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An experimental investigation was made of the effect of Riesman's construct of social character on consumers' use and preference for social compared with objective information in evaluating products displayed in advertisements. The results suggest that other-directed individuals tend to be more persuasible by advertising, have a preference for additional social information about the product, but do not have the differential preference for advertising appeals suggested by previous research. Attempts to reconcile these findings lead to a model proposing that an individual's social character has little to do with response to advertising, but does exert a significant effect on information preference between ad exposure and possible purchase of a product.

The Influence of Social Character on Preference for Social Versus Objective Information in Advertising

One very important task of advertising is to interpret and communicate the marketer's "product" in terms that are salient to its specific target markets. Casual observation as well as research in information processing (Settle 1972) suggest that this interpretation can be categorized into two basic types: (1) the objective reality and (2) the social reality about a good or service.

The concept of objective reality refers to those features or characteristics of a product that are physically testable and capable of being verified in an objective sense. Social reality refers to those characteristics that are evaluated according to the reactions of one's peers or society in general. These factors include matters of taste, preference, or attractiveness.

The purchase of an item of clothing can be used as an example of this classification. The interpretation of objective reality might involve estimating the likelihood that the buttons would fall off, that the seams would come apart, or that the material would tear easily. The interpretation of social reality, in contrast,

requires an assessment of the possible reactions of others to the new piece of clothing. Rather than objective measurements such as the tensile strength of the thread, the assessment of social reality requires the evaluation of subjective reactions of other people. The consumer typically would ask such questions as, "Will it be considered in good taste, is it in style, and is it the right color for me?"

The type of reality to be presented is an important decision that must be made for any advertising campaign. But which reality, objective or social, should be stressed? One view (Bourne 1968) is that the choice is almost completely dependent on the interaction of product characteristics with reference group influence. Such concepts as the product's relative "complexity" and its "social visibility" (conspicuousness) have been suggested as the key factors. Other researchers report that personality differences may mediate the process and affect the individual consumer's preference for either type of information over a wide range of purchasing situations (Donnelly and Ivancevich 1974; Kassarian 1965). One personality trait¹ that may account for individual differences

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¹ Although Riesman did not intend for his typology to be interpreted as a personality schema, the characteristics of the construct cause it to be treated that way in most of the literature.

is Riesman's (1950) Social Character Typology, the inner-directedness or other-directedness of the consumer.

SOCIAL CHARACTER

Riesman (1950) proposed three social character types: the tradition-directed, the inner-directed, and the other-directed. The social character orientation of any society depends on the economic, technological, demographic, and cultural factors that prevail, most societies being composed predominantly of one or two of the three types. Riesman suggested that in the contemporary U.S. tradition-directed people are seldom encountered; therefore that type is not considered here. Attention is focused exclusively on the spectrum of social character running from inner-directed to other-directed.

Inner-directed individuals turn to their own inner standards and values to guide their behavior. Early in their childhood, they are taught to accept and internalize these standards and to use them as a frame of reference for their future behavior. Once internalized, these values are relatively durable and change little over the lifetime of the individual. It is as though inner-directed people are equipped with a gyrocompass set in motion during their formative years and used throughout life to guide them.

Other-directed individuals depend on people around them for direction and guidance. They have been taught in early childhood to look to others for the correct standards of behavior, and to be sensitive to the values and attitudes of those they respect (reference groups) and with whom they associate (peers). This approach to guidance is analogous to radar, provided and calibrated in the early formative years and used to guide the individual throughout life.

Social Character and Preference for Social Versus Objective Information

Though an inner-directed person wants and needs to be liked by some of the people some of the time (Riesman 1950, p. 22), he or she is not concerned with obtaining a flow of guidance, expectations, and approbation from others (p. 31). In contrast, the other-directed person makes his or her contemporaries the chief source of direction and sensitivity (p. 22). Therefore, one would expect that the other-directed individual would find information about a product's social desirability more important than would the inner-directed person in making marketplace decisions.

Because the inner-directed individual is taught to look to inner standards and not group values, one would expect that this type of person would find objective information relatively more useful in making decisions related to purchasing.

