

1954

# Some psychological factors in audience reaction to radio commercials

---

<https://hdl.handle.net/2144/8705>

*"Downloaded from OpenBU. Boston University's institutional repository."*

BOSTON UNIVERSITY  
School of Public Relations  
Thesis

SOME PSYCHOLOGICAL FACTORS IN AUDIENCE  
REACTION TO RADIO COMMERCIALS

BY

RICHARD C. SPRINTHALL

(A.B., BROWN UNIVERSITY, 1952 )

Submitted in partial fulfilment of the  
requirements for the degree of  
Master of Science

1954

*Q. 10. 100. 1000*

Approved

by

First Reader B. Aguirre

Professor of

Second Reader Leo Martin

Professor of Radio and TV

TABLE OF CONTENTS

	PAGE
LIST OF TABLES	iii
CHAPTER	
I. INTRODUCTION	1
II. PROCEDURE	5
Phonograph Instructions	6
Commercial Number One	7
Commercial Number Two	10
III DISCUSSION OF PROCEDURE	12
1. Competition	12
2. Credibility	13
3. Previous Experience With Another Subject	13
4. Consciously Changing Judgments	14
5. No Change In Rating	14
6. The Scale	15
7. Importance of Credibility	16
IV. RESULTS	17
Results of Commercial Judgments	17
Results of Communications	25
V. DISCUSSION OF RESULTS	29
Study by Merton	29
Study by Dichter	31
VI. CONCLUSIONS	33
A Warning	34

## TABLE OF CONTENTS (cont.)

	PAGE
CHAPTER	
VII. SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER INVESTIGATION	36
APPENDIX A, RATINGS AND BOX SCORES	37
BIBLIOGRAPHY	iv

## LIST OF TABLES

TABLE	PAGE
I. Commercial Judgments, Subject A	18
II. Commercial Judgments, Subject B	19
III Commercial Judgments, Subject C	20
IV. Comparison of B and C as to judgments (t test)	22
V. Comparison of A with zero (t test)	23
VI. Comparison of B with zero (t test)	23
VII Comparison of C with zero ( t test)	24
VIII Number of Words in Communications	26
IX. Sign Test on Communications (Subject B)	27
X. Sign Test on Communications (Subject C)	28

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

Dichter, Ernest, "On The Psychology Of Radio Commercials,"  
Radio Research, 1942-43, New York:

Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1944, Reference (3)(4)

Krech, David, and Crutchfield, Richard S., Theory and  
Problems of Social Psychology, New York, Toronto, London:  
McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1948, Reference (5)

Merton, Robert K., "Patterns of Influence", Communications  
Research, 1948-1949, New York:

Harper and Brothers, 1949, Reference (1)(2)

Walker, C. Lester, "How to Stop Offensive TV Commercials",  
Reader's Digest, November, 1953 Reference (6)

CHAPTER I  
INTRODUCTION

Since radio is today one of the leading advertising media in the United States, it is of extreme importance to study the very back-bone of American radio- the radio commercial. Without the advertiser, without the commercial, radio would become stunted, taking a back seat to the other major media. The selling power of the commercial is of vital interest to all connected with radio in any way, the advertiser, the performer, and, of course, the listener. If radio is to continue to thrive, its commercial message must sell the advertised goods and services.

This study is aimed at determining the psychological effects that the commercial has on the listeners..... whether repetition of a commercial enhances its selling power, and at whom the commercial should be aimed. This last is of utmost importance, for the radio commercial has traditionally been aimed at the lower intelligence levels of the population. Has this, indeed, been the wisest policy?

The theoretical framework from which this study springs is that of the "Power Theory", a psychological theory developed at Boston University under the guiding

hand of Doctor Bernard Hymovitch. According to this theory, an individual in any social relationship has certain needs which may be satisfied by other individuals in this relationship. The potentiality of another to satisfy these needs may be considered as the person's ability to reward or punish. Thus, power is defined as the ability of one person to reward or punish others, the ability to satisfy or frustrate the needs of the other individuals.

In our culture certain individuals have come to possess more power than the majority. An individual's social role many times has inherent power, like a supervisor, a boss, or a professor. It is our hypothesis that an individual's attitudes and opinions about many things are shaped by those persons who have power over him. That is, a college professor, who has tremendous power to reward or punish his students, may greatly influence the opinions of his students, even on matters far removed from the class room. Unconsciously a student would tend to like more a radio commercial that his professor said was excellent.

