

The state of the art of advertising from the consumers' perspective: a generational approach

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It has been suggested that consumer attitudes towards advertising have become more unfavourable over the past two generations. Using a systematic literature review, the authors set out to explore the relationship that consumers have with advertising and the impact that advertising has on their lives. The paper considers the way in which consumers use advertising, how consumers select advertising and the complaints that consumers have about advertising and it does so from the perspective of different generations, namely, the "tweens", "generation Y", "generation X", the "baby boomers" and the "builders". The differences between these groups are highlighted, but the paper concludes that the public's basic feelings to advertising have remained stable over the past two generations.

Keywords Advertising, Consumers, Generations, Segmentation

Introduction

Some say advertising is a wise teacher, providing useful and relevant information, others think it is overly intrusive. However, we can be certain that advertising is indeed a ubiquitous part of modern life (Shavitt, Lowrey et al. 1998) and has been the subject of debate since its inception. It is the aim of this paper to consider the key aspects of the debate as recorded in the literature and to present them in a generational framework.

The influence of advertising has been studied for the past 70 years (Dutta-Bergmann 2006). Such study has informed both industry practice and academic pursuit. A common aim of this research has been to illuminate how advertising influences consumers' attention, intentions and behaviours (Dutta-Bergmann 2006). The "*attitude-to-advertising-in-general*" (Muehling 1987) research focuses on public perceptions of the broad institution of advertising, as opposed to advertising instruments such as the specific media or a particular campaign.

In the commercial sense, advertisers have sought to uncover the impact

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of advertising on purchasing (Pollay and Mittal 1993; Mittal 1994; Wang, Ping et al. 2002), while social investigators have attempted to understand more about the exchange between an advertised message and the adoption of desired behaviours (McDermott, O'Sullivan et al. 2006). The history of attitude-to-advertising-in-general research suggests that the overall positive attitude toward advertising has been declining since World War II (Greyser and Bauer 1966).

Common criticisms of advertising focus on issues of eroding credibility, manipulation, exploitation and the promotion of materialist social values (Pollay and Mittal 1993; Mittal 1994; Rumbold 2002; Obermiller, Spangenberg et al. 2005). Criticism can signal the distraction of consumer attention and lead to the potential loss of lucrative markets. Faced with such threats, advertisers need to know the impact their campaigns are having on consumers, and they need to know it quickly.

Children, teens, Generation Y, Generation X, Baby Busters, Baby Boomer and the geriatrics are vital audiences to advertisers. Estimates of youth markets suggest that "at 60 million strong, [it] is the largest consumer demographic to hit the US economy since the 72 million Baby Boomers" (Gordon 2006). Worldwide trends suggest that developed nations are getting older. In the US alone, more than 53 million people are aged over 55 years (Moschis 1993).

The challenge for advertising is to find ways and means into the consumer's brain and to build an enduring perceptual representation of the brand that is acceptable and desirable

(Weilbacher 2003).

The purpose of this paper is to examine the relationship consumers have with advertising in its general form; in other words, their perceptions of the impact and influence advertising has on their lives.

Method

The study method adopted for this research used *systematic procedures* to explore the issue of consumer attitudes towards advertising in general. The systematic review approach is taken from the medical sciences where great care is taken to make sure treatments are safe and effective and that every possible source of evidence is identified and rigorously evaluated. A systematic review is:

a review of the evidence on a clearly formulated question that uses systematic, and explicit methods to identify, select and critically appraise relevant primary research.

(Khan, Riet, Glanville, Sowden and Kleijnen 2001)

Systematic reviews are relevant, rigorous and transparent and have been rarely used in exploring social phenomena (Hastings, Stead, McDermott, Forsyth, Mackintosh, Rayner, Godfrey, Caraher, Angus 2003).

For this study, a literature review of peer-reviewed research was

conducted in an attempt to illuminate the trends in consumer perceptions to advertising-in-general. In order to identify potentially relevant studies the electronic databases were searched: Scopus (Social Sciences) and ABI-Inform. The databases contained the following publication titles: *Social Marketing Quarterly*, *Journal of Consumer Marketing*, *Journal of Advertising*, *Journal of Advertising Research*, *Marketing Science*, *Journal of Business Research*, *Psychology and Marketing*, *Journal of Marketing*, *Tobacco Control*, *International Marketing Review*, *Journal of Consumer Psychology*, *Journal of Consumer Marketing*.

