How does advertising work, anyway? (2005)

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> "*I am a part of that school, which believes, that a good advertising is the one that sells the products without attracting the attention to oneself. It should attract the attention of the reader to the product. Instead of saying "what a smart advertising", the reader should say "I didn't know this before. I must try this product".*
>
> David Ogilvy
>
> "Confessions of an advertising man"

1. Why is it important to know how advertising works?

Ten years ago Simon Broadbent and Leo Burnett put effort into calculating that concepts about how advertising works are nearly 500. A lot of time has passed since then and their number has increased. And yet there remained a major limit - each concept is a part either of the "strong-force" or the "weak-force" theory about how advertising works. The "strong-force" theory postulates that advertising influences people strongly because it is able to persuade the customer to buy the advertised brand, while the "weak-force" theory insists that advertising can at most incite a purchase, but it is not a decisive factor in the customer's choice. Something else also remains nearly unchanged: the differences and the oppositions between the two theories are similar to religious disputes – both to the reasoning and beliefs related to them, and to their intensity.

In this paper I am trying to present the main arguments of both theories and to reflect on them. In the first part I'll elaborate upon the "weak-force" theory, generally associated with professor Ehrenberg's name, who because of a happy coincidence, I have the honor to have met personally and learned things from the source. This part of the presentation is positive, as I share to a great extent the views of the adherents of this theory. The second part is dedicated to the "strong-force" theory. The attitude is critical for the above- stated reasons, which I hope will not obstruct the explanation of the principal ideas. In the third part, I am putting forward some new solutions that can be useful in the understanding of the way advertising influences people. They can be also used to fill a substantial gap of the "weak-force" theory, which is the psychological mechanism that makes advertising work. In this part, I defend the idea that it is hardly possible – at least in the near future – to have a unified and comprehensive theory, describing and explaining sufficiently and reliably the way advertising works. In the light of this hypothesis, the "weak-force" and the "strong-force" theory look more like variants than like general theories.

However, before I start the essential presentation, it is yet necessary to answer the question posed in the title of this article: Why is it necessary to know how advertising works? My shortest answer is - because once we answer this question, we will be able:

- To know how to make good and efficient advertisings;
- To know how to judge which advertising is a success and which is not;
- To know what we can or cannot expect from an advertising;
- To know how an advertising integrates or contradicts other factors influencing it;
- To know how to analyze and teach advertising.

My opinion is that in all these five directions, we have disappointing gaps in the knowledge of people, who:

- Make advertising;
- Order advertising;
- Study advertising – so they should be able to distinguish between the successful and bad advertising.

The existing gaps are related to confused beliefs, unclear guiding principles, a lack of self-reflection, too much self-confidence for well-known authors, inefficient obsession with creativity, a separation of advertising from its real functions in the market environment, building of a "Chinese wall" between advertising and the other parts of marketing, the subjectivity of "I like this, so it is going to work", etc.

The discussion about how advertising works is also important because this issue is associated with three fundamental topics of marketing in general as a theory and practice: (1) the nature and way of discrimination between different brands (salience) or; (2) the goal of advertising (brand maintenance or brand building); (3) how advertising influences the human mind (via reminding or persuasion).

As I have already mentioned, the purpose of this paper is to present the main views on how advertising works. Several months ago, when I started writing it, I thought it was needed for many reasons. Now I am completely convinced about this. Sergio Zyman helped me with his book "The end of advertising as we know it" that I would refuse to read only a few months before. When I finally read it, I told myself that I was right to avoid it. I think things are more than serious when a man, who was twice head of the marketing department of Coca-Cola, who worked for Pepsi's advertising department and has some 30 years of experience gained, has discovered only now that Ogilvy was so right saying that advertising should be sold?!

2. The “weak-force” theory about the influence of advertising

This theory owes its development, perfection, dissemination and defense mainly to professor Andrew Ehrenberg[1] and the researchers in his circle of thought (Goodhardt, Barnard, Screven, Bound, Kennedy, Bloom, Uncles, Barways, etc.). Before presenting its main postulates and arguments, it seems to me that I should mention about two things that are undervalued by both proponents and opponents of the theory – but I find them important. Firstly, the theory has been created and tested mainly for “frequently purchased consumer goods” in the conditions of “stationary markets” (these are Ehrenberg ‘s terms). However, as Ehrenberg and his associates have mentioned several times, the theory is applicable also in other conditions (durable goods and “nearstationary markets). Why are these two conditions important, it will become clear in the analysis of the theory later. Secondly, it is popular mainly in the United Kingdom and recently in Australia, and less in Europe. As for the USA – Tim Ambler said: accepting this theory is like doubting that your wife gave birth to your children. By the way, the “weak-force” theory is something like a “white swallow” in marketing compared with the absolute domination of Americans. As we know very well, power influences do not detour the world of science, which is in general supposed to pursue uniquely the idea of truth.

2.1. A brief description

I will first draw the main lines of the theory as they have been summarized in two key articles on the discussed topic: the article recapitulating the project JOAB (Justifying Our Advertising Budgets) and the article “Brand advertising as creative publicity”. Later, I will try to describe in detail these articles. Here, as well as later in this paper, I will quote the original texts so as to draw upon them and avoid any deviation that might result in retelling with an element of interpretation. Sometimes I will bring ideas from other articles of the JOAB project – they will usually be reviewed less strictly in order not to overload the paper with quotations and references.

