

# A Study of personal beliefs of advertising and attitudes towards advertisements: Pollay and Mittal (1993) revisited

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## Abstract

*This study involves a survey of university students and focuses on the personal beliefs and uses of advertising identified in Pollay and Mittal's (1993) seminal paper, i.e., Product Information, Social Role/Image, and Hedonic/Pleasure. Our results suggest that respondents' attitudes towards advertisements is most strongly driven by the Hedonic/Pleasure factor of advertising, followed by its Product Information role, but is unaffected by the Social Role/Image function of advertising. Our structural equation modelling results suggest that there has been an increase in the importance of the Hedonic/Pleasure role of advertising since Pollay and Mittal's (1993) original study. In addition, the measurement diagnostics for these three constructs from our modelling suggest that there may be a need to revisit these items, and to develop and validate new and better measures of them.*

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## Introduction

Advertisers spend significant amounts of money developing advertising campaigns that they hope will be favourably received by their target audiences and will increase awareness, reinforce brand and/or company images, and lead to sales. The logic is that if the target audience has positive attitudes towards the advertisement, this will result in positive attitudes towards the advertiser or brand, which can increase purchase intent (Fam & Waller, 2004; Khairullah & Khairullah, 1999; MacKenzie & Lutz, 1989). Furthermore, advertising theory suggests that an individual's attitude to advertising in general will influence people's attitudinal and behavioural responses (Mehta 2000). In order to make one's advertisements more effective, it is therefore important to understand customers' attitudes towards advertising in general, and the relationship between this and the three personal beliefs people have for advertising, i.e., as a source of Product Information, to reinforce their Social Role/Image, and to provide Hedonic/Pleasurable experiences (cf. Pollay & Mittal, 1993; Yang 2000).

Importantly, since Pollay and Mittal's (1993) seminal study was published, there have been significant changes in media and advertising, with the introduction of the world wide web, e-marketing, social media, and social networking sites. As such, these earlier studies on attitudes to advertising may require

revisiting. The objectives of this research are therefore to (1) update our understanding of the main personal beliefs of advertising, and (2) examine how the three personal beliefs of advertising investigated by Pollay and Mittal relate to attitudes towards advertising in general.

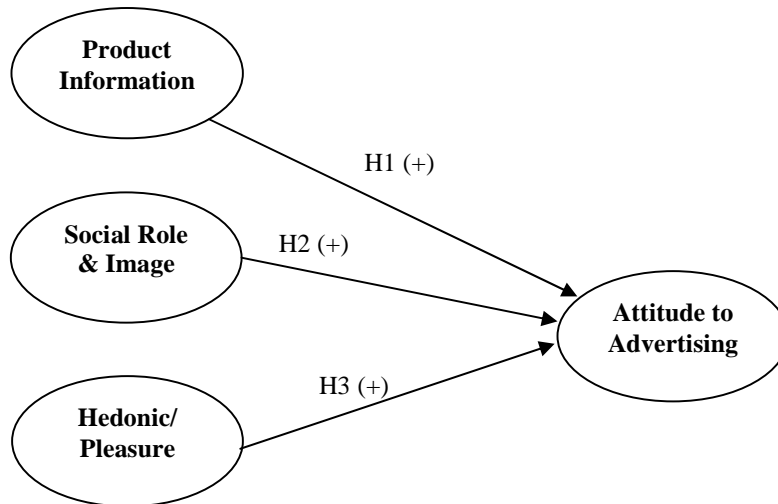
## **Conceptualising attitudes towards advertising**

Previous studies have emphasised the importance of Attitudes towards Advertising (hereafter “Aad”), (e.g., Simpson et al., 1998), though the conceptualisation and measurement of this construct has varied. Some work conceptualises it as an “overall favourability or unfavourability” (Muehling, 1987; Mehta & Purvis, 1995), whilst others suggest that the Aad concept is complex and composed of a number of underlying belief dimensions related to economic and social factors, e.g., whether advertising is good for the economy, or is bad because it corrupts values and encourages materialism (Anderson et al., 1978; Andrews, 1989; Bauer & Greyser, 1968; Larkin, 1977; Reid & Soley, 1982; Sandage & Leckenby, 1980); and others expand this to include personal use factors (Petrovici & Marinov, 2007; Pollay & Mittal, 1993; Ramaprasad & Thurwanger, 1998; Yang 2000).