Further, we hypothesize that a person will tend to communicate more to a power figure than to someone who does not hold power. Thus, a circle is set up whereby an individual communicates more and is influenced more by a person who holds power over him. The person will seek situations of interaction with the power figure, and, thus,

set the stage to be influenced.

The problem, then, is to see whether an individual's opinion about a radio commercial, a relatively structured stimulus, can be changed by the induction of a power figure. We will try to discover the psychological effects of repetitive commercials when the individual has been told how the power figure feels about the commercial.

On the basis of the conceptual schema just outlined we predict:

(1) an individual will tend to like a commercial more the second time he hears it, if he thinks that a person who has power over him likes it more;

(2) an individual will tend to like a commercial less the second time he hears it, if he thinks that a person who has power over him likes it less;

(3) and that, given an equal opportunity to communicate to either a power or a non-power figure, an individual will communicate more to the power figure.

If these predictions prove correct, it may be wise to take a complete new look at the present system of radio commercial advertising. Instead of the inane singing jingles, liked by the lowest of intelligence levels, it may be more feasible to direct the commercials at the power

figures in a given community, who in turn may possibly influence the rank and file even more than the commercial itself could do.

## CHAPTER II

## PROCEDURE

The subjects were all men undergraduates from Brown University, Providence R.I. The experiments were carried on in a quiet third-floor room in the Sigma Nu Fraternity house. Since the testing was done in groups of three, every effort was made to get groups of three who did not know each other.

In the experimental room the three subjects were arranged as follows:

B.                    A.

C.                    Experimenter

The subjects were told that the experimenter was working for the X brand cigarette company, and, on entering the room, each subject was presented with one package of X brand cigarettes. A deck of playing cards was then brought out, and the subjects each cut the pack, the man with the highest card becoming subject A, the man with the second high card becoming Subject B, and the man with the low card becoming Subject C. Thus, in every experimental group the arrangement of the subjects was determined strictly on a chance basis.

A phonograph record was then played, from which the subjects heard the following instructions:

" The X brand cigarette company is going to award one of you a carton of cigarettes plus five dollars. These prizes will be given to the person who writes the best slogan in ten words or less on why X brand is America's favorite cigarette. One of you three will by now have been selected as judge. His word goes. Whomever he selects will be awarded the prizes.

Besides the slogans, the X brand cigarette company is interested in finding out how you react to their radio commercials. Now it is a known fact that people's opinions of commercials change after having heard them more than once. We know this. It has been proven many times. What we do want to find out is which way these attitudes change, that is, whether people come to like more or dislike more a commercial heard more than once. You will hear two commercials, each one played twice. You are to rate these commercials on the nine-point scale you have before you. Be honest in your judgments. If after hearing the same commercial a second time you tend to like it better, or dislike it more, indicate this on the scales.

Remember now, on the slogans it's the person who has been selected as judge whose decision shall count. He is called subject A, and it's purely up to him to decide who writes the best slogan."

The subjects, B and C, then write slogans. They are told that the X brand cigarette company is starting an advertising campaign aimed at college men, and that this company wants to get some slogans suitable for billboards. By asking college men to write slogans, the X brand cigarettes company will be in a good position to find out what kinds of slogans college men prefer. Two slogans were given as examples: "The Pause That Refreshes", and "I'd Walk a Mile for a Camel".

A time period of ten minutes was allowed for the slogan writing, after which the slogans were turned over to Subject A for judging. Subject A, however, was told not to make his decision until after the commercials had been heard and rated.

The subjects were instructed to stop any more talking until the test was over.

Commercial Number One was then played (12-inch disc, 78 r.p.m.) for the first time. It was as follows:

"The makers of X aren't trying to high-pressure you into buying their product. As a cigarette smoker you'll realize they're a fine cigarette as soon as you smoke one. When you take an X from the package, observe the soft, mellow coloring of the tobacco. That's a positive sign of proper aging and curing. Tap the cigarette on a hard surface a few times. Notice how little the tobacco settles, for X s are firmly packed. Now light it, and you'll find

you're smoking a good cigarette. X brand smokers know it's fine tobacco that makes the difference. Try one today and see for yourself."