The “weak-force” theory about the influence of advertising, also called by Ehrenberg “the salience theory” is based on the fact that it is mainly the number of customers that distinguishes brands rather than customer loyalty[2] to a specific brand. A conclusion that

[1] Ehrenberg was head of the Center for Research in Marketing of South Bank University, London (now Ehrenberg Center for Research in Marketing). Before that, he was a research professor at the London Business School, where he was a head of a similar department. Died on February 7th, 2009.

[2] Ehrenberg is an adherent of the behavioral view of loyalty. According to him, for consumer products frequently purchased, the loyalty to a brand is measured as an average number of its purchases over a given

follows is that brand advertising would have a stronger impact depending on the number of people it is salient for, rather than on any attempts to convince anybody that Bingo is different from Bango"[3].

Only few brands can grow in stationary mature markets. For that reason, "the main goal of advertising is to maintain or defend the number of your customers… This can be done by the publicity of the brand. It is not necessary to place any efforts for the brand to look different from what it had been before or different from your closest competing substitutes"[4].

Under these conditions, it is accepted that advertising works mainly in the long run through strengthening the associations of the given brand in the memory of consumers.

2.2. The world of brands and branding: the issue of brand salience

Competing brands are similar to each other and they are substitutes. As a result, most customers usually buy or consume relatively regularly not just one brand, but a set of them (a phenomenon known as repertory or split loyalty). What makes brands different is the number of customers they have. Brands are not so essentially different neither with respect to the average frequency of their purchase, nor to the average level of customer's loyalty (irrespectively of how it is measured). These ideas of the "weak-force" theory totally correspond to the empirical facts obtained mainly by consumer panels and some special ad hoc studies[5]. They have been tested for more than 50 product categories and for different national markets.

The fact that the customer buys or consumes a certain brand means that it is salient for him. Salience is a key concept for Ehrenberg and his associates. They comprehend it as a portmanteau concept, meaning several things at the same time:

- Brand awareness;
- Presence of the brand in the consideration set[6];
- Presence of the brand in his/her purchase repertory;
- Expressed intention to repurchase the brand;
- Positive attitude towards the brand;

period. It is usual for bigger brands (brands with higher penetration) to be more frequently bought than smaller ones. This regularity is known as "double jeopardy effect" and in the field of marketing is again associated with the name of Ehrenberg

[3] Ehrenberg, A., N. Barnard, J. Scriven, Justifying Our Advertising Budgets: An Overview, Admap, March 1998.

[4] Ibid.

[5] This also applies to the Bulgarian market, according to my calculations, based on some special ad hoc studies, carried out by research agencies – MAP and Pragmatica, as well as on data form the consumer panel of GfK Bulgaria. For simplicity, here I am avoiding the presentation of the calculations.

[6] It means that the brand is placed by the buyer or the consumer among those brands, among which he has the intention to make his consumer choice

- Approval of its price;
- Recommending the brand to other people;
- Propensity to buy this brand if the usually purchased one is not available, etc.[7]

"Salience in our sense is about the brand coming to mind in personally relevant choice situations… The brand has become part of one's broad consideration set, a brand that one might buy, or use – either now, or in years ahead. This goes well beyond traditional awareness, or even the "strength" of such awareness (e.g., first recall). Salience concerns the "size" of the brand in one's mind, i.e. the memory structures that allow the brand to come forward for wide range of recall cues that can occur in purchase occasions. With this "share of mind" come the feelings of being familiar and the feelings of assurance. This is our broad designation of "salience" – awareness and memory traces, *plus* familiarity, *plus* assurance"[8].

"For marketing and advertising, the key question is therefore not how salient Brand X is to its users, but to how many consumers the brand is salient."[9] The number of customers that the brand is salient for correlates with "almost everything in the marketing mix that contributes to its purchase and its market share"[10]

The authors believe that a complex cause-and-effect relationship is in place. Brands that are salient are better displayed in stores under the pressure of consumer demand, on one hand and, on the other, their better display makes them more salient.

For brands to be potentially salient, it is necessary neither to be "the best", nor to look "better" than other brands. They have to be just more distinctive as a name and logo so that the customer would pay attention to them, and choose them. "For a brand to be in a consumers's consideration set or to actually chosen, the brand does not to be seen as "the best", but only as "good enough". This is the late Herbert Simon (1947) highly regarded "Satisficing" criterion. In Darwinian terms, this means "Survival of the fit enough", not of the fittest"[11].

According to the defenders of this view, it is consistent with the fact that consumers need most of all not brands, but products. Consumers have to choose a given brand from their consideration set in order to satisfy their needs. In principle, to make a decision, people cast a kind of mental die ("Oh, I don't know. I think I would choose this brand"). In practice, consumers seem to choose mainly known and habitually used brands for convenience and out of trust.

The model ATR&N explains how a brand becomes salient. On the level of a specific consumer it means how the consumer develops a stable and habitual propensity to buy or consume the brand. The model explains the case of new brands as well as the case of brands that are new only for the specific consumer.

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[7] Ehrenberg, A., N. Barnard, I. Scriven, Differentiation or Salience, Admap, November/December, 1997.
[8] Ehrenberg, A., N. Barnard, R. Kennedy, H. Bloom, Brand Advertising as Creative Publicity, Admap, July/August, 2002, p. 11.
[9] Ehrenberg, A., N. Barnard, J. Scriven, Justifying Our Advertising Budgets: An Overview, Admap, March 1998.
[10] Ibid
[11] Ehrenberg, A., N. Barnard, R. Kennedy, H. Bloom, Brand Advertising as Creative Publicity, Admap, July/August, 2002, p. 11.