Pollay and Mittal (1993) suggested that the two-factor (economic and social) model proposed by Bauer and Greyser (1968) may not be comprehensive enough, and added factors such as information-related and entertainment-related beliefs as factors affecting one’s general attitude towards advertising. They proposed a seven-factor model to predict Aad, with three factors measuring the personal (micro) factors which we examine in this current research (i.e., Product Information, Social Role/Image, and Hedonic/Pleasure). We do not examine their four other factors relating to societal (macro) factors (good for the economy, materialism, value corruption, falsity/no sense).

In this current study, and consistent with Pollay and Mittal (1993), we treat Aad as a general construct, rather than one composed of economic and social components. Importantly, we use the three personal beliefs and uses of advertising as independent variables to predict Aad. Hence our research replicates one aspect of Pollay and Mittal’s study, and the conceptual model is presented in Figure 1 below.

**Figure 1:** Conceptual model of personal (micro) factors affecting Aad



## **Dependent variable: Attitude towards advertisements**

Consistent with Pollay and Mittal (1993), we conceptualise the Aad construct as a general opinion about advertising. Lutz (1985) defines Aad in general as “a learned predisposition to respond in a consistently favorable or unfavorable manner to advertising in general” (p. 53). It is operationalised using three items which measure whether respondents feel that advertising is a good thing or an unfavourable thing, and whether it is likeable. These items have been used in other recent studies of Aad (e.g., Nan, 2006; Tan & Chia, 2007).

## **Explanatory variables and hypotheses**

*Product Information:* Information about a product can result in greater marketplace efficiency as it can help match consumer needs/wants to producer offerings. Thus advertising can be seen as economically useful as a valuable source of information (Pollay & Mittal, 1993). Bauer and Greyser (1968) found that information-related role of advertising was an important determinant of peoples’ Aad. Drawing on these studies our first hypothesis posits that the greater the belief that advertisements are useful for getting product information, the more favourable one’s attitude towards advertising in general (H1).

*Social Role/Image:* As Pollay and Mittal (1993) argue, as well as providing information about a product, advertising also plays a social role by presenting lifestyle images which can help people to purchase the product that is best for them. By portraying images of target audiences’ reference groups,

advertisements can reinforce a brand’s image and suggest that specific target groups are “typical customers” and that the advertised product would be consistent with their Social Role/Image. Therefore, our second hypothesis is that the greater the use of advertising for Social Role/Image functions, the more positive the respondents’ Aad (H2).

*Hedonic/Pleasure:* Last, advertising can not only inform and present/reinforce a particular social image but also entertain. Many firms use creative strategy to gain awareness, interest, or desire by developing interesting, humorous, and enjoyable advertisements. Some become very popular and memorable, and can influence people’s general attitude to advertising. Our last hypothesis is therefore that the greater the use of advertising for entertainment or pleasure, the greater one’s Aad (H3).

## Methodology

### Data collection

Data was collected from a sample of undergraduate business students from a major metropolitan Australian university. It is acknowledged that there may be cultural differences between this study in Australia and Pollay and Mittal’s (1993) study from the United States, although sample equivalence is maintained by comparing university students. The students were told that the survey was designed to measure their views of advertising in general and were requested to complete the self-administered questionnaire. The questionnaire consists of items drawn from Pollay and Mittal, and respondents were asked to pick a number from the 7-point scale indicating the extent to which they agree or disagree with the statements (1 = strongly disagree, 7 = strongly agree). A total of 213 questionnaires were completed, with 76 (36.4%) male and 133 (63.6%) females, and an age range from 17 to 35. The results of our survey will be compared with “sample 1” from Pollay and Mittal, which was also a sample of university students (n=188).