THE USE OF SOCIAL CHARACTER IN ADVERTISING RESEARCH

Perhaps the most widely quoted application of Riesman's typology in marketing is Kassarian's (1965) study investigating the construct's potential impact in consumer reactions to advertising appeals. Kassarian attempted to test whether inner-directed individuals tend to prefer inner-directed appeals and other-directed individuals prefer appeals encouched in an other-directed format. His study consisted of first having respondents take a test measuring their social character, and then asking them to rate 27 pairs of advertisements. Each pair of advertisements² consisted of an inner-directed appeal and an other-directed appeal for the same product. In retrospect, Kassarian's development of these two appeals prompts some serious questions. An example of his interpretation (1965, p. 147) follows.

A theoretical statement (by Riesman) that an inner-directed person is interested in individual sports while an other-directed person is interested in group sports, for example, might lead to an ad for tennis shoes with an illustration of either a group sport or an individual sport.

Though that rationale may make sense in a specific case of group versus individual sports, his application was significantly more widespread. Reanalysis of the treatments (Kassarian 1965, p. 149-50), which represented a wide range of product types, suggests that the inner/other-directedness of the appeals was based largely on whether a single person or a group of people was shown in the illustration (17 of 27 ad pairs or 63% of the treatments). Though the number of models in an illustration may play a part, it appears to be a rather limited interpretation of Riesman's suggestion that the basic differences between persons of the two character types are due to how they draw their values and opinions (Kassarian 1965, p. 146).

Further, Kassarian's measure of the subjects' reactions to the advertisements was the preference for the ad itself. He requested his respondents to select, from each pair of inner/other-directed ads, the ad that "would be the most effective for you, yourself—the one that would tend to influence you the most." A five-point scale, from "most prefer inner-directed appeal" (e.g., Ad A) to "most prefer other-directed appeal" (e.g., Ad B), was used to record their responses. The results of Kassarian's study showed that character type was a significant factor affecting preference for the appropriate appeal. However, because of the questions surrounding the design of the treatments, these findings may not have provided a valid interpretation.

In a later study Woodside (1968) sought to measure

²The actual treatment consisted of an illustration with a short slogan featured as a headline. No "copy" was provided.

the relationship between respondents' I-O Social Preference Scale scores and (1) the rate at which the respondents used five consumer products and (2) the respondents' preference for appeals related to either inner- or other-directedness, for each of 10 products. The appeals did not actually appear in advertisements, but in such statements as:

- One of the main purposes in buying a camera is:
- a. to have a lasting record of important occasions.
 - b. to share experiences with friends at home.

Product use did not prove to differ significantly according to I-O scores, and only two of the 10 products provided significant differences in "preference for appeals" according to the I-O score levels.

THE PROBLEM

Neither of these two marketing studies sought to measure the respondents' reactions to the *products* presented in the advertisements. Rather, both employed measures of preference for *appeals*. Ordinarily, the objective of advertising is to convince the audience that the product is suitable for their needs and to increase their purchase intentions toward the brand. Studies by Bem (1970) show that liking the advertisement does not relate to marketplace behavior. Therefore, even valid results about preference for appeals can provide misleading direction to marketers. A study was undertaken to measure specifically the relationship between I-O and reactions to the *brand* when advertised with inner- (objective information) and other-directed (social information) appeals.

A potential difference in persuasibility between inner- and other-directed subjects also was investigated. This phenomenon was suggested by Graham (1955) in the first published report of an attempt to use Riesman's Social Character Typology. Graham employed a method of presenting long paragraphs of an inner- or other-directed behavior, and then eliciting open-end responses from respondents to ascertain their character type (the ID-OD questionnaire). Though this technique proved to be extremely unwieldy and lacked tests of validity or reliability, the results of the study prompted Graham to suggest that other-directed subjects tended to be less resistant to opinion change in a highly abstract experimental setting.

The authors sought to supplement the principal dependent measures of product suitability and intention with a measure of differential preference for additional information. Given the results of Kassarian (1965) on preference for appeal, one would expect other-directed individuals to prefer additional items of other-directed (social) information more than their fellow inner-directed subjects.

Hypotheses

- H₁: Other-directed subjects will rate the brands advertised with either an objective or a social appeal

as relatively more suitable to their needs and more important to consider in making a product purchase than will inner-directed subjects.