Awareness

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Trial

↓

Reinforcement

↓

Nudging

***Figure 1*. Graphical presentation of the ATR&N model**

The given brand has to become first of all known for this consumer (the awareness phase). This can happen as a result of advertising, of seeing the product in the store, of a recommendation by somebody, of having seen that someone is using the brand, from the free samples given in store, etc. It is not strictly necessary to persuade on a conscious level about the advantages of the brand, which advertising is usually believed to achieve. Things can look much simpler: "This company is giving a lot of money for advertising. Maybe what they offer is worth trying".

It is possible later that some interest will arise. The interest appears usually when the brand is very distinctive. In general, though, such expressed interest is not present because of the fact that experienced enough consumers do not expect the brand to be much different from others. This explains the fact that interest is absent from the model. On the contrary, it has a key role in the well known model AIDA (Awareness, Interest, Desire, Action).

The feelings of being familiar with the brand and the resulting interest in it can later influence the consumer to try it: "I know this brand, why don't I try it to see what it is like?" I should boldly underline that the phase of trial has an extreme importance in the model and, in general, in the "weak-force" theory of advertising. However, this will be specifically developed later in this paper.

If, on the basis of trial, the consumer has decided that the brand is good enough, it is possible that he would try it again or, in other words, purchase it. For some brands this trial can result in selecting them into the consumer repertory. A point must be emphasized: for the second trial to occur and the brand to be purchased from this point onwards, the brand should not necessarily be perceived as "the best", or as "better", but just as "good *enough",* so to say, as good as the *other brands* in the repertory or the consideration set of the consumer. In the opposite case – i.e. when the consumer is not satisfied after having tried the brand - it will fall out of his/her field of interest.

Adding a new brand in the repertory occurs either by crowding some of the existing ones, or by keeping all of them, but lowering the frequency of buying of all brands, some of them, or just one of them.

According to the "weak-force" theory exactly after the trial, and as a result of it, not before it and outside of it, the brand and a mind-set can be present – positive or negative - and, accordingly, the subsequent consumer behavior. The trial can unlock different mechanisms of liking the brand ("I am using it, therefore, I like it". "I cannot use a brand that is not good, therefore it is good"), sufficiently well described in the psychology literature (as reducing the cognitive dissonance of Festinger or the self-perception of Bem). This is described by the reinforcement phase.

Advertising can refresh the consciousness of the consumers in relation to the new brand, contribute to it so that it becomes salient and maintains its salience. The fact that the brand is being advertised encourages the retail sellers to support it in displaying it appropriately and recommending it to consumers. Advertising of the brand, together with its availability in the distribution chain, supports its necessary availability in the consciousness of the consumer, and reminds him to purchase it again (nudging). The result, finally, is the appearance of a consumer habit of repetitive purchases. This habit, however, can go down, if it is not supported. There is a need for further advertising to encourage the purchase of the brand and to stop other brands from entering the repertory – which would result in crowding out or limiting the own brand.

2.3. The main goal of advertising: maintaining the brand

Working with customers, every one of us has come across the business ideology that I would call the "more" ideology: more sales, more profit, more customers, more loyalty, more quantity, more satisfaction, more purchase attitude etc. The expectations of the businesses for more are also related to advertising. Many great names advise the same, as Cutler, for example: "What advertising has to achieve is quite clear: to increase sales and/or the profit of companies to a higher level than where they would be without it"[12]. If a campaign cannot bring more, the usual attitude is to decide it had been a failure. This can be explained in the following way: if advertising in particular and marketing in general do not bring anything more, why pay for them? This is a logical consideration, but as most logical considerations, it is wrong.

In reality, companies have to pay for marketing in general and advertising in particular because in a stable market environment (and not only in a stable one) only few brands can grow. A significant part of them are only able to maintain their status, quite a lot to just decrease, and some others – to disappear. If a company does not use advertising for its brand when competitors are using it, it would send the brand to the last two groups. It is the case, because of the already mentioned circumstance: in the world of brands – they are similar and substitutes. Because of this, the choice between them is "quick and easy"

[12] Lilien, C, P. Kotler, K. Moorthy, Marketing Models (NJ: Prentice Hall, 1992).

(Ehrenberg's words). By contrast, the choice between functionally different products is quite difficult (sedan or hedge back, faster or cheaper processor, etc.). The absence of advertising makes the brand weaker, withdrawing it from the consciousness of the consumer and thus from his/her purchases.

"The main role of advertising of a stable brand, accordingly, stays defensive: at the same time to stop the erosion (lowering the share of purchases in the total repertory of purchased brands in the respective product category – my note S. J.) and to provide a substitute to those consumers that have gradually quitted it. In other words, the goal of advertising is to support the status quo of sales of the brand in conditions when the marketing mix and the salience of other brands (including their advertising) can really provide an incentive for consumers to quit it. "It comes down to "running hard to stand still""[13].