### Measure refinement

To use methods that are consistent with those employed by Pollay and Mittal (1993), we also used principal components analysis with varimax rotation. Our results revealed that the reflective multi-item scales are unidimensional. The results of our factor analyses are presented in Table 1 below, along with Pollay and Mittal’s for comparison.

**Table 1:** Descriptive statistics and principal components analysis results — current study compared with Pollay and Mittal (1993)

Constructs and Items	Mean (S.D) Current Study	Mean (S.D) P&M (1993) <sup>a</sup>	PCA Factor loading Current Study	PCA Factor loading P&M (1993)
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<b>Product Information (Overall)</b>	<b>4.94 (1.30)</b>	<b>5.19 (1.14)</b>		
1. Advertising is a valuable source of information about local sales.	4.53 (1.46)	5.36 (1.24)	-0.021	0.796
2. Advertising tells me which brands have the features I am looking for.	5.01 (1.24)	5.11 (1.03)	0.803	0.561
3. Advertising helps me keep up to date about products/services available in the marketplace.	5.27 (1.21)	5.11 (1.14)	0.819	0.545
<b>Social Role/Image (Overall)</b>	<b>3.81 (1.43)</b>	<b>3.75 (1.27)</b>		
4. From advertising I learn about fashions and about what to buy to impress others	3.78 (1.46)	3.84 (1.46)	0.807	0.586
5. Advertising tells me what people with lifestyles similar to mine are buying or using.	4.03 (1.36)	4.07 (1.14)	0.796	0.556
6. Advertising helps me to know which products will or will not reflect the sort of person I am.	3.62 (1.47)	3.35 (1.22)	0.719	0.631
<b>Hedonic/Pleasure (Overall)</b>	<b>4.76 (1.37)</b>	<b>4.82 (1.25)</b>		
7. Quite often, advertising is amusing and entertaining.	5.19 (1.11)	5.32 (1.11)	0.554	0.678
8. Sometimes, advertisements are even more enjoyable than other media contents.	4.52 (1.55)	4.61 (1.38)	0.783	0.814
9. Sometimes I take pleasure in thinking about what I saw or heard or read in advertisements.	4.58 (1.45)	4.54 (1.24)	0.598	0.422
<b>Attitude towards Advertisements</b>				
10. Overall, I consider advertising a good thing	5.02 (1.17)	*	0.893	*
11. My general opinion of advertising is unfavourable	3.04 (1.31)	*	0.715	*
12. Overall, I like advertising	4.96 (1.21)	*	0.842	*

<sup>a</sup> Pollay and Mittal (1993) used 5-point scales. For ease of comparison we converted their means and standard deviations to 7-point scales

\* Not reported.

As might be expected given that this current work replicates a study conducted 18 years ago, there were some differences in the factor loadings. In general Pollay and Mittal's (1993) factor loadings were mostly weaker than ours, with six of their nine items measuring the personal beliefs of advertising having loadings lower than ours. The implications of this are that the items appeared to work better for us as measures of these three constructs than they did for Pollay and Mittal. The measurement properties of these items, however, require more rigorous testing, as principal components analysis is not a strong or definitive test. This issue will be addressed below in the section titled "Initial PLS Measurement Model Diagnostics".

The mean scores for the nine personal belief items, plus a composite mean for each of the three factors, are presented in Table 1, along with the results of Pollay and Mittal's study. Consistent with Pollay and Mittal, we found that the most prevalent belief about advertising was for Product Information, followed by Hedonic/Pleasure, and last for Social Role/Image. This suggests that the prevalence of beliefs regarding these three personal functions of advertising does not appear to have changed. However, this does not allow us to conclude that the effects of these three personal belief factors have not changed, and this issue is discussed in a subsequent section titled "PLS Structural Model Testing".

#### **Initial PLS measurement model diagnostics**

Given that our sample is relatively small, confirmatory factor analysis was not used to assess the measures because of the likelihood of non-convergence and improper solutions (Gerbing & Anderson, 1988). Instead, partial least squares (PLS) was used to estimate the measurement models, specifically, SmartPLS 2.0 (Ringle, Wende, & Will, 2005).