The subjects then placed check marks beside those numbers which most closely coincided with their opinions. The scale had nine points, the points being defined as follows: 1. disliked extremely, 2. disliked very much, 3. disliked somewhat, 4. disliked slightly, 5. neutral, 6. liked slightly, 7. liked somewhat, 8. liked very much, and 9. liked extremely.

The experimenter then picked up these scales and wrote down a " box score" to hand back to the subjects. On this score, ostensibly to allow the subjects to see how they were doing in reference to the others, the numbers were dummied. That is, if subject B had scored it 5, his box score would read A - 7, B - 5, and C - 3. B would perceive himself to be in the middle, equidistant from A and C. Naturally, since B knew he had actually scored his own a 5, the experimenter must use B's own correct score and use it as a referent for determining the two dummied scores. We would predict that after hearing the same commercial a second time, if B then scored it a 6, his judgment had been influenced by A. That is, if B changes his opinion about the commercial, this change has to go either in the direction of A or of C, and if it goes in the direction of A we assume that B's perception of A's power influenced the change. ( Remember,

A doesn't decide who wins the prizes until after the experiment is over.)

However, one may argue that maybe it is a function of commercials that after repeated hearings we really do like them better, and therefore B's change in an upward direction is merely a reflection of this. For this reason we had subject C perceive A's score to be below his own. That is, if C had scored it a 5, C would get a dummied box score which would read, A - 3, B - 7, C - 5. Like B, C would find himself in the middle, equally spaced from both A and B. Thus, in order for us to assume that the power factor is indeed a factor, C's next rating would have to go down.

As for A, with no power variable operant, except the variable of how he perceives his own power, his scores were used as a control. That is, his ratings would reflect how a person would really react to repeating commercials. In the dummied box score given to A, he too found himself in the middle. If he had scored it a 5, he would find A - 5, B - 7, and C - 3. Since neither B nor C had any power over A, it was merely arbitrarily decided to have B above A, and C below him. The assigning of the letters had been determined strictly by chance in the first place, on the basis of drawing cards; so it made no difference to A which one he perceived above him in the score.

After hearing the first commercial a second time, and rating it over again on the same scale so as to show any

changes that might occur, the experimenter passed on to the first hearing of Commercial Number Two. It was as follows:

" No single brand of cigarettes fits the personal taste of all cigarette smokers. That's why you alone can decide if the difference in cigarette flavor can make one particular brand your favorite. Because your own taste, not our claims, should determine your choice, we simply suggest that you try X brand. Thousands who have smoked X brand have liked them and prefer X brand cigarettes to any other brand. Buy a pack of X brand today, and see for yourself if X brand cigarettes suit you."

The subjects rated this commercial in the same manner as they had done with Commercial Number One. Each was then handed a box score, dummied in just the same way as previously explained. With these ratings and box scores before them, and also the ratings and box scores from Commercial Number One, each subject was then asked to do one extra thing: to write a note to each of his two colleagues, explaining his reasons for having rated both commercials as he did.

After writing these two notes, each subject heard Commercial Number Two for the second time, and gave it a second rating as he had in the case of Commercial Number One.

Following this, the second commercial was played for the second time, and the subjects again gave their ratings.

This, then, concluded the experimental session. The experimenter explained the real purpose of the experiment, and welcomed any questions that the subjects might have. The subjects all seemed very interested in the theoretical back-ground of the study and expressed the wish that they might see the results when study is completed.

do an  
S!

## CHAPTER III

## DISCUSSION OF PROCEDURE

## 1. Competition.

At first it was decided to have the judge the person who had power to award the prizes either to both subjects, to one subject, or to neither of them, depending on the merit of their slogans. This would ensure that an opinion change in A's direction would indeed reflect A's power, and not be a function of B and C perceiving themselves in a competitive situation and merely drawing away from each other. On paper this sounded good, but in practice it proved not to be feasible. During a pre-test the subjects were too confused as to how the winners were to be determined. The idea that maybe neither would get a prize made them feel that the situation was phony, and that it had been pre-determined that neither would in fact get anything. In our culture, with competition a predominant note, we found we could not get away from the competitive notion in our experiments. Once the design was changed so that the subjects felt sure that only one subject could get the prizes, and that one of them definitely would get the prizes, the subjects lost their confusion, and the situation became credible.