In the other article, quite frequently quoted, something else is added to the basic role of advertising that has been more implicit so far. "Hence we think that advertising is needed to try and maintain both salience and customer retention, and to give the brand a chance of catching its fair share of "the leaks"[14]. The additional consideration in question concerns the "leaks" – i.e. those consumers who are quitting the other brands. It is important, because this is another opportunity for competitors to penetrate in the fortress of the established brand if it is not maintained by advertising. At the same time, in case of correct advertising, it is a potential to take a fair share from the competitors. Probably, the most categorical statement about what advertising can do and what it cannot is contained in the following thought: "Keeping each brand in competitive near-equilibrium or even stalemate has to be the *main* realistic marketing aim for established brands. It is what mostly happens, whatever marketers tend to say about growth. The occasional larger gain is a bonus for a fortunate few – perhaps those, who "get everything right", not just advertising"[15]

2.4. How advertising works

Every experienced consumer usually consumes relatively regularly only a limited number of brands in a given product category. He is aware of their characteristics and this awareness is based on the best knowledge – consumption. The awareness is created also as a result of trying different other brands, in addition to brands from his consumer repertory. And again, the knowledge of these brands outside the repertory is categorical enough, because it is based on experience. In such a situation, advertising should not insist that special characteristics be offered by the brand: "the experienced consumer already knows that All Bran is 'good for health', that other cereal brands are also at least somewhat differentiated, and that in most other categories brands differ even less" [16]. The "weak-

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[13] Ehrenberg, A., N. Barnard, J. Scriven, Justifying Our Advertising Budgets: An Overview, Admap, March 1998.

[14] Ehrenberg, A., N. Barnard, R. Kennedy, H. Bloom, Brand Advertising as Creative Publicity, Admap, July/August, 2002, p. 14.

[15] Ehrenberg,' A., N. Barnard, R. Kennedy, H. Bloom, Brand Advertising as Creative Publicity, Admap, July/August, 2002, p. 14-15.

[16] Ehrenberg, A., N. Barnard, J. Scriven, Justifying Our Advertising Budgets: An Overview, Admap, March 1998.

force" theory does not consider making use of the brand's distinctive characteristics and its advertising as obligatory or even desirable method. And yet, this can be used, but not as "*as a* direct selling point ('buy brand X because...'), and more as a *talking* point: The attribute is used creatively to help publicise the brand - that it is brand X that is refreshing, gets clothes clean, has air bags …" [17]

In support of this understanding, some other widely known circumstances are brought in, considering advertising that works well in all other aspects:

1. Lack of reference to any difference of the brand: "Always coca-cola", "This is coca-cola", "Nike", etc. Such forms are mainly known from billboards, T-shirts, caps etc.;
2. An indication that the brand is representative of a product category: "Domestos extinguishes all known microbes" (this is what every disinfectant does).
3. Providing information: "Intel inside";
4. The use of clichés that are not to be literally understood: "Varta – the better batteries", almost all advertisings of the type "most".

How does consciousness work with respect to advertising, according to the "weak-force" theory?

Naturally, for advertising to be efficient the first condition is to be noticed. Next comes the conscious attention to it ("What is it all about?"). The purchase, if it takes place, usually comes after a delay, which is different for the different product categories. This means the result from advertising has to be expected and measured with a certain lag. Therefore, advertising addresses the so called long-term memory.

For the brand to be remembered permanently, different pieces of information should be concentrated around a single "center of gravity". In this case, such role is played by the brand name. For this name to be active in memory, which also means to be active in terms of causality in relation to consumer actions, constant reminding is needed. This can be done just by "hammering in the name". Of course, it can be done by a creative or less creative advertising. Retaining of the brand in memory is also achieved along other lines that cannot be controlled (sharing experience, seeing experience, etc.).

Once the message or the image is placed in our long-term memory, it seems they are almost never forgotten. However, there are things that are more difficult to be remembered than others. So, the key issue is how the memory of a certain brand can be easily achieved to be recalled in purchase situations.

It is well known that things are remembered, stored and recalled from memory by the use of associations at conscious and subconscious levels. Repetitive launching of signals, which can provoke such associations that are frequently produced by advertising can

[17] Ehrenberg, A., N. Barnard, J. Scriven, Justifying Our Advertising Budgets: An Overview, Admap, March 1998.

refresh memory and make it more "helpful" in situations where such "helpful" memory is desirable from the point of view of those who exhibit the signal (purchase from the respective product category). Messages and images, however that are not corresponding to what has been initially learnt and remembered can stop the process of recalling. Because of this, all attempts of repositioning, change of logo, package, slogan, can be problematic.

Even when a given brand has a very concentrated image, similar for different consumers, associations will still be different for the individual consumers. We are in a way making a biography of the brands - associating them with certain events of our biography and the circle of people we know. In such a way, the car of brand X is associated with the friend X, cigarettes Y with a trip to London, where the colleague Y was enjoying them during the conference on… etc. "Publicizing a brand is therefore about what consumers do with the advertising rather than what advertisements do to consumers. What evokes the brand, not what the brand evokes"[18].This biographying (my term – S. J.) of brands and the idiosyncrasy of associations explain why the same advertising can be noticed, perceived, reflected upon, remembered, and has influence for different people in different ways.

From this point of view, things related to the modern topic of positioning seem quite different from the established paradigm of Rios and Trout. Therefore, the inclusion in the advertising message – verbal or visual – of a certain "positioning characteristics", for example, "Pirinsko – mountain freshness" should not be regarded as an attempt to convince consumers that Pirinsko is a fresh beer with mountain freshness and the other beers are not (there are all the same - at least by the end of the first bottle!). This is, instead, an attempt the notions "freshness" and "mountain" to be stored and used as a distinctive associative path to the brand. Even senseless characteristics that are unrelated to the product specifics of the brand can be used along these lines.

"In the weak-force or brand-salience theory of advertising what is required of an ad is not heavy persuasion of either the already experienced customer or of the unconcerned newcomer, but just to 'tell a good story well'. This is to get and maintain attention, and keep up memorability and salience for the brand. It also requires a suitable degree of consistency in order to be able to leave longer-term memory traces at all."[19]

3. The "strong-force" theory of advertising"

3.1. A brief description

According to the "strong-force" theory, advertising is able to modify the attitudes, desires and reflections of the consumer, persuading him of the presence of certain merits, true or imaginary, of the brand. Before, and even to a certain extent independently of the experience he has had using it.