The initial search string - a combination of terms and categories - was developed to ensure sensitivity to indexed studies. We searched the databases using the following arrangements:

Advertising (located in TITLE)

Consumer (located ABSTRACT, TITLE, CONTENT)

Effectiveness (located ABSTRACT, TITLE, CONTENT)

Perception (located ABSTRACT, TITLE, CONTENT)

To further refine searches for generational marketing trends, we also applied keywords to describe the consumer life stage. Labels including "Baby Boomer", "Generation X", "Generation Y", "Teens", "Tweens" and "Seniors".

Criteria for considering studies for this review

All study designs were considered in the review including trials, cross-sectional surveys, qualitative studies and previous reviews. We included English-language studies and made specific attempts to locate studies conducted in New Zealand and Australia. Only studies conducted between 1990 and 2007 have been included to ensure that this review is current and concise.

The key outcomes of interest in this review relate to consumer perceptions of advertising and are broadly categorised under:

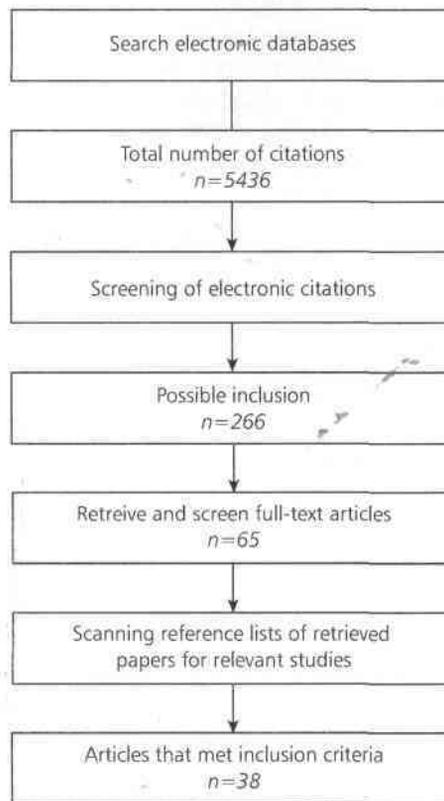
- Benefits
- Values
- Costs
- Relative importance

As the review question related to advertising-in-general, we excluded studies that focused on political campaign advertising, and specific forms of advertising (such as channel specific advertising e.g. Internet, television, radio, outdoor billboard).

Results

Searching SCOPUS we identified 5436 citations. Refining the search to consumer perceptions and advertising, 266 abstracts were printed for scanning. Limiting the search with the inclusion criteria we downloaded 65 articles. Data from 38 studies are included in this paper.

Table 1 The search process



Discussion

How consumers use advertising

Pollay and Mittal (1993) suggest that advertising affects consumers on three levels; economic; personal and social levels. When considering the effects of advertising at the economic level, consumers suggest that advertising plays an important role in increasing markets, raising living standards and increasing the quality of products (Pollay and Mittal 1993; Metha 2000; Ford-Hutchinson and Rothwell 2002). Advertising is seen as a key commercial tool and the amount of advertising is reflective of a dynamic **economy** (Ford-Hutchinson and Rothwell 2002). In this study, one business owner held the belief that, when *"you're in business you've got to advertise"*.

The personal use of advertising includes both information-seeking and entertainment roles. The participants in the Coulter et al. (2001) study provided examples of how advertising often played the role of teacher - *"helping them to become aware of and know more about product offerings"* (Coulter, Zaltman et al. 2001). Narratives from this study suggest that consumers use advertising to support their decision-making, seeking credible, trustworthy sources. As one male suggested, *"I feel good... knowing that I am going to be using the right product at the right time"*. Information that is accessible,

reliable and honest is also highly valued by consumers (Krishnan and Smith 1998).

The entertainment derived from advertising is immediately apparent in the ease with which respondents talk about ads they like or dislike

(Ford-Hutchinson and Rothwell 2002).

Associations of advertising as clever, original and humorous are synonymous with entertaining. A variety of studies using different methods have examined how consumers perceive the entertainment value of advertising. Gordon (2006) cites a study by Alex Biel which suggests consumers like advertising that is clever, meaningful, energetic, warm and well-executed so that it avoids "*rubbing readers the wrong way*" (Gordon 2006). The ways consumers use advertising supports the statement that - people are not blank sheets on which communication messages are indelibly printed - they interact, whether consciously or not. Advertising offers an opportunity to engage in this negotiation and construction of meaning and relevance that consumers perceive to be of value to them.

Advertising also expresses societal values and ideals. Research suggests that societal effects of advertising include the encouragement of materialism and the corruption of societal values. (Pollay and Mittal 1993; Mittal 1994; Rumbo 2002). Advertising-literate children and teens are perceived as particularly vulnerable groups exposed to the corruption of social values. Consumers with pro-regulation views of advertising call for restrictions on message content, distribution and dissemination of products including fast food, tobacco and alcohol (King, Taylor et al. 2005; McDermott, O'Sullivan et al. 2006; Devlin, Eadie et al. 2007; Hoek, Maubach and Mossadis 2004).