## 2. Credibility.

Was the situation realistic? Did the subjects really believe that the experimenter was a cigarette agent? The subjects were convinced from the start that things were really as they seemed. The experimenter was originally introduced to the subjects as an X brand campus representative, the experimental room being liberally sprinkled with cartons of X brand cigarettes. Also, each subject was given a package of cigarettes as he entered the room.

Cigarette give-away stunts are not uncommon on the college campus. Two of the subjects, however, said they had been suspicious at first, but once they heard the instructions coming from the record (The instructions record was also a 12 inch disc and played at 78 r.p.m.) they knew it must be true. To them the phonograph was the proof of authority. The experimenter even had one subject suggest that he not use the record so that he could award only the cigarettes and keep the five dollars for himself. The experimenter was indeed moved by the concern for his financial state.

## 3. Previous experience with another subject.

Naturally, with other variables acting, some maybe more powerful than the carton of cigarettes or the five dollars, the experimental results would not be as reliable

if these other variables were not controlled. If one subject, because of past experience, has learned to respect the judgments of another, he would probably respect these judgments in the experimental situation, despite the artificially induced power figure.

To minimize this possibility, we drew subjects from different classes. Also, we questioned them directly.

#### 4. Consciously changing judgments.

In one case we found that a subject had consciously changed his rating to coincide with the rating of the judge. He explained this action in his note by saying, "A little apple-polishing never hurt." Of course, this group was simply thrown out.

In all other cases, the subjects seemed very much surprised afterwards when they saw that their ratings had followed the opinions of the power figure. Many even had to check back again for themselves before they believed it. They said that they thought the slogan-writing part of the experiment had had nothing to do with the rating of the commercials they heard. Many of the subjects even professed that they had "forgotten" which subject was doing the judging.

#### 5. No change in rating.

It was imperative that the subjects should change their

ratings on the second hearing of a commercial. In order to reflect the influence of the power figure they first, of course, had to change. Naturally there were some subjects who " stuck to their guns ", not wanting to appear to be changeable. However, at the beginning of the experiment the subjects were told that it had already been proven that people do change their opinions of commercials after repeated hearings. Thus, the subjects were assured that it was perfectly " normal " to change one's mind.

#### 6. The scale.

When dummifying up the scores, we tried to allow the subject to perceive himself in the middle, two points away in both directions from the other two subjects. Thus, if subject B scores a 5, he will find A - 7, and C - 3. But, if B scores it an 8, we had to narrow the margin to one point, since we were working with a nine-point scale. Also, a change from 4 to 5 is actually not as great as a change from 8 to 9 or from 2 to 1. Since we were using an ordinal scale this could not be helped. A change from 8 to 9 is scored as a one-point change just as is a change from 4 to 5.

## 7. Importance of Credibility

The really important part of the procedure of this experiment is in creating an atmosphere of credibility. The subjects must believe wholeheartedly that this is an advertising stunt, and that the experimenter is a cigarette company employee. Cartons of cigarettes and advertising signs must be in clear sight of the subjects. This point cannot be over-stressed. The power will have no effect on non-believing subjects.

## CHAPTER IV

## RESULTS

The first set of results to be discussed concern the actual judging of the commercials. As previously stated, the subjects rated the commercials on a nine point scale from dislike to like. The experimenter recorded the number that the subject checked each time the commercials were played, and also recorded the amount of change. That is, if subject C rated the first commercial a 7 the first time he heard it and a 5 the second time he heard it, the change for that commercial would be -2. In a like manner, the change for commercial Number Two was computed, and these two changes were then added in order to arrive at the subject's total change.

Table Number One, shown below, gives the ratings and changes for each of the 57 subjects. Column One shows the first rating of the first commercial, and column Two gives the second rating of that same commercial. In column Three we see the change, either plus, minus, or zero. Column Four shows the first rating of the second commercial, and column Five shows the second rating. Column Six gives the change for this second commercial, and finally, in column Seven, we have the total change for one subject.



