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Behind the Smokescreen: Perceptions of R. J. Reynolds and Their Advocacy Ads

Jean M. Tripp

Eastern Illinois University

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Behind the Smokescreen: Perceptions of

R. J. Reynolds and Their Advocacy Ads

(TITLE)

BY

Jean M. Tripp

THESIS

SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS
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IN THE GRADUATE SCHOOL, EASTERN ILLINOIS UNIVERSITY
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Abstract

This study sought to gauge whether advocacy advertisements produced by R. J. Reynolds would affect people's perception of the company, and whether these perceptions would differ between males and females.

Subjects were 29 male and 41 female professionals and businesspersons, all members of a professional business organization.

Subjects completed a two part survey after reading an advocacy ad produced by R. J. Reynolds. Quantitative information was gathered through the use of a Likert-type scale in Part 1 of the survey; in Part 2 respondents answered open-ended questions. Results indicated that respondents viewed the ads negatively, believing they were biased and self-serving. Median scores demonstrated that no significant differences in perceptions were exhibited by male and female respondents.

Eigenvalues indicated one factor accounted for 35.15% of variance for female respondents, while two factors accounted for 49.8% of variance for male respondents. Results suggest that companies engaging in advocacy advertising need to be aware that the target audience may perceive the ads as biased, self-serving, and lacking credibility.

INTRODUCTION

Advocacy, or issue advertising, the “selling” of ideas and opinions, has been around for almost a century and has been utilized by countless organizations using a variety of media. More recently, tobacco companies have embarked on an aggressive print advocacy campaign equating smoking and accommodation to issues of individual rights and personal freedom, warning readers that unless the issue can be resolved, government intervention may not be far away. This study will examine an ad produced by R. J. Reynolds (see Appendix) and will explore how involvement, source credibility, and gender affect respondents’ perceptions of both the ad and the company.

LITERATURE REVIEW

History of Advocacy Advertising

Historically, American advertising has been either product or service oriented. With few exceptions, this fundamental purpose of advertising remained largely unchanged until the 1970s, when issue, or advocacy advertising experienced large scale growth. Salmon, Reid, Pokrywczynski, and Willett (1985) attribute this increased use of advocacy advertising to the negative news coverage and reporting on business associated with Watergate. Sethi (1977) attributes the trend to

the anti-oil sentiment that developed as oil companies scrambled to defend skyrocketing oil prices and large profits earned following the Arab oil embargo. More generally, Waltzer (1988) associates the growth in advocacy ads with the “public’s disillusionment with virtually every institution” (p. 41).

Advocacy advertising, however, is not a new phenomenon. Marchand (1987) cites examples of advocacy ads dating back to 1908, when AT&T launched an advertising campaign extolling the virtues of private monopoly. Throughout the 1900s, railroads, meatpackers, and even the U.S. government have utilized advocacy advertising in an attempt to further their interests.

Examples of advocacy advertising can be seen today in numerous periodicals and newspapers. Sethi (1987a) believes that today’s sociopolitical environment has contributed to its most recent growth. Sponsorship of ads has recently become more diverse, as have the issues being addressed.

Unfortunately, the effectiveness of advocacy advertising remains largely unsubstantiated due to a lack of empirical studies dealing with this type of advertising. This, in turn, creates the need to examine how the public views not only the ad itself, but the companies which sponsor the ads, especially if the issues they address are emotional,

controversial, or have the potential to create negative opinions.

The tobacco industry has a history of sponsoring advocacy advertising addressing a myriad of smoking issues. In the early 1980s tobacco companies joined forces with the Tobacco Institute in a campaign that challenged the link between smoking and health risks. At the same time, R. J. Reynolds undertook its own campaign which, according to Heath and Nelson (1986), was designed to “(1) bolster its corporate image, (2) help differentiate R. J. Reynolds from its competitors while subliminally working to position the firm for diversification, and (3) display social responsibility by demonstrating concern over the smoking controversy” (p. 104). In 1985, R. J. Reynolds produced a series of ads disputing the harmfulness of smoking in an attempt to counter growing hostility toward smokers and smoking. Cutler and Muehling (1991) note that despite protests that the ads misrepresented information linking smoking and heart disease, R. J. Reynolds continued to run the advertisements until the Federal Trade Commission stepped in.

More recently, tobacco companies have created ads and media events which defend smokers' rights. In the fall of 1990, a Philip Morris Company-sponsored national tour of an original copy of the Bill of Rights hit the road. This was not merely a public image campaign, but, according to Wallack, Dorfman, Jernigan, and Themba (1993), an

attempt “to encourage the public to associate ‘rights’ with smoking, as in ‘people should have a ‘right’ to smoke’ and ‘the government should not take that ‘right’ away from them’.” (p. 183).

Similarly, R. J. Reynolds has recently embarked on a print advertising campaign merging this individual rights theme with a related individual freedom issue. Many of the ads fuse these issues with the undesirability of government intervention into personal freedoms. One ad’s tag line reads “The smell of cigarette smoke annoys me. But not nearly as much as the government telling me what to do.” Another states, “If the government gets its way, the pursuit of happiness will no longer be my inalienable right.” It appears that R. J. Reynolds has not altered its advertising strategies much from that of the 1980s -- it’s merely attacking from a different angle, appealing more to the emotionality of patriotism and individual rights and personal freedom.

Rationale for Advocacy Advertising

The rationale for producing advocacy ads is varied. Cutler and Muehling (1989) note that companies engage in this form of advertising because they feel they have been blamed unfairly for a myriad of societal failures. Advocacy campaigns serve as a reaction to this criticism. In addition, the “business persecution complex” (p. 42) has led corporations

to respond to the media's perceived lack of objectivity by producing paid advertisements that assure that the corporation's viewpoints are expressed in the way the corporation wants them to be. Sethi (1977) writes that the rationale for an organization to engage in advocacy advertising falls into one of four categories: 1) to counteract public hostility to corporate activities due to ignorance or misinformation; 2) to provide a better understanding of complex business issues; 3) to foster the values of the free enterprise system; and 4) to counteract the new media's bias and business' inadequate access to the news media.