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[18] Ehrenberg, A., N. Barnard, R. Kennedy, H. Bloom, Brand Advertising as Creative Publicity, Admap, July/August, 2002, p. 6.

[19] Ehrenberg, A., N. Barnard, J. Scriven, Justifying Our Advertising Budgets: An Overview, Admap, March 1998, p. 9.

Advertising is regarded mainly as the principal tool to construct a brand, differentiating it from competitor brands. Brand differentiation from competing brands that are in their characteristics identical or almost identical products, is achieved by a more or less controlled process of conditioning, whose essence is the persuasion of the consumer – in other words, finding an appropriate, exclusive place for this brand in his or her consciousness. As a result of the belief that advertising has a strong persuasive influence, it is regarded as an instrument that has to bring and really brings – if it is well designed, results in the short run.

Considering advertising as strongly persuasive, the expectations related to it are to result in direct and sensible increase of sales.

A classical example of this theory is the model AIDA, which has set the foundation to a whole crowd of hierarchical models, launching the idea that advertising works in persuading the consumer.

3.2 The world of brands and branding: the issue of differentiation

Brand differentiation is considered to be a mean of achieving a competitive advantage and a platform for the construction of a rational or emotional foundation for the consumers to prefer the respective brand to the competing ones. The brand has to be in some way unique in the eyes of the consumers, so that he/she would have a reason to prefer it to other brands and to continue to do so. If such uniqueness is not achieved, or if it is lost, the brand is transferred to the zone of commodities and can rely only on accidental purchases, purchases out of price considerations or forced (non-availability of other brands).

In principle, there are two possible ways of brand differentiation: (1) Functional or utilitarian difference (for example, choosing of a menu in mobile telephony of Sony with the use of rotating discs); and (2) Emotional or imaginary difference (yoghurt made "on grandma's recipe" of Danone).

At the level of different brands, it is difficult to achieve stable and meaningful functional differentiation, as it is easily and quickly copied by competitors. It is not accidental, therefore, that contemporary markets are said to be brand markets that operate in the conditions of product parity. The alternative is to search for emotional/imaginary differentiation. Therefore, the idea of positioning emerged as it was originally suggested by Riot Trout in: Positioning: the fight for your consciousness, where the goal is to achieve the association of the brand with the notion of uniqueness in the consciousness of the consumer. Other directions of this theory can also be classified as: emotional branding, emotional sales offer, etc. It is considered that all they require strongly influencing and, therefore, very original and creative advertising, which would persuade the consumers, that for certain characteristics the brand is the best or better than others.

Within the limits of different brands, however, it is possible to achieve meaningful product or functional differentiation. Within the limits of the same brad of deodorants there is a great variety and different aromas. There are shampoos for dry, greasy, and normal hair, also within the same brand. Yoghurts are with 2%, 3,6% and 4,5% fat content. There are cigarettes medium, light, super light, ultra light, etc. The “strong” theory insists that differentiation is possible not only within the same brand (the position of the “weak-force” theory), but also between brands, even if competition usually results in copying of competitive advantages, which means: a trend towards unification.

3.3. The main goals of advertising: building a brand and additional sales

According to the “strong-force” theory, the main goals of advertising are building the brand and additional sales (additional – compared to their level before the advertising campaign). The first goal is mainly in the long run, and the second – for the short run prospective. I will start the discussion with the first goal and then I will continue with the second one.

The brand is built by systematic efforts on its positioning and shaping a favorable image. Advertising plays a central role in these efforts. Furthermore, for a lot of practicing advertising specialists, and even for renowned advertising agencies, to say that advertising has a main role really means undervaluing it: “only” a main role. They would like to hear about the *exclusive role* of advertising. The enthusiasm for exclusiveness can be seen in the hard work on details, which afterwards none of the spectators, listeners, or readers would pay attention to. And if they do not notice them, it means they are not important for them.

The second important idea of the adherents of the “strong-force” theory on the role of advertising on building the brand is that advertising is able to easily “shape” the consciousness of consumers. This “plasticine effect”, if I can introduce this term, is supposed to be intrinsically inherent in advertising as a form of communication. It is trusted that this effect does not work only when there is bad advertising (no clear ideas, contradictory perceptions, contradicting effects of campaigns, etc.).

The third idea of this rubric is that even if investing in advertising to build the brand does not bring obvious results (sales increase – according to the adherents of the “strong-force” theory) in the short run, it will do so in the long run.

There are several main principles in the criticism from the part of the “weak-force” theory, concerning these ideas on the role of advertising in building the brand:

1. The image and positioning of the brand are the outcome of not only and merely advertising, but of the practical experience of consuming the brand. Advertising has a certain role – but a main role, just a secondary or maintaining if we can use this precise term from the theater and cinema (to remind, to push, to maintain).
2. Even the well-designed advertising and the well-managed advertising campaign cannot largely “shape” consumers’ consciousness in such a way so that he or she would be persuaded to buy a brand if they were not convinced in its advantages by practical experience.
3. Differentiation between brands rarely occurs they are copying from one another. Differentiation within a brand is more important, which was already mentioned.

4. Brand differentiation achieved by advertising in most cases has no significant influence on consumer behavior. The fact that brand X is believed to of a specific kind and with specific features, does not result in the purchase of it just because it is different from Y if he/she does not consider it a good representative of a category of goods.