How consumers select advertising

The communication environment in free market economies is busy, fast-paced and contentious.

To be successful, an advertisement must establish a contact with the consumer in which the consumer consciously attends to the advertisement and is, then, influenced by it

(Weilbacher 2003).

Over the past two decades advances in the knowledge base of the physiology of the brain has informed marketing research (Curren and Goodstein 1991; Onley, Holbrook et al. 1991; Escalas and Stern 2003; Weilbacher 2003; Gordon 2006). Of particular interest to marketers, is the link between emotions, memories and cognitive choices-the affective drivers of advertising selection (Escalas and Stern 2003).

Advertising, if it is attended to at all, is nothing more than a net addition to everything the consumer has previously learned and retained about the brand

(Weilbacher 2003).

Weilbacher suggests that the perception of the value or benefits of advertising will also depend on several personal habits and attitudes that are part of a general reaction to advertising, such as:

- continuous screening of incoming messages to sort out those messages that are of no immediate interest,
- an indifference toward, and high intolerance for, all kinds of intrusive communication,
- a short attention span once a message is perceived as advertising,
- a continuing pre-occupation only with self, and
- an essential disinterest, if not aversion, to advertising-in-general.

Consumer research on generational segments suggests that these habits and attitudes are evident in many, if not all, of the segments being exposed to advertising in the 21st century.

Generational marketing and advertising

Advertising and children

Since the early 1990s children have progressively become the focus of marketers as it became evident that, besides being customers in their own right, children's influence on family purchasing was steadily increasing

(Caruana and Vassallo 2003).

Research has shown that mothers who shop with their children end up spending 30 per cent more than they had originally intended. However, if the children are shopping with their father he will overspend by as much as 70 per cent (Caruana and Vassallo 2003).

Observational studies of children conducted in the 1970s reported that Saturday morning television viewing sparked requests from children for advertised breakfast cereals and sweets. This trend continued into the 1990s with similar results presented in, retrospective studies with parents recalling food purchases and the television viewing patterns of their children (McDermott, O'Sullivan et al. 2006). Advertising may entice the desires of children, however Caruana and Vassallo argue that "*parents are the most pervasive and important influences*" on a child's consumer socialisation (Caruana and Vassallo 2003). Academics argue that demographic and social changes also need to be considered when examining the consumer socialization of children (The Henry J Kasier Family Foundation 2004).

Importantly, children are growing up immersed in media. A random sample of 1,000 parents of children aged between six months and six years living in the USA conducted in 2003, reported that nearly all children (99%) lived in a home with a television set, and half of the children (50%) lived in homes with three or more sets (The Henry J Kasier Family Foundation 2004). The report also suggests that the vast majority of children are growing up in homes where television is a near-constant presence.

One study reported on research conducted by the Broadcasting Commission of Ireland (BCI) that examined children's perceptions of

advertising (2003). Responses from 260 young people aged between 10 and 17 years were considered in a consultation process used to revise national advertising regulation codes. Interestingly, this was the only study located for this review that considered the perspectives of children on their attitudes-to-advertising-in-general.

A summary of key points suggests that:

- children do value and use advertising,
- children do show an awareness of the intention of advertising,
- children find repetition of advertising annoying, particularly in radio advertising when a product is repeatedly 'plugged' during programming,
- children supported social marketing concepts providing education on safety, anti-violence and media literacy skills.

Questions on the influence of advertising on "pester power" were also explored. The findings suggest McDermott (2007) is supported by young people; *"the overwhelming majority of respondents agreed that pester power does exist and children and young people ask their parents to buy them products and services"* (Anon. 2003). Respondents also provided comments of the pressure on children themselves when their peers associated the ownership of a product with their own popularity or social standing. *"Stop trying to make things cool telling children that if they get a certain toy they will have lots of friends"* is one example of this type of response.

The respondents also suggested that advertising should portray children in less idealized images; *"there should be no advertisements with just beautiful looking children, but there should be a mix of all shapes and sizes, races and looks"*. With international interest in childhood eating patterns, the BCI study also examined children's perspectives on food advertising. However, generally low levels of response were recorded. *"Children's responses on the issue of diet and nutrition were more muted than that of adults"* (BCI, 2003, pp.15).