- H₂: Other-directed subjects will rate brands advertised with a social appeal as relatively more suitable to their needs and important to consider, whereas inner-directed subjects will rate brands advertised with an objective appeal as relatively more suitable to their needs and important to consider.
- H₃: Other-directed subjects will rate additional social information not contained in the advertisements as relatively more preferable and inner-directed subjects will rate additional objective information not contained in the advertisements as relatively more preferable.

METHOD

A two-part experiment was constructed and administered to 112 undergraduate business administration students.³ In the first phase of the study the subjects filled out the I-O Social Preference Scale developed by Kassarian (1962). This scale consists of 36 forced-choice items, requiring the respondent to select either an inner-directed or an other-directed alternative to complete a statement. Each item is scored on a five-point scale, depending on whether the respondent strongly agreed with the inner-directed alternative, agreed with it, did not answer the item, agreed with the other-directed alternative, or strongly agreed with it. An example of one of these items follows.

- On the subject of social living,
- (a) a person should set up his own standards and then live up to them;
 - (b) one should be careful to live up to the prevailing standards of the culture.

This instrument has a test-retest reliability of .85, with a validity coefficient of .69 (Kassarian 1962).

In the second phase of the experiment a test booklet containing mock advertisements on five different product types was presented. The treatment ads represented a brand of mouthwash, a brand of men's clothing, diamonds as a gift, a brand of automobile, and a brand of women's clothing. To increase the external validity of the experiment, the products were chosen to represent consumer goods of high, medium, and low price, as well as different sex orientations (mouthwash represented a low-priced product aimed at both sexes). Brand names were fictitious and chosen for their lack of similarity to available brands to minimize the respondents' potentially confounding perceptions of present brand names. These products were also items that the student subjects would plausibly purchase or have thought about purchasing.

Two advertisements were prepared for each product. The objective form consisted of information relating to the physical characteristics of the brand

³Four subjects were deleted from the final analysis because of missing data.

or product. The social form contained information about the product's social desirability and acceptance. Because other-directed individuals have been hypothesized to prefer information about what others think of the product, information about the social desirability of the product would seem to capture a valid interpretation of Riesman's concepts.

The same basic illustration was used in both social and objective formats. Extreme care was taken to control the type style, length of ad copy, and number of selling points across appeals. Half of the sample received test booklets containing five objective type ads. The other half received booklets containing five social type ads.

After reading each ad, the respondents were presented with two questions developed to elicit cognitions about the products advertised. Because one task of advertising is to persuade consumers that the brand or product fits their needs, the first question was phrased to obtain the subjects' suitability rating. Ideally, the second question should measure the subjects' probability of purchasing the brand, but the advertisements were obviously in "rough" format⁴ and they promoted potential new products. Because of the nature of the ads, it was not feasible to ask probability of purchase directly. Pretests of various wordings determined that the subjects could best answer the modified *intention* format used. The final form of the question was as follows for each advertisement.

Based upon the information presented in the advertisement, how suitable do you think this brand would be to your own needs and preferences?

Unsuitable _____ Suitable

If you were going to purchase a product of this type, how important would it be to you to consider this particular brand?

Unimportant _____ Important

After these questions, the subjects were asked to indicate their preference for one item of additional information, not included in the ad, from each of five pairs of information items pertaining to the product in the ad. One of each pair related to objective reality and the other related to social reality. For example, in the case of the ad for men's clothing, the respondents had to make a choice between additional information on (1) the styles available or (2) construction of the garment. Each item of objective reality was scored zero and each item of social reality was scored one. Total *preference* ratings for additional information ranged from zero for persons who preferred all objective information to five for those who preferred all social information. The content of both the advertisements and the items of additional information was selected on the basis of the judgments of five experts,

⁴The treatments were "rough" in that they featured artist sketches in a black-and-white ad that conformed to the 8-1/2 x 11" test booklet dimensions.

in addition to the experimenters, who were familiar with the definitions and constructs relating to the classification of information and to social character.

Respondent social character (I-O) scores were ordered and divided at the mean to form a dichotomous independent variable: an inner- and an other-directed group.⁵ The other independent variable in the design, the type of appeal used in the advertisement, also had two levels: objective type and social type. Each person was exposed to five advertisements in the repeated measures design and there were three dependent variables: suitability ratings, intention ratings, and preference ratings. These data were submitted to a two by two repeated measures analysis of variance with unequal cell size capability for each dependent variable to measure the significance of the hypothesized main effects and interactions.