According to Sethi (1987b), confusion surrounds the term "advocacy advertising", partly because all advertising is some form of advocacy. Sethi defines advocacy advertising as advertising that is "concerned with the propagation of ideas and the elucidation of controversial social issues deemed important by its sponsor in terms of public policy" (p. 5). Meadow (1981) believes its purpose is to change the hostile attitude of the audience to one of trust. Smith and Heath (1990) note that advocacy advertising communicates diverse opinions, displays varying facets of corporate personality, and attempts to "gain and maintain public support and confidence" (p. 48).

Most scholars in the field agree that advocacy advertising is an outgrowth of issues management, the vague concept of defining

environmental factors that affect a corporation's well-being. Cheney and Dionisopolous (1989) recount the organizational development of the issues management function. They assert that throughout history, power has gradually transferred from the hands of specific individuals to the halls of organizations. From this organizational development, corporate communications arose and has evolved from a defensive role, to a more "political and proactive role" (p. 141). They note that many large firms now engage in "promoting particular value premises 'for' their respective publics" (p. 141). Although this type of promotion is not new, corporations have become more aggressive and their messages have taken on a more political tone. Interestingly, the authors allege that "many public relations and issue advocacy messages are designed to have political influence without allowing their sources to be identified as political actors" (p. 143).

Confusion about advocacy advertising's role in the issues management process abounds. Hainsworth and Meng (1988) question whether issues management and advocacy advertising are the same thing, or whether advocacy advertising is just one of the elements of a successful issues management function. They suggest that issues management provides a way for senior management to participate in the public policy process. However, Crable and Vibbert (1985), in their

Catalytic Issue Management Model, argue that organizations have no true authority over public policy. Therefore, the issues management function, including advocacy advertising, becomes of paramount importance because it “permit[s] an organization with no actual authority to influence public policy” (p. 4).

The methods organizations utilize to influence public policy have shifted. As a relatively new discipline in the 1970s, most individuals involved in an organization’s issues management function were communication specialists. Therefore, issues advertising become the most common activity in the issues management function. Later, the discipline recognized that issues advertising was not the most effective way to manage issues. Communication plays a part, along with planning and public policy analysis.

However, a large part of issues management research still addresses the task of influencing external publics through messages, that is, advocacy advertising. Advocating and expressing a particular viewpoint externally can have internal consequences, creating the potential for conflict between management and the internal public. In an article which appeared in Management Review (1982), Sethi advises corporations to survey both employers and shareholders before publicly taking a stand on controversial issues. He believes that when

management feels it speaks for the entire corporation and its stockholders, internal credibility can be damaged. Mehlman (1983) interviewed Rand V. Araskog, CEO of ITT, who feels that advocacy advertising is especially unfair to stockholders holding differing viewpoints, and goes on to say that he feels advocacy advertising is a misuse of stockholder money.

Nelson (1990) argues that controversies surrounding issues management lie in three areas he identifies as the missing factors: a common grounding in education, theory, and ideology. This lack of grounding explains corporations' inability to effectively communicate their stance on critical issues. Cheney and Dionisopolous (1989) offer three challenges to the producers of corporate public discourse. The first is the "organizational challenge" (p. 147), which suggests that corporations should consolidate public communications activities (public relations, advertising, and issue management) into a central organizational function, allowing corporate messages to reach a wider audience, while creating an internal balance of autonomy and interdependence. In addition, organizations face a "rhetorical challenge" (p. 148) to present a "consistent and self-reflective image" (p. 148), as well as an "ethical challenge" (p. 148). Because organizations hold a more privileged position and have access to greater resources, they

have the responsibility to practice a higher standard of ethics.

Nelson believes that “persuasion is at the heart of issues management communications” (p. 29). Unfortunately, little research has been conducted addressing the persuasiveness of the issues management function or advocacy advertising. Most research regarding effective persuasion has been conducted in the areas of product and public service advertising.

Recipient Involvement and Persuasion in Advertising

Previous research has linked the power of persuasion with the perceived credibility, expertise, objectivity, and trustworthiness of the message source. More recent research has linked additional variables to the persuasiveness of the message. Homer and Kahle (1990) examined source expertise, timing of source identification, and involvement as factors affecting advertising effectiveness. They believe involvement, or the perceived importance of an issue, plays a key role in the amount of information retained in forming brand evaluations. Their research suggests that the more involved a recipient is, the more information is remembered. In addition, when message involvement is high, it is more advantageous to identify expert sources at the beginning of the ad. Conversely, when less involved, identifying sources at the end

of the ad increased the ad's persuasive power. The researchers conclude that an advertisement's effectiveness may depend on the recipient's level of involvement.

Petty and Cacioppo have conducted extensive research on the role of involvement and are credited with the development of the central route and peripheral route to attitude change. In subsequent research by Petty, Cacioppo, and Schumann (1983), central route is defined as attitude change "resulting from a person's diligent consideration of information that s/he feels is central to the true merits of a particular attitudinal position" (p. 135). Attitude changes induced by the central route are believed to be "relatively enduring and predictive of behavior" (p. 135). The peripheral route theory suggests that individuals change their attitudes based not on extensive thought about the issue, but on positive or negative cues or inferences in the context of persuasion. This type of attitude change is thought to be temporary and unpredictable of behavior. Petty et al. argue that central route, or argument quality, has a greater impact on attitudes of individuals with high involvement. However, peripheral cues have a greater impact on people with low involvement.

Just as involvement plays a part in the persuasive effectiveness of produce and public service advertising, it also has implications for

advocacy advertising. Cline and Masel-Waters (1984) investigated involvement and negative attitudes (what they called “backlash effect” [p. 39]) relating to a videotape that was produced by AT&T to positively influence and enlighten viewers about its divestiture developments.

Their study found that for those issues which AT&T was trying hardest to create positive attitudes in the viewers, more negative attitudes, or backlash, were actually created. Cline and Masel-Waters attributed the level of involvement of the viewers, and state that for those with low involvement, “the overtly persuasive nature of the videotape created a resistance within them that led to a degree of backlash in those areas where the attempts at persuasion were most visible” (p. 45). The researchers urge practitioners to pay special attention to messages aimed at low involvement audiences and to evaluate “the degree of backlash the communicator is willing to tolerate as a result of placing a controversial issue on the . . . agenda” (p. 46). Smoking and smokers’ rights are probably considered by most to be a controversial topic.