Marketers know from many decades of research that media do have a variety of important effects on children (The Henry J Kasier Family Foundation 2004). In the US children aged between six and 14 years watch 25 hours of television every week, and see approximately 20,000 commercials every year (Moore and Lutz 2000 as cited in Oates, Blades et al. 2001). In a trial of children's exposure and recall of advertising, Gates (2001) reports children as young as six years can distinguish between advertisement and programs, and can recall *"advertisements and their products"*. In a summary of Caruana and Vassallo's research for practitioners it is suggested that understanding the child's power over parental purchases is the key to pitching products to this market segment.

Advertising and children: a theoretical perspective

The theory in this area assists us in understanding how people process and respond to advertising, and the key concepts relate to recall and recognition of advertisements. To evaluate advertising, children must have two important skills; first, they must be able to distinguish between advertising and non-

advertising content, second, they must be able to recognise persuasive intent (Moore 2004). Many researchers rely on Piaget's work in regards to the development of children as consumers (Roedder John 1999). Briefly, there are three stages of development and these are loosely related to age, although the literature does warn that different children mature and move through the stages at different speeds.

Children from 3-7 years are generally in the *perceptual* stage, which is characterised by a general orientation toward the immediate and readily observable perceptual features of the marketplace (Roedder John 1999, p. 186). These children are familiar with brands and stores but do not necessarily understand the role of them. The *analytical* stage is usually populated by children aged between 7-11 years and this is an important stage of development in terms of consumer knowledge and skills (Roedder John 1999, p. 187). Piaget (1970) terms this stage the shift from perceptual thought to more symbolic thought, with significant increases in information processing abilities (Roedder John 1999). The final stage is the *reflective* stage, children are now aged between 11-16 years, with further development in the key areas of cognitions and social development (Roedder John 1999). However, Moore (2004, p. 163) reminds us that having "*cognitive and attitudinal defenses*" is not the same as using them.

Piaget's theory has been criticised in relation to these developmental stages (Phelps and Hoy 1996), suggesting that they are not 'fixed' but gradual changes in development (Cantor and Nathanson 1996). Others have argued that young children are able to compare items belonging to different conceptual categories (cited in Pawlowski, Badzinski and Mitchell 1998). Indeed, there is research that demonstrates that children younger than 3 years of age recognise and respond to advertising elements. Acuff and Reiher (1997), for example, found that some 2-3 year olds can identify frequently seen characters and some demonstrate desire for those characters and related products. Neeley and Schumann (2004) found that children as young as 12 months may cue emotional responses from television actors and this, they suggest, supports Meltzoff's 1988 work with 14 month old children who could imitate the actions seen on television (cited in Neeley and Schumann 2004, p. 20).

Tweens and young teens

You are a tween if ...

- You know the lead singer of the Black Eyed Peas.
- You watch MTV's Video Music Awards.
- You use emoticons.
- You know it's not cool to say, 'That's Hot'.
- And you watch 'Degrassi the Next Generation'.

Tweens (8-14 year olds) comprise a new type of audience - an increasingly powerful and smart consumer group which last year alone spent and influenced an astounding \$1.18 trillion (US) across the globe

(Lindstrom 2004).

The real power of tweens is their ability to influence the purchasing habits of their parents. According to Lindstrom (2004) they have *"well-planned arguments to help ensure that family purchases go their way"*.

More than their parents or any generation before them, tweens are consummate communicators. They spend 60% more time in front of screens than they spend in classrooms. Each year, children in this age group are exposed to over 30,000 television commercials. Tweens are connected by cell phones, broadband and pay TV to media programming that they control, select and influence.

The major difference between today's tweens and those of yesteryear, is that today's tweens no longer expect to be informed by traditional media

(Lindstrom 2004).

Advertising serves to inspire the imagination of this group of consumers. TV advertising is only one part of a multi-media experience. Advertising piques an interest, and once tweens *"hear of something new and exciting then they want it to be accessible [immediately]"* (Lindstrom 2004). Following the initial introduction, tweens will confer with their peers on MySpace, FaceBook or by SMS, literally sharing their experience as it is unfolding. According to the US study, *BrandChild*, conducted by Milward Brown, 25 percent of all tweens communicate with other tweens beyond their national boundaries every week. Online gaming, email chat rooms and web-based magazines have connected this group of consumers internationally.

International impulses clearly are more attractive and influential towards tweens than trends coming from home

(Lindstrom 2004).

Children born in the 1990s are growing up in a vastly more sophisticated world when it comes to advertising

(Mallalieu, Palan et al. 2005).

Mallalieu et al. (2005), conducted a study to assess the effects of advertising on tweens. She found that on the whole, children were quite knowledgeable about advertising. The study suggested that tweens have highly developed media literacy skills being both skeptical of promises posed in advertising and highly attuned to false claims associated with disappointing products. From the study, one young male said *"my dad had this cell phone and the ad said it would work all over the world... but when we moved it didn't work. Why call it a Worldcom then?"* (Mallalieu, Palan et al. 2005).