Support for the first hypothesis requires a significant main effect of the subjects' social character on the suitability ratings and intention ratings. Support for the second hypothesis requires a significant interaction between social character and appeal type on the suitability ratings and intention ratings. Support for the third hypothesis requires a significant main effect of social character on the preference rating. A main effect, rather than an interaction, is required because the dependent variable is expressed directly as a preference for social information. The appeal type is not expected to have a significant main effect on the preference rating.

RESULTS

Theoretically, the I-O scores could range from 0 to 144 with a midpoint of 72. The final 108 usable I-O scores in the study ranged from 48 to 113 with a mean of 74.9 and a standard deviation of 14.6. These values do not differ significantly from the scores obtained in the original population ($t = 0.08$, d.f. = 256, $p > .25$) on which the instrument was validated (Kassarjian 1962) or from those in Kassarjian's 1965 study ($t = 0.06$, d.f. = 306, $p > .25$). Nonetheless, the composition and response of this sample should not be viewed as necessarily representative of the general population.

The mean suitability scores are presented in Figure 1. The ANOVA F -statistic (Table 1) detected a main effect of appeal ($p \leq .001$) and the subjects' social character ($p \leq .016$). The main effect of appeal revealed that, in general, the mock advertisements presenting objective information tended to prompt significantly stronger feelings that the product was suitable to the needs and preferences of the respond-

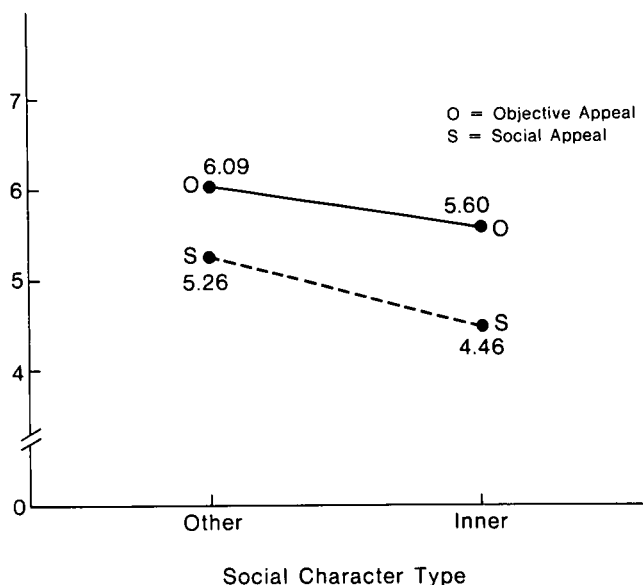
⁵Social character sample sizes, mean scores, variances, and ranges for the whole sample, other-, and inner-directed blocks are:

I-O total: 108 subjects, $\bar{X} = 74.97$, $\sigma^2 = 14.64$, range = 48 to 113;

I-O other: 54 subjects, $\bar{X} = 62.87$, $\sigma^2 = 7.43$, range = 48 to 74;

I-O inner: 54 subjects, $\bar{X} = 87.07$, $\sigma^2 = 8.89$, range = 75 to 113.

Figure 1
MEAN SUITABILITY SCORES



ents. This outcome is not surprising in view of the sample's education level.

The main effect of social character lends support to the first hypothesis and strongly suggests that the more other-directed the subjects' social character, the more they appear to be persuaded by both appeals. The ANOVA failed to find the hypothesized interaction of social character and appeal ($p > .55$) and thus the second hypothesis for the measure of perceived suitability of the product is rejected.

Mean intention scores are shown in Figure 2. The relationship of these scores very closely resembles the results obtained for suitability. The analysis of variance (Table 2) again found a main effect of appeal ($p \leq .031$) and social character ($p \leq .031$). The product advertised was also a significant source of variance ($p \leq .001$). However, because it failed to have significant interactions with social character or the appeal

used, the main effect of product does not affect tests of the hypotheses.

As with the previous question, the main effect of social character suggests that the other-directed individual tends to be more persuadable. Thus, significant results in both measures lend strong support for the first hypothesis.