Because the topic of smoking is such a contentious issue that can lead to hostile feelings, the R. J. Reynolds advocacy advertising campaign utilizes emotional appeal as a means of swaying the audience. Research shows that this message appeal interacts with involvement. Flora and Maibach (1990) utilized AIDS public service

announcements to determine whether low involvement viewers would remember emotional AIDS messages better than rational AIDS messages. They found that for those individuals with low involvement, emotional AIDS messages were more memorable than more rational messages. Highly involved viewers experienced more lasting knowledge and attitudinal changes when they were exposed to the rational messages.

Gunther and Thorson (1992) used the emotional appeal of both product and public service advertisements of highly involved viewers and gauged the viewers' estimations of the perceived impact of the ads. Their findings indicate that for neutral ads, subjects estimated themselves to be negatively affected. However, for emotional ads, subjects estimated a greater than actual positive effect. This suggests that when it's more socially acceptable for people to be resistant, they estimate themselves to be highly resistant, but when it's considered more socially acceptable to be influenced by emotional messages, people estimate themselves to be quite yielding. In the case of the R. J. Reynolds ads, we must ask whether it would be considered socially acceptable to be influenced by these ads, and whether it's worth alienating that portion of the audience with low involvement.

Research by Chaiken and Maheswaran (1994) linked

involvement and attitude formation, but added the additional dimension of source credibility. When involvement is low, source credibility determines an individual's attitudes, regardless of whether the message is strong or ambiguous. When involvement is high and the message unambiguous, the central route determines attitudes. However, when involvement is high and the message ambiguous, both central and peripheral routes influence attitudes. In 1984, Salmon et al. addressed the issue of involvement and source credibility in advocacy advertising, believing that the "level of involvement that characterizes an individual's relationship with an issue or situation" (p. 551) is directly related to source credibility. They further maintain that involvement and source credibility play a large role in the perceptual, behavioral, and attitudinal responses to advocacy advertising.

Using virtually identical advertisements, but varying the source (American Cancer Society or Pepsi Cola) and format, Salmon et al. found that for those subjects with low involvement, the effects of source and format were most likely to be significant. For this group, persuasion occurred through the peripheral rather than the central route. In advocacy advertising, as in product advertising, the research supported previous research by Petty and Cacioppo which found that under circumstances of low involvement, peripheral cues are salient, while

central cues are more important under conditions of high involvement.

Credibility in Advertising

Involvement and credibility are related concepts when examining the effectiveness of all forms of advertising, including advocacy advertisements. Sethi (1987b) claims that the “public’s predisposition to receive [advocacy advertising’s messages] in an attitudinally neutral, if not positive, state of mind will greatly influence the effectiveness of advocacy advertising” (p. 16). He asserts that the public’s perceptions of the ad sponsor’s credibility is imperative due to the adversarial nature of the ads and the skepticism and possible hostility of the audience.

The perceived credibility of the source of the advertisement can be influenced by numerous variables. Booth-Butterfield and Gutowski (1993) believe that source credibility and the mode of the message (print, audio, video) affect argument processing. They argue that ads utilizing the print media are more effective, generate central route processing, and that recipients exert more effort in the print mode than the audio or video mode.

Wu and Shaffer (1987) link source credibility with a receiver’s prior experience with the attitude object to assess an individual’s susceptibility to persuasion. They cite previous research by Fazio and Zanna (1981)

who suggest that direct-experience attitudes are more resistant to counterattitudinal influence than indirect-experience attitudes. In the study by Wu and Shaffer, subjects formed preferential attitudes toward a brand of peanut butter by direct-experience (taste) or indirect-experience (reading about others' taste preferences). They were then exposed to a testimonial by either a highly credible or less credible spokesperson which either endorsed the product the subject preferred or the product the subject did not prefer. The results indicate that direct-experience attitudes are more resistant to counterattitudinal appeals than indirect-experience attitudes. The researchers also found that direct-experience attitudes were more susceptible to proattitudinal influence than indirect-experience attitudes.

More obvious variables can affect credibility. Tokheim, Wanzenreid, and Powell (1990) examined how cigarette smoking affected the perceptions of credibility among and between smokers and non-smokers. Smokers and non-smokers were shown pictures of smoking and non-smoking models. Non-smokers ranked the non-smoking models higher in the areas of competency, character, and composure, while smoking models were viewed as more extroverted. Interestingly, respondents who smoked did not distinguish between the smoking and non-smoking models, suggesting that "smokers are rather

oblivious to the presence of cigarettes while the non-smokers are acutely aware of their presence.” (p. 1390). This study may have implications for tobacco industry advertising, especially the current R. J. Reynolds campaign since many of these ads show someone smoking.

Because advocacy advertising many times attempts to change a target audience’s opinion on a very controversial issue, credibility of the message source is of paramount importance. Reid, Soley, and VandenBergh (1981) have conducted one of the few empirical studies to specifically test source credibility and advocacy advertising. They examined how source attribution and fatalism affect responses to advocacy print advertisements.

By having subjects read identical ads but manipulating the source (commercial sponsor, trade association sponsor, noncommercial sponsor, no sponsor listed), the researchers found that a neutral audience responds more negatively toward a commercial sponsor than a noncommercial one. Additionally, the commercial and trade association source ads produced a “negative intent to respond to the advocated request” (p. 309). In the R. J. Reynolds ad used for this study, the sponsor’s name appears within the ad copy.

Other authors also address the issue of credibility in advocacy advertising. Smith and Heath (1990) claim that in order to be perceived

as credible, the source of the advocacy advertisement must be perceived as “morally right, while assuming a sufficient level of moral development in its audience” (p. 53). Heath and Douglas (1986) believe that companies that are viewed as trying to communicate “openly and fully on some issues . . . will create credibility which extends to other issues” (p. 54).

One sure way to diminish credibility in advocacy advertising is for the ads to appear too self-serving. Coe (1983) interviewed 846 corporations, magazines, newspapers, radio stations, and television stations to get impressions of advocacy advertising and its effectiveness. Respondents in the study felt that advocacy advertising’s effectiveness is weakened by the public’s perception of the ads being self-serving. They believed that once this negative attitude exists, these negative feelings are transferred to all advertisements produced by the company.