Adolescence is also a lifestage of transition, which can be awkward and painful. Teens' self-consciousness and social anxiety makes them very receptive to image advertising and high-status, heavily advertised brands.

The goal of most image advertising is to suggest that featured brands help a person look better, feel better, attract sexual interest and impress friends

(Pechmann, Levine et al. 2005) (Masten 2004 cited in Pechman et al. 2005).

Studying the effect of advertising on teen tobacco consumption, researchers found brand-specific advertising expenditures had three times more influence on brand shares among teens than adults (Pechmann, Levine et al. 2005).

However, new evidence suggests that the high media literacy levels and emerging skepticism demonstrated in the Mallalieu study may have beneficial effects. Mallalieu suggests that the tweens in this study found anti-smoking commercials useful.

These were the only commercials that tweens felt were in any way helpful in terms of getting a message across, but they also clearly recognised that the anti-smoking ads were still intending to persuade people to change a specific behaviour.

Generation Y

You are a Gen Yer if ..

- Remote-control TVs, microwaves and telephones with keypads are a given.
- You vividly remember the World Trade Centre attacks, but barely recall the fall of the Berlin Wall.
- You consider '80s music to be oldies.
- You have a cell phone but no land line
- You are logged on 24/7
- You chuckle when you see a Vote for Pedro' T-shirt.

Generation Y or Millennial, were born between 1980 and 1995/2000 (depending on the source). They are "*well-connected, over-stimulated, media-savvy consumers who are open-minded, optimistic and well-educated*" (Pirovano 2006). Pirovani warns against stereotyping the teen marketing because they are a "moving target" and as "*resistant to advertising as were the Generation X before them*" (Wolburg and Pokrywczynski 2001).

Teens were raised in a digitized age where change happens rapidly and everything is immediate: they want fast food, fast connections and instant gratification. Competent communicators, teens multi-task simultaneously e-mailing, text messaging, downloading music, uploading and mentally negotiating constructs with advertisers.

This generation is more adept at communications than any of its predecessors

(Pirovano 2006).

Having grown up in a more media-saturated, brand conscious world than their parents, Gen-Yers encounter advertisements in different places than their parents and are believed to respond to them differently

(Wolburg and Pokrywczynski 2001).

Teens are a highly coveted market, courted by advertisers keen to establish brand loyalties early and influence the consumption habits of both them, and their parents'.

Advertisers have used celebrity endorsements, humour, and competitions through interactive media to appeal to teens. Teens are more likely than younger children to identify peers as their most important role models. (Pechmann, Levine et al. 2005, Brown 1990 as cited in Pechmann et al. 2005). Advertisers may benefit from using characters from "TV shows, film stars, sports celebrities and even writers from niche magazines who are highly identifiable with Gen-Yers" (Wolburg and Pokrywczynski 2001).

According to Wolburg (2001), teens respond better to advertising that incorporates "humour, irony and the 'unvarnished' truth". He also warns however, that teens are fickle. "Advertisements meant to look youthful and fun may come off as merely opportunistic to the Gen-Y consumer."

Social marketing campaigns targeting young people have also relied on mass marketing channels including poster, radio and television advertising in attempts to change risky behaviours associated with smoking, drugs and unsafe sex. However, demonstrations of how media-savvy and defiant teens construct meaning and value from advertising became evident to English health promoters when teenagers were found to be stealing public posters to display in their bedrooms (Hastings 2007). The "Heroin Screws You Up" campaign also inspired popular culture icons including a "heroin chic" fashion model.

This does not suggest, however, that social marketers have failed. Efforts to inhibit the adoption of smoking behaviours in young adults have proven success (Devlin, Eadie et al. 2007). Advertising campaigns based on "fear appeals, social norms and tobacco advertising manipulation" have shown positive impacts on young consumers in the US and Australia. The findings from a qualitative study with young people in England suggests that "no single anti-smoking message appeal is likely to have universal appeal [with teens]" and that anti-smoking messages are mediated by the values teens attach to smoking (Devlin, Eadie et al. 2007).

The depiction of teens in advertising presents another challenge for advertisers. When asked to consider how well advertising-in-general depicts teens, 58% said it did not depict their generation in ways that can relate to, and another 20% were neutral. According to this sample, up to 75% of the advertising aimed at teens lacks authentic, believable depictions of this age group (Wolburg and Pokrywczynski 2001). Movies and television were significantly better at depicting teens than magazines and advertising-in-general.