As to the second main goal – creating additional sales, things in the "strong-force" theory also seem quite problematic. In the short run, in an environment of unchanging or slightly changing markets – as most markets in developed countries are – only some brands can achieve additional sales. To get these additional sales, they have to take them from others. This is a zero-sum game. Some win at the expense of others. Furthermore, in most cases additional sales are not large[20]. New sales occur not so much because previous non-consumers of the brand had been persuaded to reach out for it as they had been persuaded that it was "exclusive, great, the most", but mainly because previous consumers had been encouraged to increase their shares or buy it faster than it would otherwise happen had there been no advertising. In the first group (non-consumers) brand trial takes place because this group has become aware of it and for the previous consumers – because the fourth phase of the model ATR &N has been enacted.

In a longer run, there is yet no evidence that advertising results in additional sales. Additional sales are an exception rather than the rule. For most brands it is a success to stay in business, with unchanged or almost unchanged sales volumes as compared to previous volumes. Not all sales can increase. Some grow at the expense of others, which go down, and a third group maintains its sales volumes.

Even if there are brands that had additional sales after advertising, it is something difficult to test or proof. It is almost impossible to isolate the effect of advertising from the effects of other elements of the marketing mix (prices, distribution, promotion, PR), and of changes in the market situation.

3.4. How advertising works: persuasion

Adherents of the "strong-force" theory consider that the only model, which can reliably explain how advertising works, is the model of persuasion. Meyers-Levy and Malavia in the key article of this school of thought, wrote that most messages have the same final goal: to persuade target consumers to accept a certain product, service, or idea[21].

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[20] I must point out that the academic programs like JOAB under which Ehrenberg and his associates work are funded are supported not just financially, but also in terms of information by companies like Procter&Gamble, Unilever, Microsoft, Marx&Spenser, Olivetti – which allows them to use information "from the kitchen" on the work of advertising. Because of this reason, most of their ideas and theories are based upon sound empirical foundations tested many times.

[21] Meyers-Levy, J. and P. Malaviya, Consumers Processing of Persuasive Advertisements: an Integrative Framework of Persuasion Theories, Journal of Marketing, 63.

In this concept, persuasion goes through a number of consecutive phases: a cognitive phase (knowing about the brand and its characteristics), affective phase (building a positive feeling towards the brand, and as consequence, the desire and attitude of purchase appear), and a behavioral phase, when desire translates into purchase. As it was already mentioned, this model was proposed first by AIDA. In its contemporary versions, the main idea in the hierarchy of effects and in the linearity of their occurrence is still intact. I would explicitly mention three other characteristics that are common for the models of this school of thought.

First, they postulate that *every advertising* is granted certain attention and processed by consciousness, even the nearly unnoticeable one. Petty and Caciollo believe that processing the information coming from advertising and hence the level of its persuasive power is effected in two ways: central and peripheral. The central way is related to the advertisings receiving a high level of attention (the consumer has been strongly interested); on the contrary, the peripheral way results in a relatively low consideration[22]. In the model of the two authors, there is no filtering mechanism to sort out the unwanted advertising, a fact that questions one of the main principles of cognitive psychology – selective perception. In this way, the consumer is viewed as a computer, processing all information that attacks him, irrespective of whether it is beneficial or not to him.

Second, the models overlook the trial of the brands and the influence it exerts on shaping and changing attitudes. The analogy with a computer can be extended. In the same way that computers process new information “starting on blank”, i.e. with no influence of previous information, consumer consciousness processes the advertising information without being influenced by information based upon his/her practical experience with the brand.

Third, the models state that the attitude towards the brand is formed before the purchase and the positive attitude always results (if the necessary funds are available) in a purchase. The result of the negative attitude would be the opposite. Only someone who has never worked with empirical data, however, does not understand how serious the clashes between positive attitude and purchase are, and how often a positive attitude does not readily translate into a second purchase.

There is evidence in support of doubts raised as to whether persuasion is the only, let alone the key advertising goal most frequently pursued. It is a commonly held view that a host of adverts are not really targeted at achieving persuasion. Different categories of these advertisings were already mentioned above.

[22] Petty, R. and J. Caciollo, Communication and Persuasion: Central and Peripheral Routes to Attitude Change (N.Y.: Sringer, 1986).

4. Perceptions, cognitions, memory and behavior: critics and alternative points of view about the work of advertising

The answer to the question how advertising works is related to how perceptions are formed, how people remember, how old information is recalled, and how all this affects people's behavior. On each of these four topics, both general theories – "strong-force" and "weak-force" - demonstrate significant weaknesses. All these criticisms as a whole, I believe, imply the hypothesis that it seems almost impossible to elaborate a general unifying theory to describe and explain reliably enough how advertising works. In the light of this hypothesis, both "strong-force" and "weak-force" theories seem more partial and fragmentary, rather than general in nature. But everything should be said in time.

4.1. Perceptions, filters, and barriers.

If there is something definitively proven in the field of psychology, this is the fact that perceptions are selective – i.e. not everything that tries to focus our attention actually manages to do so, and hence not everything is perceived indeed. Every person has filters or barriers protecting his/her perceptions. To put it in stronger terms: we perceive what we want to perceive. We play an active role in this process instead of being just passively susceptible to influence. In other hierarchical models of perception, not enough attention is paid to its selective character or, at least, the latter is underestimated. The higher the information overload of a contemporary individual, the more serious this defect is. I think we can already speak not only of the selectivity of perception stemming from the individual's physical limitations to encompass everything, but also about the existence of social patterns of deliberate unwillingness to be exposed information and to perceive it. In this respect, it is worth reading "Under the Radar" by Bond and Kirshenbaum. Not to confuse things, the first sources of selectivity, which are mainly physically conditioned and are conscious can be called *filters,* and the second that are conscious and socially conditioned – *barriers.*

If there are filters or barriers in the way of perception, there is no way to achieve the respective secondary processing of advertising, forming cognition and affect (emotions), which would combine to "persuade". Therefore, a great part of advertisings are doomed not to pass through the consumer radar and not to work.