TABLE II

Exp.	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.
1.	6	7	1	7	7	0	1
2.	4	6	2	7	8	1	3
3.	6	7	1	8	7	-1	0
4.	7	6	-1	4	5	1	0
5.	6	5	-1	8	9	1	0
6.	8	9	1	7	6	-1	0
7.	7	6	-1	9	9	0	-1
8.	7	8	1	6	7	1	2
9.	6	5	-1	7	8	1	0
10.	4	3	-1	7	8	1	0
11.	4	7	3	7	8	1	4
12.	8	7	-1	5	8	3	2
13.	6	7	1	5	8	3	4
14.	4	4	0	7	7	0	0
15.	7	8	1	9	9	0	1
16.	7	6	-1	8	8	0	-1
17.	6	7	1	8	8	0	1
18.	2	3	1	8	7	-1	0
19.	7	5	-2	9	9	0	<u>-2</u>

14

TABLE III

Exp.	1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.
1.	7	7	0	8	8	0	0
2.	7	6	-1	6	5	-1	-2
3.	5	6	1	8	8	0	1
4.	7	7	0	4	2	-2	-2
5.	4	4	0	6	6	0	0
6.	7	8	1	5	5	0	1
7.	7	7	0	8	9	1	1
8.	7	4	-3	6	3	-3	-6
9.	4	7	3	8	1	-7	-4
10.	6	7	1	8	9	1	2
11.	5	5	0	6	7	1	1
12.	3	2	-1	2	1	-1	-2
13.	4	5	1	7	5	-2	-1
14.	4	3	-1	8	9	1	0
15.	7	4	-3	9	8	-1	-4
16.	4	4	0	8	8	0	0
17.	6	5	-1	7	7	0	-1
18.	4	3	-1	6	6	0	-1
19.	8	8	0	9	8	-1	<u>-1</u>

Thus, by looking at Table I and adding up the total change of all the A's, we get -8, with a mean of  $-.42$ . That is, it averaged out so that each A changed  $.42$  in the negative or dislike direction. In Table II we see that the B's overall change was a plus fourteen, with a mean change of plus  $.73$ . Finally, in Table III, the C's changed -18, with a mean change of  $-.95$ . These results, of course, are in the predicted direction and seem to confirm our hypothesis that a person having power over other persons will influence the judgments of these other persons in the direction of the judgments of the power person. B, as you will remember, perceived that A had rated the commercial higher than he himself had. Thus, B's overall change went in a positive or upward direction. C, who had perceived A's ratings as below his own, had an overall change of 18 points in the negative direction.

These results, in order really to uphold our hypothesis, must be shown to be statistically significant. We wish to find out whether the change differences between all the B's and all the C's are indeed real differences. Could these differences be the result of chance factors, or are they the result of the manipulated, or independent variable? A T test of significance was used.

TABLE IV

B	C
Change 14	Change -18
Mean change .73	Mean change -.95
Standard Deviation 1.59	Standard Deviation 1.84
S.D. of Mean .36	S.D. of Mean .43

$$t = 3.00$$

A t value of 3.00 is far above the value needed for .01 significance. Thus, there is less than one chance in a hundred that the obtained difference is due to chance. We therefore reject the Null Hypothesis and state that the obtained difference is indeed a real difference. The B's and C's were alike in all respects except in their perceptions of how A rated the commercials, B thinking that A liked the commercial more, and C thinking that A disliked the commercial more.

Now, turning to the scores of the A subjects we find an overall change of -8. Is this a real change? If the experiments were carried on ad-infinitum would this change of minus eight continue to present itself? That is, is the base line really minus eight rather than zero? To answer this question we applied a T test comparing A's change with zero.

TABLE V

$$t \text{ equals } \frac{\bar{X} - 0}{\text{S.D. of the mean}}$$

$$t = \frac{-.42}{.34}$$

$$t = 1.25 \quad (\text{Not significant})$$

Thus, we retain the Null Hypothesis and state that the obtained difference is due to chance. A's score could have ranged from -8 to 8, and it is only chance that the -8 came out in this experiment. We were safe, then, in assuming a zero baseline.

We must now see whether B's scores differ significantly from zero. When testing A against zero we used a two tail test, since we had no prediction as to A's direction of change. With B, however, we predicted a change in the positive direction, and we will, thus, use a one tail test of significance.