This generation of consumers value advertising that respects their sophisticated levels of media literacy. Wolburg (2001) suggests that advertisers:

- give teens direct and precise information on product attributes,
- avoid product imagery based on traditions and long corporate histories,
- recognise the personality, social and age-related differences that exist between teens, and

- avoid appealing to materialist values that may have inspired their Baby Boomer parents.

Generation X

You are a Gen Xer if...

- You or your peers have been called 'slackers.'
- You were coming of age when the Challenger space shuttle exploded.
- One of your first favourite movies was 'Star Wars' or 'E.T.'
- You wore parachute pants.
- Kurt Cobain's suicide was a defining event for you or your friends.
- You've used floppy computer discs but consider them 'old school.'
- You cut your musical teeth on Madonna, Duran Duran and The Cure.

Generation X captures the category of consumers born between 1965-79. Generation X-ers have also been called the Baby Busters, being born after the child-bearing boom of the post-war prosperity. This generation has been influenced by significant changes in social patterns including the breakdown of traditional two-parent families, increased consumerism, and the ubiquitous nature of advertising.

One factor that distinguishes the baby buster generation from other generations is its preoccupation with material possessions and shopping

(Roberts and Manolis 2000).

More than any generation prior to, or since, this generation is driven by the consistent goals to make money and buy products (Dunn 1993 as cited in Roberts 2000).

They are also heavy users of television and have been spoiled for choice with an expansion of programming during their lifetime. Generation X is the original audience of MTV, television shopping channels and religious broadcasting. However, empirical evidence of their attitudes toward advertising in general is conflicting. Some studies suggest that Gen-Xers "see marketing as a highly manipulative practice; that is one of the bottom-feeding jobs in society" (Coupland 1991 as cited in Roberts 2000). Interestingly, they hold particularly cynical or suspicious views of indirect marketing techniques such as "relationship marketing", networking and public relations (Roberts and Manolis 2000).

Other studies have reported more positive attitudes to advertising. Unlike baby boomers, Gen-Xers are not hostile towards advertising: they know advertising is to sell a product and their attitude is 'tell me more about your product, give me information [and] the reasons why I should buy it'

(Roberts and Manolis 2000).

The Yankelovich 2005 Marketing Receptivity Study reported that 55% of Gen Xers enjoyed advertising, but rejected intrusiveness and saturation.

Roberts suggests that their definition of marketing is a narrow construct commonly associated with advertising in media channels such as radio, television and print. Gen Xers do actively seek advertising information when it is relevant, and importantly, pass it on to others once it is deemed valuable. Gen-Xers also held higher views that marketing is socially responsible and are less likely to perceive marketing and/or advertising as offensive, useless and non-beneficial compared to the baby boomers (Roberts and Manolis 2000).

The environmental movement has acknowledged that Gen Xers are the most responsive age group to its cause. Consumers are becoming increasingly concerned with environmental issues and are associating them with the products they buy (McDaniel and Rylander 1996). Recent public awareness events highlighting climate change, such as "Live Earth" were pitched to entice Gen Xers to become champions or effective messengers. According to Timmons Roberts, a James Martin Fellow at Oxford University, *"the challenge that remains [for the climate change cause] is to determine which messages move people from concern to positive action"*. (AC Nielson, 2007).

Baby boomers

You are a baby boomer if...

- The Mickey Mouse Club once seemed like something that would be cool to join.
- You had friends who swore they were at Woodstock, even if they weren't.
- You adored, or hated, Elvis way before he got pudgy and wore sequins.
- You first noticed Jack Nicholson as a drunken Southern lawyer in 'Easy Rider'.¹
- You remember the jolt, as a child or teen, of learning about a leader's assassination.
- Cigarette ads on TV once seemed normal.
- The first time you heard about Vietnam, you weren't sure what or where it was.

Images that have been associated with this generation include: rule breakers, non-conformists, suspicious, rebellious and materialistic. According to Roberts, Baby Boomers have been the most resistant generation to advertising-in-general, jaded by marketing and consumerism. Adopting a pragmatic approach to aging in an image-conscious society, they prefer information intensive advertising to image-oriented marketing (Roberts and Manolis 2000).

The arrival of the baby boomers -- the 76 million Americans born between 1946 and 1964 — into the upper age brackets is the leading reason for the shift in opinions about older consumers. *"It's a demographic group that's too big and too rich to ignore"* (Elliott 2007).

Free-spending boomers think young regardless of how old they actually are. Another reason for the change is that consumers in their 60s, 70s and 80s are behaving differently from their counterparts in previous decades, particularly in their willingness to travel, dine out and adopt new technologies.