Sethi (1987b) alleges that because the public already tends to view business as having low credibility “a posture of self-righteousness on the part of the sponsor or defense of its position is highly suspect and is considered self-serving” (p. 76). Heath and Douglas (1986) claim that some ads are “so blatantly self-serving that they stand little chance of success” (p. 48). Sethi (1987a) believes that a sponsor should avoid self-serving positions and develop a political position that embraces

public interest. Heath and Douglas agree, noting that advocacy advertisements that appear to be the most successful “provide information which viewers . . . perceive as vital to their self-interests” (p. 48).

To avoid appearing too self-serving, and, in turn, more credible, several researchers suggest the use of two-sided persuasion. As Sethi (1977) points out, presenting a one-sided appeal while ignoring opposing viewpoints may be counterproductive and may, in actuality, defeat the sponsor’s purpose. Salmon et al. (1985) cite research by Walster, Aronson and Abrahams (1966) that found that sources which argue against their own self-interests are considered more credible than those which argue solely to promote their own self-interests. Cutler and Muehling (1989) claim that two-sided messages may be more effective than one-sided messages because they meet with less resistance. However, they maintain that few conclusions can be drawn regarding advocacy advertising due to the lack of empirical studies specifically dealing with that form of advertising.

However, studies addressing two-sided persuasion and negatively framed messages in product and service advertisements have been conducted in the last several years. Homer and Yoon (1992) examined the emotional and cognitive responses of print ads that

employed positive and negative framed appeals and found that “brand-related cognitions are more influential when induced by a negatively framed versus positively framed appeal” (p. 30). Crowley and Hoyer (1994) researched two-sided persuasion, providing both positive and negative brand information in an ad, and found that including some negative information can be a very persuasive tool. They stress, however, that in two sided persuasion, establishing credibility becomes the main objective. They cite previous research that indicates that the inclusion of negative information in an ad leads the audience to conclude that the advertiser is especially truthful. This view of increased credibility, in turn, strengthens the audience’s beliefs about the positive attributes that the advertiser claims about the product or service. In addition, the authors believe that two-sided messages are “more effective than one-sided messages in changing negative attitudes and in creating favorable new attitudes” (p. 566). However, prior attitude plays a critical role in the effectiveness of two-sided messages. If a receiver has negative attitudes, two-sided messages can change these favorably. But if the attitudes are already positive, two-sided messages are only effective if the recipient has previous knowledge of the negative information being communicated.

Gender and Persuasion

Advocacy advertising, like all advertising, relies on targeting a specific audience and gearing the message to fit that segment of society. One category commonly used to segment the audience for persuasive appeals is gender. According to Sternthal (1986), “[g]ender is a critical factor in developing marketing strategy” (p. 136). Though research in this area applies mainly to product or brand advertising, it follows that the same logic would apply to advocacy advertising as well. Meyers-Levy and Sternthal (1991) hypothesize that males and females differ in their information processing strategies, or how they make judgments. According to the researchers, males appear to be more selective, choosing messages that imply a single idea or inference. Females, on the other hand, attempt to process all of the information presented in an advertising message. Accordingly, advertising geared toward males should be single minded. By contrast, messages aimed at females should present a variety of ideas. Because the processing time is longer for females, the message should be presented in a medium that allows females time to process more than one message or idea.

Prakash (1992) believes that Meyers-Levy’s and Sternthal’s theory can be explained in that males have a higher level of achievement orientation, or “agentic role” (p. 43), which involves a drive to be

assertive, independent, and self-centered. Females tend to be concerned for others, create nurturing relationships with others, and seek others' approval. He calls this "affiliation orientation" (p. 43). Because of these orientations, Prakash asserts that women are more open to persuasion, an observation he states is supported by previous research (Eagly and Carli, 1981). Prakash believes that the format of an ad can create a favorable attitude toward the ad, thereby creating a favorable attitude toward the brand, resulting in a greater intention to purchase the product. Furthermore, Prakash believes that gender differences also influence the attitude toward the ad, and gender differences should be considered when developing ad format.

In designing appeals for men, Prakash maintains that ads should appeal to the male achievement orientation, while limiting the information to a few salient attributes because of the selective information processing noted by Meyers-Levy and Sternthal. He suggests ads that "show males socializing in large groups, participating in competitive activities, especially sports-related, and in scenarios of traditional sex-roles of male-female interaction" (p. 49).

Conversely, when gearing ads toward women, advertisers should provide more complete information, since women "prefer to make decisions with an open mind depending on the information cues

provided" (p. 50). This, supposedly, fulfills the affiliation orientation of females. Prakash recommends that women should be shown "socializing in competitive circumstances, but preferably in non-sports activities. . . , in noncompetitive situations working by themselves or in some intimate settings with other females or males. . . , [or] shown socializing either in large groups or small groups" (p. 50). Interestingly, the R. J. Reynolds advocacy ad campaign does not rely on either of these stylistic formats.

Gender differences in persuadability were also noted by Tuthill and Forsyth (1982). Their research suggests that because non-conforming behavior can damage social relationships, "females more than males express opinions which match the attitudes of the others around them" (p. 205). Tuthill and Forsyth support the contention that "American females seem to be more easily persuaded than their male counterparts -- not because their comprehension of the message or tendency to yield is greater but because they are more likely to employ opinion conformity as a self-presentational strategy" (p. 210).

Not all researchers agree, however. Kempe, Maloney, and Dambrot (1978) believe that because the roles and cultural expectations for women are rapidly changing, theories concerning sex differences in persuadability may no longer be applicable. Their research implies that,

regardless of whether a topic has high or low involvement, no significant sex differences in persuadability exist.

But perhaps the level of persuadability depends on the product being advertised, the style of advertisement, and the age of the audience. Covell, Dion, and Dion (1994) looked at age and gender and reaction to different styles (image or qualities) of advertising of tobacco and alcohol products. Image advertising was perceived as more persuasive than quality-oriented advertising by the adolescent girls in the survey, but not the adolescent boys. This gender difference, however, was not observed in the adult sample. This study is particularly relevant to the R. J. Reynolds advocacy campaign since the target audience is adult and the ads fall into a more image-related category.