TABLE VI

$$t \text{ equals } \frac{\bar{X} - 0}{\text{S.D. of the mean}}$$

$$t = \frac{.73 - 0}{.37}$$

$$t = 2.03$$

The probability is better than .05. We reject the Null Hypothesis and state that the difference is a real difference. In only five cases in a hundred could this be the result of chance.

C's scores were also predicted. We will again use a one tail test, since we predicted that C's scores would go in a negative direction.

TABLE VII

$$t \text{ equals } \frac{\bar{X} - 0}{\text{S.D. of mean}}$$

$$t = \frac{-.95 - 0}{.43}$$

$$t = 2.21$$

Again the probability is greater than .05. We again reject the Null Hypothesis and state that the obtained difference is indeed a real difference.

## COMMUNICATIONS

During the discussion of procedure we said that between the first and second hearing of the second commercial each subject was told to write two notes, one each to the other two subjects. We thus had a total of 114 notes. The subjects were instructed merely to write the reasons they had for rating the commercials as they did. This, of course, seemed like a logical procedure since no talking was allowed during the experimental situation. A total of 5,118 words were written. Hypothesis number three states that, given an equal opportunity to communicate to either a power or a non-power figure, an individual will communicate more to the power figure. From this we would predict that B would write more words to A than to C, and that C would write more words to A than to B. Although A, too, wrote notes, the data will not be included since no predictions were made as to A's behavior.

In the following table, table number eight, we see how the subjects communicated to each other in respect to the number of words written.

TABLE VIII

COMMUNICATOR COMMUNICATEE	B		C	
	A	G	A	B
Exp.				
1.	55	48	61	98
2.	42	27	64	57
3.	31	30	85	85
4.	36	36	25	25
5.	86	87	39	39
6.	62	62	35	29
7.	69	61	89	61
8.	98	69	63	70
9.	46	35	65	53
10.	45	33	24	21
11.	94	45	30	21
12.	45	31	53	28
13.	22	9	56	59
14.	105	103	25	22
15.	26	16	48	48
16.	40	40	40	16
17.	32	32	42	43
18.	45	23	86	8
19.	30	17	98	69
	13 plus		12 plus	
	0 minus		2 minus	
	6 equal		5 equal	

Here we see how B and C wrote to each other and to A. The B's wrote 989 words to A and 804 words to C. C's wrote 1128 words to A and 852 to B. With no overlap whatever, the subjects clearly wrote more to the power figure than to each other. Statistically this is shown at an extremely high level of probability.

The test applied here was the binomial sign test. In each experimental group it was discovered which subject had the most words communicated to him. Thus, B, in experiment one wrote 55 words to A and 48 words to C. This was scored as a plus. A minus was scored when a particular subject wrote fewer words to A, as in the case of C in group number eight. In some cases a tie was recorded, as in the case of B in group 4. There must be a differential of at least two words or it is called a tie, or zero.

B then had thirteen pluses, no minuses, and six zeroes. C had 12 pluses, two minuses, and five zeroes.

In the case of B we ask the question, what is the relative frequency of getting an r of zero, or no minuses?

TABLE IX

$$p(r) = \frac{n!}{r!(n-r)!} \cdot p^r q^{n-r}$$

$$\frac{1}{2^{13}} = \frac{1}{8,192} = .0001$$

It is thus very unlikely that this result could have been due to chance. There is only one chance in 10,000 that

this could have been due to chance. We reject the Null Hypothesis.

TABLE X

N 14

p  $\frac{1}{2}$ q  $\frac{1}{2}$ 

r 2

$$\frac{x}{\text{S.D.}} = \frac{2-7}{14 \cdot \frac{1}{2} \cdot \frac{1}{2}} = 2.67 = .0035$$

In table X we see the results of C. Again the probability of this result having been due to chance is extremely small, three and a half chances out of a thousand. We thus again reject the Null Hypothesis.

We can certainly now assert that persons communicate more to a power than a non-power figure.

CHAPTER V  
DISCUSSION OF THE RESULTS

The results clearly substantiate the hypotheses that were tested. Persons are influenced by, and communicate more to persons who have power. By communicating more to a power figure, an individual puts himself more often in a position where the power figure can exert influence. Power, then, the independent variable, is a function of the dependent variables, judgment change, and amount of communication. This can be stated, since the subjects B and C were alike in all respects except their perception of A's ratings. B and C behaved very differently from each other, the B's liking the commercials the more they heard them, and the C's disliking the commercials the more they heard them.

