Data Interpretation	3.84	3.33	2.87*	1.1/1.0	146
Agency Conducts/Uses More Qualitative Research	3.82	3.43	2.17*	1.1/1.0	149
Agency Collects/Supervises Collection of More Primary Research	3.41	3.64	1.22	1.3/1.1	147
Agency More Frequently Relies on Outside Suppliers	3.14	3.18	-.10	1.2/1.1	148
Agency Uses More Syndicated Research	3.13	3.18	-.24	1.2/1.2	148
Agency Relies More on Research Supplied by Client	3.04	3.88	4.96*	1.0/1.1	147
Agency Conducts More Research on Finished Ads	2.83	2.61	1.72	1.2/1.2	146
Agency Functions More as Research Supplier	2.80	2.75	.19	1.3/1.3	150
Agency Conducts/Uses Less Quantitative Research	2.62	2.61	.03	1.2/1.0	146

Note: *Indicates significance $p \leq .05$
 1 = Strongly Disagree
 5 = Strongly Agree

2. Pretest method selection in the majority of cases is a joint decision between agency and client executives; however, agency researchers tend to see more decisional autonomy on their part than do ad executives.
3. There is agreement among agency researchers and ad executives that TV commercial executions are most often pretested in unfinished storyboard or animatic form; however, according to over half of both groups of executives, commercials are often also tested in finished form.
4. Focus groups, mall intercepts, and one-on-one depth interviews are the most popular pretest methods of data collection, according to both agency and client executives — both agree that focus groups are most frequently used. However, agency researchers believe that mall intercepts rank second in usage, while ad executives believe one-on-one interviews rank second.
5. There is agreement between executives that a wide variety of measures are used in conjunction with focus groups and mall intercepts, with the most popular being diagnostic-based responses such as main point communication, believability, and liking/disliking of commercials. However, there is disagreement between the two groups over appropriateness of matching particular measures with particular methods. Whether by choice or policy, ad executives see brand-related memory and purchase intention measures as appropriate for both methods of data collection; agency researchers see those measures as more appropriate with mall intercepts than with focus groups.
6. The role of the agency research department in copy research has changed over the past ten years, according to both agency and client executives. However, agency researchers tend to believe more strongly than their client-based colleagues that agency involvement has increased, especially in areas such as consultation, strategic planning, data interpretation, and qualitative research design.

It should be noted that these conclusions effectively describe “what” methods and measures are used by advertising agencies to pretest TV commercial executions. They do not answer the question of “why” certain methods and measures are used and others are not. Exact answers to the “why” question can only be provided by additional research. However, there are

sufficient grounds to speculate about the reported changes in industry commercial pretest practices.

To guide future research efforts, following are some thoughts about why pretest practices changed between the late 1970s and the early 1990s. The discussion is offered, not as definitive explanation for the observed changes in industry pretest practices, but as speculation about “why” these changes may have occurred.

Future Research

Changes related to the agency’s role in TV commercial pretesting may be linked to the adoption of the strategic planning approach by advertising agencies, especially the apparent proliferation of qualitative methods and measures in the pretesting process (Barry, Peterson, and Todd 1987; Freeman 1988; and Stewart 1986). Strategic planning involves the uncovering of various, and sometimes subtle, meanings contained in data, developing a sense of who the consumer is, and then transferring that insight into creative executions. The primary objective of the planning approach is not only finding out how many consumers share a certain attitude or react to a creative idea in a certain manner, but also exploring why they feel the way they do and why they react as they do. This research objective — aiding in the planning of advertising strategy — is well served by qualitative methods and measures.

It would be empirically enlightening to conduct other surveys to actually determine if more agencies have adopted the strategic planning approach and to explore “why” certain methods and measures are used in TV commercial pretesting and others are not. Though adoption of the planning approach by advertising agencies may indeed be related to changing pretesting practices, other explanations are also plausible. As suggested previously, the fact that changes in agency pretesting practices have occurred does not identify where those changes originated or why they originated. Additional research is needed to determine the role of the agency versus the client in the adoption of the strategic planning approach and to identify those factors that stimulated change. In particular, questions should be asked about the relationship between strategic planning and research practices, including pretesting practices as well as other research practices.

Certainly, there are other influences, in addition to the strategic planning approach, which have served to facilitate the apparent growth in popularity of qualitative methods and measures. Qualitative research

is generally faster and less expensive than quantitative research. Research budgets, like all budget items, have undergone cuts in many companies. Additionally, the increasingly competitive business environment has forced demands for faster turnaround of research results. Conditions such as these have undoubtedly contributed to making qualitative research an attractive option, and each condition should be the focus of additional study.

It would also be interesting to conduct another study that differentiates between phases of TV commercial pretesting. In this study, for example, no distinction was made between *copy development research* (i.e., testing of rough creative concepts, or perhaps storyboards in focus groups) and *quantitative pretesting research* (i.e., testing of rough or finished commercials in theaters or malls). There is the possibility that the reported changes are due, not to the adoption of the strategic planning approach, but to the redistribution of the typical pretesting budget. Perhaps as the economy weakened during the 1980s, advertisers pulled back from expensive quantitative pretesting, transferring more money to the cheaper phase of copy development research. If so, the trend toward qualitative methods and measures is attributable not to the adoption of the strategic planning approach per se, but to the budgeting of more copy development research and less quantitative pretesting research.

Another study should examine why some agencies engage in TV commercial pretesting and others do not. Interestingly, almost 20 percent of the agency and advertiser respondents indicated that their agencies do not pretest commercial executions for assigned brands. This proportion is somewhat surprising given that the samples represented the largest agencies and advertisers.

In addition to studies conducted to answer "why" questions, other surveys should periodically track changes in TV pretesting practices, including decision making roles, methods and measures used, and amounts of money allocated to TV presentation research, at the same time, these studies should investigate the perceived role of the agency research department to determine if another shift in the function of the agency research department takes place. In either case, changes would be expected as ad executives must constantly adapt to marketplace demands. Monitoring industry practices is an important research activity, and future studies are recommended.

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