Unfortunately, the scarcity of empirical evidence relating to advocacy advertising creates a need to examine how target audiences view both the ads and the companies that sponsor them. As Sethi (1987b) states, "one of the most important factors influencing the future growth and direction of issue-advocacy advertising is . . . the attitude of large segments of the public toward [its] use" (p. 16). Therefore, this study will try to determine the following:

RQ1: Will R. J. Reynolds' advocacy ads affect peoples' perceptions of the company?

RQ2: Will perceptions of R. J. Reynolds differ between males and females?

For this study, perceptions will be gauged by a variety of factors, including, but not limited to, credibility of the source, social responsibility of the company, whether the ads appear defensive or self-serving, and if the respondents feel the information that appears in the ads is accurate.

METHOD

A purposive, convenience sample of 29 male and 41 female professionals and businesspersons, all members of either a central Illinois Rotary club or a professional women's organization, were surveyed. This researcher attended a Rotary club meeting, where members were informed that a survey regarding advocacy advertising would be conducted at a subsequent meeting. Two weeks later, I distributed the survey at the beginning of the regularly scheduled meeting. Completed surveys were collected at the conclusion of the meeting.

Because of time constraints, the surveys for the professional women's organization were distributed by the president of the club at a monthly meeting. The president informed the members that the survey was being conducted by a graduate student who was interested in

advocacy advertising. Along with the survey, the respondents were given a number two lead pencil and a self addressed stamped envelope in which to return the survey.

The survey was designed to gather both quantitative and qualitative information. It consisted of a general instruction sheet, a copy of an R. J. Reynolds advocacy ad which appeared in the October 31, 1994 issue of Time magazine, a scantron sheet, and a sheet with open ended questions developed to obtain qualitative information (see Appendix). Subjects were asked to carefully read the ad and respond to 35 statements on the scantron sheet. The first five statements were designed to obtain demographic information: age; sex; whether the individual was a smoker, non-smoker, or former smoker; level of education completed; and whether the individual was a veteran or not. For the remaining statements, the respondents were asked to indicate their feelings about the ad using a five-point Likert-type Scale, from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. Approximately half of the statements were positively phrased ("This ad accurately reflects the facts"), while the other half of the statements were more negatively phrased ("This ad is self-serving"). These statements were designed to assess respondents' attitudes toward credibility, source expertise, objectivity, and social responsibility of R. J. Reynolds, while gauging the

involvement level of the respondent.

The second part of the survey asked the respondents to indicate their general feelings about the advertisement and R. J. Reynolds. In addition, it asked whether the ad had changed the respondent's feelings about R. J. Reynolds. Last, the respondents were asked to indicate their occupation.

Data from the scantron sheets were analyzed in three separate groups: (1) the entire group; (2) males; and (3) females. The median and mean scores to statements were calculated. In addition, eigenvalues were calculated to test the factorial relationships of the statements.

RESULTS

Seventy respondents, 29 males and 41 females, completed Part 1 of the survey. Male respondents fell into the following age categories: two aged 25-34; six aged 35-44; 17 aged 45-54; two aged 55-64; and 2 aged 65+. The ages of female respondents were: five aged 25-34; 17 aged 35-44; 11 aged 45-54; seven aged 55-64; and one aged 65+. Four respondents, all males, considered themselves smokers, 48 respondents were non-smokers (21 males and 27 females); and 17 were former smokers (4 males and 13 females). The level of education completed by

the group indicated that the respondents fit Heath and Douglas' (1986) definition of target audience's higher educational levels: 47% had completed graduate school, an additional 31% had an undergraduate degree, 17% had completed some college, and the remaining 4% had completed high school. There were ten male veterans in the group.

Overall, male and female respondents' strongest feeling about the ad and the company correlated. Five statements elicited a median response of 4.5 or greater (disagree to strongly disagree). These are shown in Table 1. Three statements received an overall median score of 1.5 or below (strongly agree to agree) and are illustrated in Table 2.

The largest variance of median scores between male and female respondents was observed for statement 26, which stated "R. J. Reynolds is acting in an irresponsible manner by developing this ad." Male respondents gave the statement a median score of 2.6; female respondents felt slightly more disagreement, producing a median score of 3.3. Other statements that elicited a .5 or greater variance between male and female respondents are shown in Table 3.

Eigenvalues were calculated to test the relationships of the statements and to determine whether male and female respondents differed in their perceptions of the ad and the company. For female respondents, one factor accounted for 35.15% of the variance, with an

eigenvalue of 10.54. Four statements concerned with credibility, accuracy, and bias, showed significant loadings. These statements and their loadings were: "R. J. Reynolds is presenting the information in an unbiased manner" - .7062; "This ad addresses both sides of the smoking issue" - .7721; "Through this ad, R. J. Reynolds speaks for the common people" - .7326; and "I don't care about the smoking issue" - .7413.

Two factors accounted for 49.8% of the variance for male respondents. The first factor was derived from six statements and received an eigenvalue of 8.28. This factor addressed the perceived accuracy and bias in the ads and accounted for 27.58% of the variance. This factor was made up of the following statements: "I believe that this ad accurately reflects the facts" (loading of .8307); "R. J. Reynolds is presenting the information in an unbiased manner" (loading of .9401); "This ad addresses both sides of the smoking issue" (loading of .9146); "R. J. Reynolds truly believes our rights are threatened" (loading of .7438); "R. J. Reynolds can be trusted to provide accurate information about smoking" (loading of .9008); and "Smokers and non-smokers should resolve the issue on an individual basis" (loading of .8625).

The second factor included three statements that reflected negative sentiments about the company. This factor accounted for 22.22% of the variance. These statements and their respective loadings

were: "R. J. Reynolds is more concerned with protecting its bottom line than in protecting our individual rights" - .6935; "R. J. Reynolds sounds defensive in this ad" - .7307; and "R. J. Reynolds is acting in an irresponsible manner by developing this ad" - .8752.

Sixty-eight respondents completed Part 2 of the survey, intended to gauge respondents' general feelings about the ad, the company, and whether the ad changed the respondents' feelings about the company. Overall, feelings were generally negative toward both the ad and the company, although the higher incidence of neutral feelings about the company indicated that the negative feelings associated with the ad did not, in some cases, affect the respondent's general feelings about the company.