- 1)  $B = C$
- 2) B and C perceive A differently
- 3)  $B \neq C$

From this sequence, we infer the intervening variable, power.

Robert K. Merton, (1) in an article entitled, "Patterns of Influence, A Study of Interpersonal Influence and of Communications Behavior in a Local Community", has studied influence with respect to magazine reading. Merton's sponsor in this study, Time Magazine, was concerned with

learning more about patterns of inter-personal influence, because they thought this might aid them in selling advertisements. Two of Merton's aims were to

- (1) "identify types of people regarded as variously influential, and
- (2) to relate patterns of communications behavior to their roles as influential persons." (2)

The types of influentials that Merton discovered may be thought of as types of power figures. Merton interviewed 86 persons and asked them to name others in the community to whom they turn for advice regarding various types of personal decisions. The influentials thus isolated came from such professions as Doctors, Lawyers, Ministers, the Chief of Police, a Judge etc. Also were included the names of successful business men. Power can thus be established in a person through wealth, role, or a combination of these. The main similarity among Merton's "influentials" was education. All were fairly well educated. Merton also found that these influentials who were asked for advice in one sphere were also influential in a great many spheres.

Just as the influentials in the Merton study influenced the rank and file into liking and buying Time Magazine, so too we have shown they can influence the rank and file into liking a radio commercial. We thus pose the question, at whom should the radio commercial be aimed?

Ernest Dichter (3), the author of "On the Psychology of Radio Commercials", points out that the advertiser makes a mistake by slanting the commercial toward the uneducated. During an interview, one of Dichter's respondents said:

"I can't remember any of the commercials. I am really a very bad subject for you because I don't approve of advertising at all; I hate it. I don't mind it so much when it's really short, but I always turn to another station the moment it comes on, except when it's news. The advertising makes me so darned mad. They talk to you as if you were a child of six". (4)

Radio commercials should not insult the listener's intelligence. Dichter finds that inane commercials are reacted to negatively by listeners.

Another of Dichter's respondents said:

"Chipso, Ivory, Duz and all the others are just too ridiculous for words. They all come on, one after the other, in the morning. They all claim exactly the same thing, and yet they do it as if you were too stupid to remember that five minutes ago someone else was claiming the same thing for another product, just as if it were the only one that existed. That's what makes me so mad about it. All they ought to do is give a straight-forward account of the product, because everyone knows anyway that they are all the same. I often wonder whether they're trying to kid me, or whether they're trying to kid themselves".

It often happens that the family listens to the radio in a group. If one member of the family has the ability to reward the others (probably the father), his opinion may greatly affect the opinions of the rest of the family. If the power figure likes a certain commercial, the others will tend to like the commercials better the next time

they hear it, even though they don't think so at the time. The subjects in our experiment did not know that they were being influenced by the power figure, thinking thier judgments were their own. They were often surprised when at the end of the experiment they were shown how their opinions followed those of Subject A.

However, it must be made clear that before any notions like these about family listening can be thought of as valid, they must be experimentally verified. This experimentation should take place right in the home situation with the members of the family taking part as subjects. The artificial confines of the laboratory are often quite different form the actual situation in the home.

## CHAPTER VI

## CONCLUSIONS

The hypotheses tested in this study were:

- 1) an individual will tend to like a commercial more the second time he hears it, if he thinks that the person who has power over him likes it more;
- 2) an individual will tend to dislike a commercial more the second time he hears it, if he thinks that the person who has power over him dislikes it more;
- 3) given an equal opportunity to communicate to either a power or a non-power figure, an individual will communicate more to the power figure.

These hypotheses were all shown to be experimentally valid, and significant at the .05 level or better.

## A WARNING

A recent article in the "Reader' Digest" began, (6)

"If the blah-blah-blah of certain objectionable TV commercials rouses your ire or outrages your taste, here is news. An ingeniously simple device now enables you to eliminate the sales harangue of any commercial which you object to - without ever getting up from your easy chair."