Analysis of the measurement model diagnostics suggested that less than half of the items are adequate indicators of the three personal belief factors. As can be seen in Table 2 below, a number of the PLS standardised factor loadings were well below the recommended level of  $\approx .71$  (Fornell & Larcker, 1981) which suggests that they did not account for a sufficient amount of variance in the latent variable. Consequently, there are serious problems with convergent validity, as two of the Average Variance Extracted (AVE) results are below the benchmark of .50 (Product Information AVE = .44, and Social Role/Image AVE = .45), suggesting that the items explain less variance in the latent variables than variance due to measurement error (Fornell & Larcker, 1981). It was important that we omit the weakest of these items prior to our structural modelling because such items add little to the explanatory power of the measurement model, and, if not omitted, can attenuate and bias the path estimates in the structural model (Hulland, 1999).

**Table 2:** Assessment of measurement for reflective constructs

Construct	Indicator	Standardized Factor Loadings	Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted
Product Information	1	<u>.595</u>	.36	.70	<u>.44</u>
	2	<u>.674</u>			
	3	.717			
Social Role/Image	1	.899	.52	.69	<u>.45</u>
	2	<u>.364</u>			
	3	<u>.642</u>			
Hedonic/Pleasure	1	<u>.675</u>	.63	.80	.57
	2	.843			
	3	.734			
Attitude towards Advertisements	1	.893	.77	.85	.59
	2	.715			
	3	<u>.578</u>			
	4	.842			

As a result, we decided to delete item 1 from Product Information, item 2 from Social Role/Image, and item 3 from Aad. The other items were retained, and although some were still somewhat weak, they were all close to the benchmark of .71. Importantly, by deleting the items mentioned above, we were able to raise the AVEs of Product Information and Social Role/Image to an acceptable level, thus improving convergent validity.

In our final measurement model, convergent validity was established as the t-statistics for each item were all statistically significant (Anderson & Gerbing, 1988), and the average variance extracted (AVE) for each construct exceeded .50. Discriminant validity was established using Fornell and Larcker's (1981) criterion that the AVE for each construct in a test pair be greater than the square of the correlation between those two constructs. All pairs of variables passed this test. This result was corroborated using a

test advocated by Chin (1998) involving the items' cross-loadings. No item should load higher on another construct than it does on the construct it purports to measure, and all items met this criterion. Last, reliability was established because the composite reliabilities of the multi-item measures ranged from .76 to .87 (see Table 3 below). Overall these diagnostics suggested that our final measurement models are adequate and that it was appropriate to proceed to structural model testing.

### PLS structural model testing results

While the original study analysed the results using LISREL, in this analysis we used PLS to estimate the structural models for various reason: first, the sample is relatively small; second, no assumptions are made about multivariate normality; and third, the primary concern is prediction of the endogenous variables (cf. Chin, 1998; Diamantopolous & Winklhofer, 2001).

**Table 3:** Measurement model and structural modeling results

Construct	Cronbach Alpha	Composite Reliability	Average Variance Extracted	Path Coefficient	t-statistic	P&M Cronbach Alpha	P&M Path Coefficient
Product Information	.48	.79	.66	<b>0.17</b>	<b>2.3283**</b>	.68	<b>0.15*</b>
Social Role/ Image	.39	.76	.61	0.04	0.4337	.47	0.048
Hedonic/ Pleasure	.63	.79	.57	<b>0.43</b>	<b>5.2175***</b>	.57	<b>0.14*</b>
Attitude towards Ads	.77	.87	.69	N.A.	N.A.	.83	N.A.
<b>Control Variables</b>							
Age	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	<b>0.15</b>	<b>2.1515*</b>	N.A.	N.A.
Gender	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	-0.04	0.5904	N.A.	N.A.

R<sup>2</sup> for Attitude towards Ads = .30

\* p<.05 \*\* p<.01 \*\*\* p<.001

To establish the stability and significance of the parameter estimates, the t-statistics were computed using 500 bootstrap samples. The results of the PLS structural model testing are presented in Table 3 above, along with the Cronbach's alphas and path coefficients from Pollay and Mittal (1993).