The repeated failure to detect a significant interaction between social character and appeal type for the intention ($p > .98$) as well as the suitability measure leads to a rejection of the second hypothesis. However, blocking the I-O scores in only two levels provides a very conservative test of social character effects; therefore, a further analysis investigating the differences between quartile extreme groups was performed. If there are significant interactions of I-O and appeal type, the analysis of extreme groups should provide a more sensitive detector.⁶ This additional analysis of variance failed to find the hypothesized interaction ($F = 2.05$, d.f. = 1, 416, $p \leq .83$) for the intention measure.

The third hypothesis, that the subjects' social character will prompt systematic differences in the preference measure, required a significant main effect on social character. The average information preference ratings are plotted in Figure 3; a high score represents a preference for social information. There is very little difference between the scores under the two appeals, but the marginal values across the two I-O groups are in the appropriate direction. An analysis of variance (Table 3) detected a main effect of the product advertised ($p \leq .001$) and of the subjects' social character ($p \leq .006$).

As one would expect, the product advertised affected the type of additional information preferred, the automobile and the diamond prompting the greatest preference for additional social information. The main effect of social character supports the third hypothesis. Other-directed subjects tended to prefer additional social information in comparison with inner-directed subjects.

⁶ However, a regression artifact would moderate this sensitivity.

Table 1
ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE: PRODUCT SUITABILITY SCORES

Source of variation	Degrees of freedom	Mean square	F ratio	Probability
Social character (A)	1	55.53	5.97	0.016
Appeal (B)	1	129.31	13.90	0.000
A × B	1	3.34	0.36	0.550
Error	104	9.31		
Products (R)	4	1.55	0.52	0.722
R × A	4	4.20	1.41	0.231
R × B	4	3.57	1.19	0.313
R × A × B	4	1.22	0.41	0.803
Error	416	2.99		

Table 2
ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE: CONSIDERATION/INTENTION SCORES

Source of variation	Degrees of freedom	Mean square	F ratio	Probability
Social character (A)	1	33.53	4.77	0.031
Appeal (B)	1	33.62	4.78	0.031
A × B	1	0.00	0.00	0.980
Error	104	7.03		
Products (R)	4	38.23	13.70	0.000
R × A	4	1.78	0.64	0.636
R × B	4	2.36	0.85	0.496
R × A × B	4	3.40	1.22	0.302
Error	416	2.79		