According to *American Demographics*, Baby Boomers are busy. They:

- have less leisure time than other adults, and claim to feel stressed more often,
- are more likely than either younger or older adults to have dependent children at home,
- despite delayed marriage and high divorce rates, nearly two-thirds are married,
- more than six million baby boomers are already grandparents,
- are already in their peak labor force participation years ,
- are notorious for their willingness to buy on credit and forego saving money,
- are more likely than older or younger adults to own a computer.

The Baby Boom accounts for a huge portion of TV viewers. According to Nielsen Media Research, households headed by people between the ages of 35 and 54 comprise 40 percent of all households using television during prime time. While much on TV is targeted to the youth market, adults between the ages of 35 and 64 spend an average of 248 minutes a day watching TV, 22 minutes more a day, on average, than adults 18 to 34 years (Paul 2003).

Boomers do not toss out the old media when new forms come in. Baby Boomers also go online more frequently than do most other generations. Seventeen percent of adults ages 35 to 54 years log on more than once a day, compared with 12 percent of non-Boomer adults (Paul 2003).

Compared to younger generations, Baby Boomers are generally less responsive to advertising and hold less favourable views of its intent. They also appeared somewhat more skeptical about advertising than other age groups. Baby Boomers appear to trust advertising less than younger generations do (33% compared to 42%). Moreover they are less likely (35%) to believe that advertised brands are a better value for money than their older generations (45%) (Shavitt, Lowrey et al. 1998).

The builders

In 1936 according to a report in *Sales Management* the typical consumer seemed to think advertising was definitely informative, not necessarily trustworthy and far more often than not preyed on fools, and was fertile ground for the operation of quacks (Calfee and Jones Ringold 1994). When this report was published today's oldest seniors were only 16 years of age. This generation lived their formative years in the dark shadow of the Great Depression as their countries headed towards World War II.

Given the impact of these historic events, it seems almost ironic that this group is often referred to as the "Lucky Generation". They are the parents of the Baby Boomers, the "builders" of infrastructure, the economy and many

enduring institutions of their societies including universities, hospitals and schools. They are proudly pragmatic, patient, persevering and financially conservative. They trust and respect seats of authority.

Older consumers have longer memories of advertising and greater experience of its evolution. Advertising was perceived to have increased in quantity, have greater ubiquity and to have increased in quality. *"I think there is far more understanding now of how to influence people"*. Male, empty nester, urban. They may also feel that they need more information in a fast-moving world and display attitudes that show a greater importance is associated with advertising because some of their decisions will be restricted by a restricted income (Ford-Hutchinson and Rothwell 2002). Older consumers are loyal audiences of television advertising, and expect advertising to both inform and entertain them. Older adults appeared to be more favourable than others towards advertising in general and the advertising industry (Shavitt, Lowrey et al. 1998).

The Shavitt et al. (1998) study found that older adults appeared more favourable than other consumers towards the advertising industry on specific dimensions, particularly those involving government regulations. They are more inclined to believe that advertising regulation should be done by the industry rather than the government (65%) and are more likely to believe that the government already places too much regulation on advertising (27% compared to 15 or 19 for other generations) (Shavitt, Lowrey et al. 1998).

A segmentation study provides further insights into categories of older consumers.

Market segmentation is an effective strategic tool for addressing the mature market, not only because this market is highly diversified, but also because of its size

(Moschis 1993).

Two categories, the "ailing out-goers" and the "healthy indulgers" reported strong favourable attitudes to age-based advertising. Ailing out-goers are described as health conscious seniors with relatively poor health who are socially active, but unlikely to-change lifestyle due to age. They consistently show an interest in learning and doing new things and are highly likely to be retired. Their strong need for information intensive advertising was associated with financial services, and domestic-assistance products and services.

The other group, the "healthy indulgers" are independent, active, relatively wealthy, socially engaged and in good health. They willingly purchase products and services to indulge themselves. They display a strong need for selective advertising, and are more favourable toward in-store displays. This groups also holds favourable attitudes to technology and are keen to master computers as a means of engaging socially with others (Moschis 1993).

Older consumers are targeted by the pharmaceutical industry in direct-to-consumer advertising (DTCA) campaigns. According to DeLorme (2006) these ads are placed: to inform consumers about the advertised drugs, to prime consumers to talk to their doctors about taking advertised drugs and to motivate consumers to request that the advertised drug be prescribed by their doctor. This positions older consumers as a potentially vulnerable group to this type of marketing strategy.

However, consistent with advertising-in-general research, consumers often hold ambivalent attitudes towards DTCA. In qualitative research, interviewees suggested that DTCA provided a great deal of information about conditions and treatment. The ads may prompt consumers to seek further information to determine if the advertised drug is appropriate for their medical condition.