Furthermore, under the strong theory of advertising, the leading role of consciousness is expressed in forming an opinion and attitude with respect to the brand. To purchase, therefore. In AIDA, the interest and the desire are expressed *as a result* of advertising and *before* the practical experience with the brand. It is enough that the brand should become known to consumer, i.e. that there is a breakthrough in perceptions, and as a consequence, the well known hierarchy of effects is obtained. However, things often follow a reverse logical order and, in this respect, I differ in my opinion from Ehrenberg as well. We do not buy an unknown brand (please, note that in the model of Ehrenberg the initial phase is also when the brand becomes known – done mainly by advertising). We test it, which sends a signal to our radar to let advertising penetrate our consciousness ("Oh, well! There is advertising of what we bought yesterday. Let's see, what they say in it.").

This reverse logical model is totally in line with two phenomena in contemporary markets: first, self-service shopping, where there is no intermediary or there is rarely one for your choice and you can even accidentally put something in the basket. Secondly, the high share of spontaneous purchases in many product categories (spontaneous for the product or for the brand in the sense that you reached for something in the store without having any intention to buy it previously). For some product categories, the share of spontaneous purchases is more than 50%.

4.2. Emotions and memory

Even advertising that has penetrated through the filters and barriers of perception, may not work in the way it has been intended or may not work at all. This is the case, because the act of perception and the behavioral act (purchase) are separated by a period of time (as it is correctly mentioned by Ehrenberg, Ambler, Jones, and I would add – and by the *context*, which seems to me no less important). In one context, we are sitting before the television, waiting for the next match in the championship, and in the other context we are in the store – pushing the cart. For perception to result in purchase, it has to "survive" until the time of purchase and, in the meantime, to have laid the foundations of some attitude with respect to the brand. This needs the participation of long-term memory. The "strong-force" theory overstates this probability that memory will 'survive' and conditions for shaping an initial attitude and impulse to buy will be created. On the contrary, the "weak-force" theory does not see such potential in most of contemporary advertising. Both are not right for the same reason – incorrect understanding of the role of emotions in the process of remembering. For the "strong-force" theory, emotions come only and mainly from advertising and act as a catalyst to remembering and creation of an attitude towards the brand. Ehrenberg considers the issue of the advertising - emotion relation as an open-ended one at best. I disagree with Roderick White's criticism of Ehrenberg, claiming that the latter does not see any emotional link between the consumer and the brand. It is correct to say that Ehrenberg considers that it is not advertising but practical experience, which lays the basis of this emotional linkage. I cannot totally agree with this disparaging view of advertising, whereby the latter is considered incapable of establishing any emotional link between the brand with the consumer, or at least to contribute to the emergence of such a link. For some consumers, advertising is perceived as the manifestation of the brand's attitude to (and the company) towards them. In a reciprocal way, this creates an emotional attitude – they and the brand. In a certain sense, it can be said that *in modern markets the dualistic"brand+advertising" quasi-product is offered, and the relationship "consumer – advertising of the brand" can be considered autonomous and provoking emotional links between the consumers and the brand.*

Why is the so important that we know whether an advertising provokes or not emotional attitude towards the brand? Modern neurology has empirically proven that *emotions* *contribute to memorizing and to the durability of memory* It is not an accidental fact that we remember a text easier if it is a song than in a poem, easier in a poem than in prose, and it is easier for us to remember a situation that is associated with strong emotions (irrespectively of whether these emotions were good or bad). Emotions, associated with these events, contributed to remembering and its durable storage and recollection. Therefore, even if Ehrenberg is right in his assumption that it is not advertising that creates an emotional attitude towards the brand, but its use – still the important fact remains that advertising can help remembering the brand and its introduction into the consideration set, when the time comes.

4.3. Emotions, memory, cognition, and behavior

One of the fundamental weaknesses of the "strong-force" theory is that it does not explain how advertising, after being perceived and processed by conscience, influences consumers' choice. The "weak-force" theory assumes that it reminds, triggers action, and supports behavior- but there is no clear notion of the psychological mechanism. And understanding the psychological mechanism is very important as this would lay the foundations of search for profitable strategies of influence on the consumers.

According to Damasio, human decisions are based mainly on emotions (affect) and social skills, not on cognitions[23]. The author, however, does not exclude decisions based on memory and cognition: routine everyday operations such as dressing up, for example, requiring nothing but memory; situations in which decisions have to be coordinated with other people – requiring participation of thought, etc.

Ambler and Burn proposed a more refined model: the model MAC (Memory, Affect, Cognition)[24] According to them, the transition from cognition and processing of advertising to consumer action (purchase) has two phases and long term memory is the link between them. In the first phase, advertisings that have passed through perceptual philters and barriers (if I could use my distinction), are processed either only by memory (reminding), by memory and affect (liking, associations with the product), or by memory, affect and cognitions (arising need and rationalization). These brain functions are accepted by the model as simultaneous and not consecutive.

The model does not presume that affect or cognitions can independently change long term memory and, therefore, later result in consumer choice. As to the combination of memory plus cognitions, Ambler considers that it is another model, which is not so comprehensive or useful as MAC.