Figure 2
MEAN CONSIDERATION/INTENTION SCORES

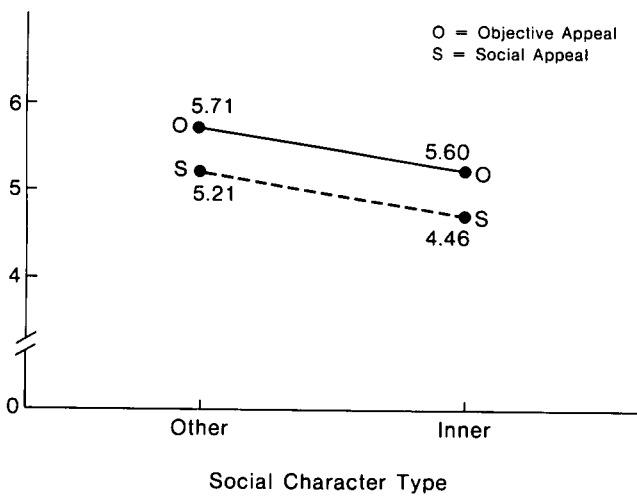


Figure 3
MEAN ADDITIONAL INFORMATION PREFERENCE SCORES

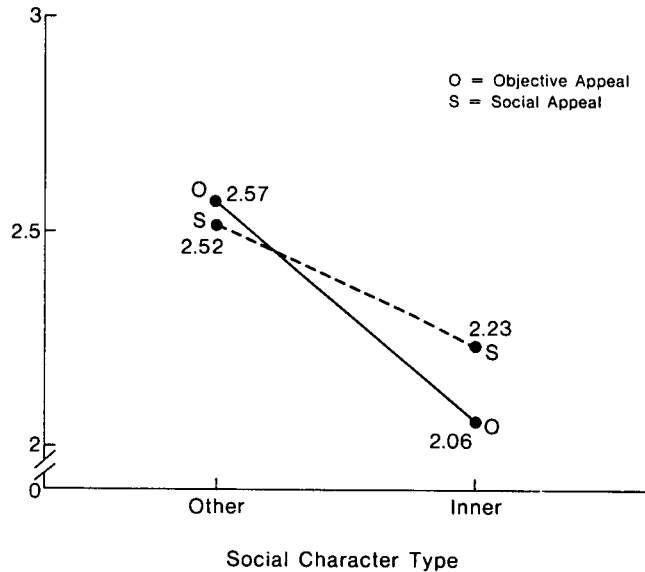


Table 3
ANALYSIS OF VARIANCE: ADDITIONAL INFORMATION PREFERENCE

Source of variation	Degrees of freedom	Mean square	F ratio	Probability
Social character (A)	1	21.19	7.78	0.006
Appeal (B)	1	0.47	0.17	0.677
A × B	1	1.79	0.65	0.420
Error	104	2.72		
Products (R)	4	36.27	31.03	0.000
R × A	4	0.79	0.68	0.608
R × B	4	0.57	0.49	0.743
R × A × B	4	0.58	0.49	0.741
Error	416	1.17		

SUMMARY AND DISCUSSION

The results of this experiment can be summarized as follows.

1. Ads using objective information provided higher suitability and intention ratings than did ads using social appeals.
2. Other-directed subjects provided higher suitability and intention ratings than did inner-directed subjects.
3. There were no interactions between inner-directed versus other-directed subjects and objective versus social appeals.
4. There was an interaction between inner-directed versus other-directed subjects and preference for *additional* objective versus social information.
5. There was no interaction between objective versus social appeals and preference for *additional* objective versus social information.

The results provide support for the first and third hypotheses, but do not support the second hypothesis. The findings are complex, somewhat paradoxical, and open to a wide variety of interpretations, not all of which can be considered here. Rather, one relatively cohesive explanation for all five findings is attempted.

For the moment, assume that (1) inner-directed people are relatively insensitive to the social context of a product, either within the advertisement or outside it; (2) other-directed people depend on advertisements to interpret objective reality because they have the sensitivity to glean the social implications of a product from those around them. The plausibility of these two assumptions can be judged according to their ability to explain the preceding five points.

Ads using objective information were rated more favorably by both social character groups, but possibly for very different reasons. The inner-directed may depend more heavily on interpretations of objective reality whereas the other-directed look to their social environment for the necessary social approval.

Other-directed subjects were influenced more favorably by both types of appeals. Because they are other-directed—in fact, almost by definition—this group is more easily influenced, more persuasible.

There were no interactions between social character and appeal types. Inner-directed individuals, being relatively insensitive to the social surroundings, may place some value on social interpretations offered directly by ads. In contrast, other-directed people value social approval, but can assess it from their own social environment and so do not place much value on social appeals within the ads. Thus, the two groups respond in about the same way.

In relation to the inner-directed group, other-directed subjects showed a preference for *additional* information outside the advertisement that would interpret social reality. This preference would be expected if other-directed people are accustomed to seeking and measuring social acceptability from sources external to the advertisements.

Last, the type of appeal used in the ad did not influence the preference for additional objective or social information. The two social character groups might react similarly but for different reasons. In this case, each social character group expects and gets about the same thing from the ads, and preference for *additional* information is more a function of social character than of what has been presented in the ads.

This very tentative model is relatively compatible with the suggestion of Graham (1955) that other-directed people are more persuasible. Likewise, if the promotional appeals tested by Kassarian (1965) and Woodside (1968) are regarded as sources of *additional* information because they were not encouched within actual advertisements, their results do not conflict with the model offered.

The suggestion has been advanced, perhaps too boldly, that social character of the audience for advertising messages has little to do with response to appeals but much to do with what the individual does between exposure and purchase or rejection of the product. Should this be the case, persons who create promotional messages need not be very concerned with social character. In contrast, those who depend on publicity, endorsement, and the creation of fads and fashions could expect the social character of the consumer to affect behavior in the marketplace significantly. The model that has been suggested by this study can certainly be tested by experimental research and warrants further investigation.

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