The article then goes on to describe "Blab Off", a gadget which attaches to your TV set and enables you to turn off the audio at any time, yet leaving the picture so you can tell when the commercial is over. The viewer simply holds the device in his hand and clicks off the commercial when it becomes unbearable. *Garbage*

The ramifications of such a device are obvious. One of the finest and most potent of advertising media may find itself doomed. At whose feet lies the blame? The answer is also obvious. The advertisers themselves have created the conditions which have made "Blab Off", or something like it, inevitable. It could be, however, that "Blab Off" is really a blessing in disguise, a device for jolting the advertiser out of his smug belief that the listener enjoys the inane commercial.

"If the day should come when most sets have this cutter-outer, Blab Off will then probably have accomplished its mission - which is not to end all commercials. The purpose of the gadget is to give the helpless TV audience the same power of selection which newspaper and magazine readers have. With Blab Off the TV fan can select the advertising he wants to hear, and he can get away from the commercial he dislikes. A few million people equipped with this

freedom of selection ought eventually to raise the calibre of TV commercials to the point where Blab-Off will no longer be necessary."

The warning is now before the advertisers. In a country which boasts 110 million radio sets, more than half the radio sets in the entire world, the advertiser cannot afford to offend his audience.

*What does this have to do  
with this thing?*

## CHAPTER VII

## SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER INVESTIGATION

It would be interesting to do some further experimentation on the judgments and judgment changes toward commercials of people not subjected to power. That is, run the experiment without any passing back of box scores. Find out how a person reacts to repetitive hearings of commercials without indicating to him how the others in the group are reacting. The scores of Subject A in this study were similar to this. Since A was the power figure, he had no power operating on him, except his perception of own power. However he did think that he had knowledge of how the others were doing, even though the knowledge was in reality false. In the proposed experiment the subjects would get no knowledge, false or otherwise, as to the ratings of the other subjects. This experiment would be relatively simple to do, since a whole classroom full of subjects could take the test at one time. The experimenter would have to be very careful, though, that the subjects worked in private, and that they refrained from looking on anyone else's paper.

Another interesting experiment would be to try and relate likeability of the commercial message with actual buying of the product advertised.

APPENDIX A  
RATING SCALES AND BOX SCORES FOR  
ONE SUBJECT IN EXPERIMENTAL  
GROUP NUMBER ONE

SUBJECT:

B

COMMERCIAL NUMBER:

1

EXPERIMENT:

How much did you like the commercial you just heard?

Indicate your opinion on the following scale.....

PLACE A CHECK MARK UNDER THE NUMBER WHICH MOST CLOSELY COINCIDES WITH YOUR OPINION.

1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.
disliked	disliked	disliked	disliked	neutral	liked	liked	liked	liked
extremely	very much	somewhat	slightly		slightly	somewhat	very much	extremely

IF YOUR OPINION OF THE COMMERCIAL CHANGED AFTER HEARING IT A SECOND TIME, PLEASE WRITE IN BRIEFLY THE REASON FOR THE CHANGE. IF YOU HAVEN'T ANY SPECIFIC REASON, WRITE "NO REASON".

SUBJECT:

COMMERCIAL NUMBER:

EXPERIMENT:

ONE REPRESENTS LOW OPINION AND NINE REPRESENTS HIGH OPINION.

A .....

B.....

C.....

SUBJECT:

B

COMMERCIAL NUMBER:

2

EXPERIMENT:

How much did you like the commercial you just heard?

Indicate your opinion on the following scale.....

PLACE A CHECK MARK UNDER THE NUMBER WHICH MOST CLOSELY COINCIDES WITH YOUR OPINION.

1.	2.	3.	4.	5.	6.	7.	8.	9.
disliked	disliked	disliked	disliked	neutral	liked	liked	liked	liked
extremely	very much	somewhat	slightly		slightly	somewhat	very much	extremely

IF YOUR OPINION OF THE COMMERCIAL CHANGED AFTER HEARING IT A SECOND TIME, PLEASE WRITE IN BRIEFLY THE REASON FOR THE CHANGE. IF YOU HAVEN'T ANY SPECIFIC REASON, WRITE "NO REASON".

SUBJECT:

COMMERCIAL NUMBER:

EXPERIMENT:

ONE REPRESENTS LOW OPINION AND NINE REPRESENTS HIGH OPINION.

A 8.....

B 6.....

C 4.....