In the second phase of the model, the consumer is faced with consumer decision. This phase occurs after, sometimes a long time after the first phase – the phase of influence of advertising. Again, the filters of perception are activated, and they prevent a great part of the decision-making capacity. In habitual purchase, only memory is engaged, and this

[23] Damasio, A., Decartes, Error: Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain (London: Papermac, 1994).
[24] Ambler, T. and T. Burne, The Impact of Affect on Ad Memory, Journal of Advertising Research, March/April, 1999.

provokes long-term memory about brand, product, advertising, and its use in a short-term processing of choice that has to be made.[25]

With more complex purchases, where real decisions are to be made, affect comes into action in the sense that we buy what we like or feel would be socially approved of in compliance with Damasio's theory.

In rare cases can advertising force us to activate rationalization proper or cognition. But it is more often the case that cognition is used for the rationalization of our choice (to present it as rational and good choice afterwards) than as a real foundation for choice (more memory and affect).

4.4. Attention, learning and consumer choice

One of the weaknesses of the MAC model of Ambler is that it does not take account of the role of attention, learning for the influence of attention on consumer choice. This issue is treated in another model, developed by Heath, the so called Low Attention Processing Model[26], explaining how attention can exert an influence even when consumers pay very low attention to it.

The analysis of this model is necessary at least for three reasons:

First, it provides some directions for explaining the influence of a solid part of advertisements which are made neither to attract great attention, nor to persuade strongly. Different categories of them have been already mentioned in the analysis of the theory of the weak influence of attention. In this sense, the model can fill the gaps already mentioned of the "weak-force" theory – missing psychological mechanism of the influence of advertising.

Second, it questions the universal validity of the prevailing research methodology, which measures the influence of advertising mainly by measures and techniques of recalling and recognition. If attention can be influential without being recalled or even recognized, then methodology has to be really modified in the direction to research approaches that would allow such a fact to be included.

Third, the model reflects a widespread fact, mentioned above: forming consumer choice in a situation of lack of time when the customer is influenced mostly by intuition and spontaneity than rationality.

I am presenting below the main principles of the model as they are described in a recent report[27]:

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[25] Ambler, T., Persuasion, Pride and Prejudice: How Ads Work, International Journal of Advertising, Volume 19, No 3, 2000.

[26] Heath, R., The Hidden Power of Advertising, Admap Monograph No 7, WARC, Henley-on-Thames, Great Britain, 2001.

[27] Heath, R. and P. Hyder, Measuring the Hidden Power of Emotive Advertising, Market Research Society Conference, 2004, Great Britain.

1. The lack of time situation (I would add to that the information overload), in which consumer choice is determined, brings intuitions and emotions to the foreground, and rational decisions to the background.

2. The situation prevents the consumer from looking for information on brands and minimizes the need to pay attention to advertising. But information about brands can be still obtained at low or zero level of attention by two different mental processes: passive learning and implicit learning.

3. Passive learning is a cognitive process at low level of attention, which means that it can weakly influence beliefs and attitude – but it can record and unify the brand name and other elements of advertising.

4. The process of implicit learning is supposed to be totally automatic, non-cognitive, and attention-independent. Implicit learning cannot analyze or re-interpret any of its objects. It can just store what has been received together with each conceptual meaning, associated with these perceptions.

5. Therefore, because of this limitation, implicit learning does not result in strong rational benefits for the brand in the consciousness of the consumer. It instead builds and strengthens associations in time and they are linked with the brand through passive learning. These associations are extremely stable and enact emotional markers, which, on their turn, can influence intuitive decision-making.

6. Passive and implicit learning are, respectively, semi-automatic and totally automatic processes, and are enacted every time when advertising is there, irrespectively of how much attention it attracts. As there is a trend to pay less and less attention to advertisings, situations where it will be perceived at a low or even zero level of attention, still having a chance to influence consumer behavior, will be more frequent.

On the basis of these concepts, Heath makes the conclusion that: advertising, which exploits the processing based on low attention would work better when it is seen several times at low attention levels than if it is present less frequently – once or twice at high level of attention"[28].

In support of his theory are the last findings of Mayo. According to him, feelings and emotions are processed without the participation of operational memory (the type of memory that analyzes and interprets) and they are automatic and implicit by definition[29]. In his special research, Peter Hyder found out several relations, important from the practical point view that proves this theory to a certain extent:

1. Advertising, based on feelings and emotions (i.e. on the affect) benefits from longer periods of display.
2. The effect of advertising, based on feelings and emotions, is usually unconscious for the consumers.

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[28] Ibid.

[29] Damasio, A., The Feeling of What Happens (UK: Heineman, 2000).

5. Summary

There is not such a model, claims Ambler, which is able to explain the advertising thoroughly. However, it is sensibly to be expected from a model to do that better than others of the kind when it comes down to the mass consumer brands advertisement.[30] I assume, it is wisely to agree with him.

In the present article it was made an attempt to be presented the two most influential traditions regarding the explanation of the ad impact – the "weak" and the "strong" theory as well as numerous criticisms of the main treatments of them. Some people might keep waiting for an integrated general theory to appear, others might consider such theory is logically and practically impossible. No matter the group of people you personally belong to, it is reasonably for you to restrain from 2 types of generalizations in future: the generalizations of the typical cases of the "weak" theory and the generalizations of the unique cases of the "strong" one.

[30] Ambler, T., Persuasion, Pride and Prejudice: How Ads Work, International Journal of Advertising, Vol. 19, No. 3, 2000.