Overall, respondents' general feelings about the advertisement reflected negative sentiments. I categorized the responses as follows: negative - 45 responses; positive - 7 responses; neutral - 12 responses; and no answer - 4 responses. Negative views tended to be worded in stronger terms. The ad was viewed by several as self-serving, biased, and one-sided. One respondent described the ad as "self serving, illogical, emotional drivel." Another respondent thought the ad was one-sided, but rationalized "but so are all ads." Some of the terms and phrases used to describe the ad included "inflammatory and biased,"

“cheap trash,” “manipulative,” and “whiny and self serving.”

Source credibility was addressed by several respondents. Said one, “I don’t have trust or faith in this kind of info given by any company related to the issue in this manner.” Another stated, “I would expect a tobacco company to run this type of ad.” Perhaps the most biting comment was the question, “Who would believe R. J. Reynolds *cared* about individual freedom when they *do not care* about individuals’ health?”

The issue that seemed to stir the most emotion among the respondents was the ad’s equation of smoking with patriotism and personal freedoms. Comments included, “I believe the sensationalism and speculation of ‘rights denial’ is insulting,” “RJR is trying to equate smoking - an act of pure choice to begin with - with political governing. I disagree that these are the same,” “I feel that this ad really stretches the comparison between personal freedom and behavior that has been proven to affect the health of others (second hand smoke),” “To equate ‘smoking rights’ with the Berlin Wall, democracy in Russia, and apartheid is an unforgivable comparison. The concept of ‘majority rules’ in a democracy seems lost here,” “the ad manipulates with an emotional, pseudo-patriotic appeal, implying that disagreement would be un-American. I’m sorry people fall for it,” “There is no comparison between

smoking rights and the fall of communism and apartheid,” “It (the ad) exploits the issue of personal freedom,” and “They are trying to make the smoking issue a ‘rights’ issue rather than a health/addiction one.”

Several respondents attempted to analyze R. J. Reynolds’ target audience and its actions. Interestingly, there was no consensus on just who the target audience was. Comments included, “It is an attempt by R. J. Reynolds to stir emotions of smokers, to encourage smokers to become activists in the fight against such legislation,” “They are appealing to those who favor ‘choice’ and civil liberties but who are anti-smoking,” and “It was designed to sway those who don’t have strong feelings about smoking.”

Some of the responses indicated that respondents felt neutral about the ads. They wrote, “trying to influence public opinion. I believe that this is well within their bounds to do,” “I don’t feel strongly either way about the ad. They have the right to state their view and even ‘slant’ their position.” One respondent found the ad to have “an interesting rhetorical approach. Presents an interesting view.” Another believed the ad brought up “more questions than the few that are addressed with its answers.” And one respondent simply asked, “Who cares?”

A minority of the respondents view the ad favorably. Several commented on the quality of the argument. One believed it was “well

written, very slanted," another felt "the argument being presented is a valid argument." One respondent considered the ad thought-provoking, stating, "makes one stop & think." But perhaps the most positive reaction to the ad came with the statement, ". . . it accurately reflects the status of government intervention in this area."

Whereas the general feelings about the ad tended to be negative, the general feelings about the company, though mostly negative, took on a more "business is business" approach, even among some of those respondents who felt negatively about the ad. Said one such respondent, "I respect them from a business standpoint, but I am anti-smoking." Similar comments included, "It's a company producing a product like thousands of other companies," "Just a company trying to turn a profit," and "They are a corporation trying to serve their consumers."

Some respondents viewed the company as one trying to protect itself: "They are a large diversified MNC try(ing) to protect their market," and "They do have a right to protect their interests." Several respondents defended the company, stating, "they are simply trying to sell a product -- They do print health warnings on their labels, so it's up to the individuals from there on --," "They are doing everything they can to keep their bottom line up, stressing the issue of freedom and personal liberty," "It is

free to advertise as it chooses,” and “they can do what they want -- they can advertise how ever they want. I firmly believe in freedom of speech.”

The majority of respondents, however, still viewed the company negatively. Several addressed the issue of trust. One wrote, “I don't trust their presentations.” Other comments included, “A despicable company that lies to the public about the dangers of smoking,” “. . . this company has concealed its negative research on the harmful effects of smoking, which is dishonest and self-serving,” and “they know their product is harmful to the health of their users and those near the users -- they ignore this information to keep the money flowing -- I have very little respect for them and their treatment and lack of concern for their customers as human beings.”

Two respondents had some advice for the company: “They should be spending money trying to figure out how to remain solvent without tobacco production,” and “They should just advertise their products -- not deliberately try to confuse and distort. Should spend their \$ on research and development of non-cancer causing products.”

Some respondents provided succinct negative responses when asked about the company. Some of these included, “contempt and disgust,” “manipulative,” “desperation,” “greedy, irresponsible,” “disappointment,” and “self seeking businessmen.”

Only three responses could be categorized as truly positive. One response took on an apologetic tone, "I'm sure they have their motives re: business -- but they do have a point about govt. interference." Another response judged the company based on business principles, "Good, consumer-oriented company. In general, products are what they say they are. Reputable." The third positive response stated, "Over the years R. J. has been a responsible company & they have contributed a great deal to America."

Overall, this second statement elicited the following responses: negative - 26; positive - 3; neutral - 35; and no response - 4.

When asked whether the ad changed the way respondents felt about R. J. Reynolds, an overwhelming majority said no. Fifty-seven respondents believed their feelings about the company, whether negative or positive, were not influenced by reading the ad. The survey did not ask for any further explanation of a "no" response.

Ten respondents believed the ad changed the way they felt about the company; only one respondent stated that it was a positive change. When asked to describe the change, the answer was aimed more at the government than at R. J. Reynolds: "It is thought provoking -- makes me wonder what the govt. will do and where it will go to govern our lives. To(o) *many* govt. controls now to *run* some businesses!!"

For the other nine respondents who believed the ad changed their feeling toward the company, the sentiment was that the ad had created more negative opinions. Some of the comments included, "I feel this is generally a good company, but this ad makes them look bad -- defensive & dishonest," "I didn't think they would do this -- seems desperate," "less educated people might believe their 'information.' This angers me."

Several responses indicated that feelings had been negative before reading the ad and had become even more negative after reading the ad. These responses included, "They're worse than I thought," "my opinion went lower, if possible, than before," and "I have less respect for them than ever."