This research also exposed skepticism towards claims made in DTCA. Consumers often found DTCA presented unrealistic and overly simplistic situations that distorted the product benefits. One response captures this sentiment: "*some of these commercials make medication sound like an easy cure and a cure for all sorts of things ... and it just isn't true*" (Jones and Mullan 2006).

In a large study to assess older adults' perceptions and understanding of the influence of DTCA found similar results (Jones and Mullan 2006). The major finding from this study was that older consumers reported little perceived benefits of DTCA and expressed concern that DTCA may cause people to ask their doctor for inappropriate medicines, rely more on medicines, and become more confused about the therapeutic application of medicines.

The studies on DTCA echo sentiments associated with research into advertising in general. People value clear information on which they can base their purchasing decisions. They are cynical about claims that promote the product in sensational or misleading appeals. There is no magic bullet effect of exposing advertising to consumers for a prescribed action. Consumers scan advertising for relevant information and construct the value of the message after contemplating how the product may fit into their purchasing context. This construction of meaning is often conducted in social groups after talking to peers and family on the value of a particular product.

Criticisms and complaints about advertising

On the one hand, advertisers have more outlets for the distribution of creative campaigns with the introduction of new technologies including sophisticated mobile telephones and increased functionality of the Internet. However a growing body of evidence suggests that "*many consumers simply do not believe the ads they see*" (Obermiller, Spangenberg et al. 2005). Today, consumers have become vigilantes: they know their rights and are not afraid to express them (Research 2006).

Harker (2003) suggests that some advertisements may be 'unacceptable', that is unfair, misleading, deceptive, offensive, false or socially irresponsible. In a study conducted for a government health department, three in ten respondents (30%) reported that they had felt concerned about alcohol advertising that they had seen or heard. Much of this concern related to the content of the ad, young people being exposed to the ad, concern that it encouraged drinking and concern about linking sports with alcohol (King, Taylor et al. 2005). Clearly such issues raise concerns regarding the potential harmful effect that advertising can have on the more vulnerable members of Society (Volkov, Harker et al. 2002).

Untruthful advertising

Clearly there are aspects of advertising that are fiercely criticised, by consumers.

The first negative that comes out of every group of consumers [surveyed for this study] is the dislike of what might be called untruthful truthful advertising.

Ford-Hutchinson and Rothwell 2002).

This is advertising that does not literally lie, but is economical with the whole truth. Common examples from groups included small print that outlined conditional warranties, with suggestive phrases such as "terms and conditions may apply", "limited numbers available" and "prices from".

It's the very, very tiny print... you find that it says something that seems to be very different from what your are reading above.

(Ford-Hutchinson and Rothwell 2002)

Clutter

Respondents in Coulter's qualitative study reported that there was just too much information and that it was overkill that resulted in a confused and doubtful, rather than enlightened, decision-making (Coulter, Zaltman et al. 2001).

You see commercials for Reebok, then you see Nike, then you see LA Gear, then you see Converse, then you see Keds ... you see all these different kinds of sneakers. And they are all claiming to be the best, the best for your feet, the best for the basketball, the best for this, and you get confused because you see so many different kinds of ads for the same kind of thing.

In order to avoid being oversaturated by advertising messages, today's postmodern consumer is often forced to employ ad-avoidance strategies (Speck and Ellio, 1997 as cited in Rumbo 2002, Rumbo 2002). It is reasonable that simple disbelief may be one way that consumers cope with the persuasive attempts of advertising. *"The most frequent coping response [consumers use] may be to discount messages recognised as ads"* (Obermiller, Spangenberg et al. 2005). Obermiller suggests that skepticism is both a cause that encourages advertisers to be honest and an effect of the consumer experience with dishonesty.

Complaints

Volkov et al suggested that complainants believed less strongly that: advertising was considered as a good thing, or that advertising presented a true picture of the product advertised. Complaints also reported stronger convictions that advertising promoted undesirable values in society. As a corollary, complainants also reported that they held a generally favourable opinion towards advertising-in-general. The authors suggest that *"regardless of the issues that they may harbour about advertising, complainants perceive the industry as necessary"* (Volkov, Harker et al. 2002).

Conclusion

Fifty years have passed since Greyser and Bauer (1966) first examined the history of attitudes to advertising. Their conclusion to this research is "yet in spite of all these general tendencies, the public's basic feelings towards advertising and its major institutional elements have remained remarkably stable over time. While consumers will criticise individual aspects of advertising, they accept it as part of life, part of the modern, progressive economy and are, on the whole, favourable toward it" (Greyser and Bauer 1966). Reviewing the literature on the public opinion towards advertising and the concept of attitudes-towards-advertising-in-general today holds consistently with these original sentiments.

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