

***Persuasive Advertising* is only the end of the beginning: A rejoinder to the review**

J. Scott Armstrong

Professor Gendall and I agree about *Persuasive Advertising* (Armstrong 2010) on some points and differ on others. I appreciate his kind comments about the book, but in this reply I will focus on our differences. I follow the sequence of topics in his review. The italicized sub-headings represent my viewpoints.

Advertising is an investment. I am steadfast that the purpose of advertising is to persuade people to act-- to buy, sell, vote, provide help, save souls, and so on. In other words, it should produce some gain or return on the investment. The gains are not only for stockholders but also for all stakeholders, such as customers, employees, and retailers. I accept that Professor Gendall is not convinced on the need for results, but I expect that many advertisers will agree with me. As for the power of advertising, sometimes it is profitable –in the sense of benefits are derived– and sometimes not. The purpose of my book is to achieve greater benefits from investments in advertising.

Examples are not evidence. Examples are designed to illustrate, not to provide evidence. Thus, I was pleased that my examples did not convince Professor Gendall, as they were not intended to. In my book, I try to dispel the common belief that examples constitute evidence and put them in separate sections so as to avoid this error.

Early evidence is relevant. As I state in the conclusions section of the book, the principles are expected to change over time as we learn more about how they are best applied and the conditions under which they apply. For example, contrary to early research, I found that prospect theory offers no benefit to advertisers. So the principles are based on the cumulative evidence to date. I was impressed by the value of the early studies and their contributions to the development of the principles, so I do not recommend discounting research merely because it was done many years ago.

Different types of evidence are advantageous and they can be weighted differently. I provided much heavier weight on experimental evidence. Beyond that, I aimed for full disclosure, and even pointed out some studies that deserved little weight. I consider the fact that there were many approaches and many criteria as an advantage rather than a disadvantage. In any event, I provide full disclosure of the evidence so that users of the book can weight the evidence as they wish.

Evidence-based advertising requires good judgment. I expect that this will always be the case for advertising – as it is in medicine and other complex fields. Of course, we know a lot about how to improve judgment. Thus, for example, I recommend that independent judgments be combined to improve judgments. I also recommend the use of checklists as an aid to judgment.

Evidence-based advertising supplements rather than replaces knowledge about advertising. I was surprised that Professor Gendall views *Persuasive Advertising* as “a comprehensive review of advertising” and as being similar to work by Ehrenberg and Jones. While I am honored to be included in such good company, I view evidence-based advertising as a completely different approach. It does not aim to refute or replace other approaches to advertising – and it is not the final word. It is narrowly focused on evidence-based knowledge about persuasion.

Is that really new? As I describe in a forthcoming paper (Armstrong 2011), I have been unable to find any of the 195 principles in existing advertising textbooks. In addition, the principles go beyond “common sense.” When given true-false questions about the principles, on average, people do no better than guessing.

Hopefully, the principles will supplement advertisers’ knowledge and skills and lead to more effective advertising. In addition, I hope that researchers will continue their valuable work of determining when the principles are most effective and how they can be applied effectively. While I am the messenger, the book is a tribute to the useful findings produced by thousands of researchers, and to the painstaking efforts of those who helped ensure that the principles reflect the knowledge to date.

References

Armstrong, J. S. (2010), *Persuasive Advertising*. Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan.

Armstrong, J. S. (2011), “Evidence-based advertising: An application to persuasion”
Forthcoming in *International Journal of Advertising*.

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