The final section of Part 2 of the survey asked participants to indicate their occupation. Sixty-six respondents completed this part of the survey. Eighteen of the 66 respondents who answered the questions worked in the area of higher education, either as teachers or administrators. Occupations in the banking and insurance industries accounted for 14 respondents, with another 14 employed in some other business-related occupation. Six respondents were retired, four were business owners or self-employed, three were attorneys, and three were health and social service administrators. Two respondents were ministers and two individuals occupied management positions.

DISCUSSION

This study sought to gauge the views of those individuals deemed to be the target audience of an advocacy ad produced by R. J. Reynolds. Results indicate that feelings toward both the ad and R. J. Reynolds were predominantly negative. Survey scores reveal that the majority of respondents had high levels of involvement. Yet unlike Cline and Masel-Waters (1984), who found backlash only among those respondents with low involvement, it appears that in the case of this ad, backlash was created among a high involvement audience as well. Perhaps this can be explained through research by Gunther and Thorson (1992) which suggests people estimate themselves as more resistant to an ad when it's considered more socially acceptable to be resistant. In recent years, a negative social stigma has been attached to those individuals who smoke, making non-smoking the more socially accepted norm. These negative social implications of smoking may be reflected in the respondents' reaction to the ad, which, by virtue of being sponsored by a company that so obviously supports the habit, might be viewed as socially unacceptable.

Chaiken and Maheswaran (1994) believe that an individual's response to an advocacy advertisement is influenced by source credibility as well as the audience's level of involvement. Sethi (1987b)

notes that an ad sponsor's credibility plays a key role in swaying opinion, especially for ads addressing controversial issues. R. J. Reynolds' credibility was severely challenged and ultimately rejected by the respondents in this survey. It can be ascertained that this perceived lack of credibility on such an adversarial issue contributed to the respondents' negative feeling toward both the ad and the company.

In their discussion of source credibility, Smith and Heath (1990) maintain that an ad must be perceived by its target audience as "morally right" (p. 53) in order to be effective. Respondents' written comments to Part 2 of the survey suggest that many lack trust in and respect for the company, question its honesty to the public, and feel it places higher emphasis on its bottom line than the health and safety of its customers, hardly creating the impression of moral correctness necessary to persuade.

A full 87% of the respondents either agreed or strongly agreed with the statement "This ad is self-serving." Coe (1983) notes that the success of an advocacy ad is weakened when it's viewed as self-serving, and that these negative feelings are subsequently transferred to all advertisements produced by the company. This study suggests the possibility that these negative attitudes may be transferred to the company as well.

In order to be successful, companies which sponsor advocacy ads need to create ads that address the concerns of its target audience, or, as Sethi (1987a) contends, messages that embrace public interest.

Although the smoking issue is one of concern to a great many people, R. J. Reynolds' concern for accommodation does not truly embrace the interests of that segment of the population which considers itself to be non-smokers or former smokers. It's easy to see why the respondents, almost 93% non-smokers or former smokers, would perceive the issue of accommodation as one serving the interests of R. J. Reynolds over that of the majority of the public.

Research also indicates that credibility can be enhanced by presenting a two-sided message (Sethi, 1977; Salmon et al. 1985; Cutler and Muehling, 1989; Crowley and Hoyer, 1994). Although the ad addresses the issue of accommodation, giving an allusion of two-sided persuasion, the majority of respondents still felt that the ad did not address both sides of the smoking issue. Perhaps an ad presenting a more two-sided approach would have created a higher perceived level of credibility of the company among respondents.

The majority of respondents felt that the ad did not change their feelings toward the company. However, nine out of ten respondents that stated that the ad changed their opinion felt that the ad created more

negative feelings. Perhaps R. J. Reynolds should heed the advice of Cline and Masel-Waters (1984) who urge sponsors to evaluate “the degree of backlash the communicator is willing to tolerate as a result of placing a controversial issue on the . . . agenda” (p. 46).

The second research question sought to determine whether males and females differed in their perceptions of R. J. Reynolds. The findings reveal that opinions of both the ad and the company varied little between males and females. Both males and females entertained negative feelings, with the largest variance of median scores observed in statements addressing R. J. Reynolds’ responsibility and image, followed by involvement issues. Females tended to respond in a slightly more negative manner. This conflicts with claims that females are more open to persuasion (Prakash, 1992; Tuthill and Forsyth, 1982) and supports the findings that, regardless of level of involvement, gender does not play a significant role in persuadability (Kempe et al., 1978; Covell et al. 1994).

The findings of this study also do not support conclusions drawn by Meyers-Levy and Sternthal (1991), who believe that males and females process information differently. They maintain that males are more single-minded and more influenced by a single idea, where females process all the information presented in an ad, preferring a

variety of ideas. Interestingly, this study found the opposite. Only one factor accounted for a significant level of variance for female respondents. Male respondents appeared to be less single-minded, considering two factors significant in their evaluation of the ad and company.

An obvious assumption that can be drawn from this study addresses smoking habits of the respondents. Initially, I intended to measure whether perceptions of R. J. Reynolds would differ between smokers and non-smokers. However, after the surveys were completed and only four respondents indicated that they smoked, the course of the study had to be altered. It became apparent that individuals who make up an advocacy advertiser's target audience (i.e. highly educated, high occupational level, opinion leaders, decision makers) tend to be non-smokers. This leads to the question of just whom R. J. Reynolds was attempting to persuade.

Before the survey was conducted, I contacted R. J. Reynolds, both in writing and by telephone, in an effort to obtain information about the ad, including its target audience. Because the information was considered proprietary, the company would not disclose anything. Therefore, I had to assume, based on the views of authors and researchers in the field of advocacy advertising, who the target audience

was. Interestingly, authors and researchers in the field of advocacy advertising differ in their views of what constitutes target audiences. When Heath and Douglas (1986) examined the effectiveness of advocacy advertisements in regard to the energy crisis, they found that the ads targeted information seekers and opinion leaders. It was believed that higher educational and occupational levels, as well as higher income levels, correlated with the perceived seriousness and reality of the issue. Waltzer (1988) contends that advocacy advertising is intended to "influence the influencers" (p. 42), and should be aimed at decision-makers and specialized publics. However, Cutler and Muehling (1989) believe it is "seldom possible to precisely target the proper audience" (p. 42).

Sethi (1987a) agrees that many advocacy campaigns "aim generally at the educated without any attempt at the careful targeting of audience that is common to product and service advertising" (p. 292). He believes, however, that there are two exceptions. One of these is targeting that segment of the population that may be undecided about a particular issue, or what Sethi calls the "persuadables" (p. 292). The other exception, which is generally utilized by sponsors wishing to generate action on a legislative issue, is to target influential individuals and opinion leaders.

Although few empirical studies have been conducted addressing advocacy advertising, those that have (Cline and Masel-Waters, 1984; Heath and Douglas, 1986; Reid et al., 1981; Salmon et al., 1985) have employed college students as subjects. But because the majority of researchers believe that advocacy advertising is generally aimed at opinion leaders, influential individuals, and individuals with higher educational levels, this study targeted an audience that more closely matched the characteristics viewed by scholars in the field to be those of a true target audience.

It is unclear at whom R. J. Reynolds is aiming these ads. Possibly, as the research suggests, R. J. Reynolds created the ads knowing that the majority of people who would read them would be non-smokers. However, if that is the case, this study shows that the ads will not be successful.

Several limitations in the study became apparent after the data were collected. It would have been more advantageous to ask participants to provide demographic information on Part 2 of the survey instead of Part 1. As the survey was designed, it was impossible to determine just who (a smoker/non-smoker/former smoker or male/female) was providing their more in-depth feelings. This information may have provided an opportunity for more thorough

analysis.

In an attempt to more closely match the sponsor's intended target audience, it may have been more practical to distribute additional surveys to opinion leaders in non-college towns. Unfortunately, time did not permit it. Individuals occupied in the area of higher education made up over 27% of the respondents. This is probably not representative of most sponsor's target audiences. If possible, future researchers might wish to more closely match the sponsor's intended audience. In addition, females made up over 58% of the survey's participants. Not many people would argue that women have cleared tremendous hurdles and have experienced professional advances. However, most would agree that females are still under represented in terms of being "influentials" or opinion leaders.

Theories addressing advocacy advertising abound, but solid, empirical data is not extremely prevalent. The emerging importance of issues management and the growth of advertising budgets should lead corporations to consider the effectiveness and affects of advocacy advertising. If a company chooses to engage in this form of advertising, it should consider the most effective way to present a high level of credibility and responsibility while attempting to minimize backlash and a perception of self-servitude. Future research in the area should address

these issues if advocacy advertising is to become consistently successful.

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Appendix

Part 1

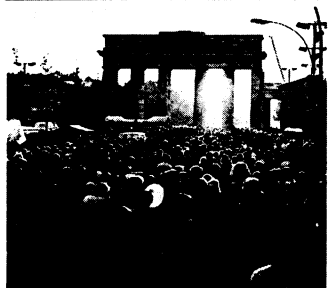
Please read the attached advertisement, which appeared in the October 31, 1994 issue of *Time* magazine. After you have read the ad, please read each statement and completely fill in the circle corresponding to the number that most closely reflects your feelings about the statement.

For purposes of this survey:

- 1 = Strongly Agree
- 2 = Agree
- 3 = Neither Agree Nor Disagree
- 4 = Disagree
- 5 = Strongly Disagree

Once you have completed Part 1, please go on to Part 2.

The Berlin Wall Crumbles



Democracy's Victory In South Africa

Free At Last: Mandela and ANC Celebrate Triumph



***Nationwide, Reins
on U.S. Smokers'
Freedom Tighten***

WHERE EXACTLY IS THE LAND OF THE FREE?

These days the cry of new-found freedom is heard all over the world. Many countries are rejecting repressive regimes and embracing self-determination and the principles that we, in America, hold so dear. But, with some recent proposals, our own Government may be taking a serious step backwards.

The Government is attempting to prohibit smoking in America. They've proposed a substantial tax increase to make cigarettes too expensive for many people to afford.¹ They've introduced regulations that could lead to a total smoking ban in private as well as public places in some circumstances.²

Regardless of their reasons, both their tactics and the end result they are seeking are threats to our freedoms. The individual rights of not just the 45 million Americans who choose to smoke, but other Americans as well, could be compromised.

If they are successful in their bid to abolish cigarettes will they then pursue other targets? Alcohol could be next. Will caffeine and high-fat

foods follow? Then books, movies and music? Who knows where it could end?

The time has come to say, 'enough'. The time has come to allow adults in this country to make their own decisions of their own free will, without Government control and excessive intervention. The time has come for a little common sense to prevail and for us to once again deserve to be called the land of the free.

This opinion is brought to you in the interest of an informed debate by the R.J.Reynolds Tobacco Company. We believe that the solution to most smoking issues can be found in accommodation, in finding ways in which smokers and non-smokers can co-exist peacefully. And we encourage dialogue and discussion that will help solve the issues without resorting to Government intervention. For further information please call 1-800-366-8441.

TOGETHER, WE CAN WORK IT OUT

¹ House of Representatives Bill No. 3600 and Senate Bill No. 1757. ² Dept. of Labor, OSHA Docket No. H-122, Indoor Air Quality, Proposed Rule, 4/4/94. © R.J.Reynolds Tobacco Company

Part 2

Please briefly answer the following questions.

My general feelings about the ad are: _____

My general feelings about R. J. Reynolds are: _____

Did this ad change your feelings about R. J. Reynolds? Yes No
If yes, in what way? _____

Your occupation _____

Thank you for participating in this survey.

Table 2

Statements Receiving a Median Response of 1.5 or Less

Statement	<u>Median Response</u>		
	Males	Females	Entire Group
"This ad is self-serving."	1.4	1.3	1.3
"R. J. Reynolds is more concerned with protecting its bottom line than protecting our individual rights."	1.4	1.4	1.4
"Smoking should be banned in all public places."	1.8	1.4	1.5

Table 3

Statements Eliciting a .5 or Greater Variance in Median Response

Statement	<u>Median Response</u>	
	Males	Females
"R. J. Reynolds is acting in an irresponsible manner by developing this ad."	2.6	3.3
"R. J. Reynolds suffers from an image problem."	2.0	2.5
"I don't care about the smoking issue."	4.2	4.7
"Smokers and non-smokers should resolve the issue on an individual basis."	3.6	4.1