## Comparison of the structural models and discussion

Of the three personal beliefs of advertising, two proved to be significant—Product Information and Hedonic/Pleasure. The strongest result, however, was for Hedonic/Pleasure ( $\beta=.43$ ,  $p<.001$ ). This suggests that people's attitudes towards advertisements in general improved when they perceive advertisements to be entertaining or enjoyable. Comparing this result with Pollay and Mittal's (1993) student sample, our result confirms that this factor is important and may have significantly increased in importance since their original study, as their path coefficient was much lower ( $\beta=.14$ ,  $p<.05$ ). As the path coefficient for Hedonic/Pleasure is much higher in our current research, this could indicate a greater role for advertising as a source of entertainment or pleasure and an important driver of Aad.

We also confirm Pollay and Mittal's (1993) result showing the importance of the Product Information role of advertising, which is also a significant predictor of Aad ( $\beta=.17$ ,  $p<.01$ ), as our result is almost identical to Pollay and Mittal's path coefficient ( $\beta=.15$ ,  $p<.05$ ). This suggests that respondents are still using advertising as a source of product information. Also, consistent with Pollay and Mittal, we found that the Social Role/Image factor did not influence Aad. However, the low scores for this dimension may be due to a 'resistance' from respondents to the idea that they are socially influenced by advertising, particularly young people who would be reluctant to admit to others that they buy things to impress others (item 4) or even to 'reflect' who they are (item 6).

In order to check whether our results were affected by extraneous variables, we also included age and gender as control variables to predict Aad. Our results reveal that gender was not statistically significant, suggesting that there are no gender differences in our respondents' Aad. In contrast, however, our age variable was statistically significant ( $\beta=.15$ ,  $p<.05$ ). This suggests that the older the respondent, the more positive his or her Aad, and the younger the respondent, the lower the Aad. This is an interesting finding, and it provides evidence supporting arguments that younger respondents may be more cynical about advertising than older respondents. It is possible that younger people have become increasingly media-savvy and view advertisements more negatively than older people. Despite this, our results still suggest that they believe that advertising is useful to them, as it fulfils Product Information and Hedonic/Pleasure needs.

Our results therefore suggest that there has been a shift in the personal beliefs of advertising since Pollay and Mittal's (1993) original study, with much greater importance being placed on the entertainment and information value of advertising. Last, our results suggest that the idea of advertising having a social role which assists people in personal image creation and which drives their attitude towards advertisements is not supported by our findings. The implication of this is that that the students in our sample derive their information about Social Role/Image aspects through means other than advertising, e.g., the internet and friends.

## Conclusion

This study has replicated part of Pollay and Mittal's (1993) study to focus on the personal beliefs of advertising and their effects on Attitudes towards Advertisements. Our results suggest that respondents have generally positive attitudes towards advertisements. Further, two factors—product information and hedonic/pleasure—were found to be important predictors of their attitudes towards advertising. These results, when compared with their sample 1, support the Pollay and Mittal findings that Hedonic/Pleasure and Product Information are significant. Importantly, the Hedonic/Pleasure function of advertising in our study is three times stronger than the result reported in Pollay and Mittal's study, which suggests that there has been a major shift in the personal belief of advertising. Further research is, therefore, recommended to understand this change. A possible explanation for the shift may lie in shifts to new media by later generations, although having the studies undertaken in two similar, but different, countries may also have an influence. Finally, given how poorly the items performed as measures of these latent variables, it is important for future research to develop and validate new, improved measures of these personal belief variables.

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**Proceedings of the 2011 Australian and New Zealand Communication Association Conference  
Communication on the Edge**

**PREFACE**

Welcome to the proceedings of the 2011 conference of the Australian and New Zealand Communication Association:  
*Communication on the Edge*.

The conference was hosted by the University of Waikato, New Zealand, at the University of Waikato campus in Hamilton. The conference theme was deliberately open to broad interpretation, to capture the spirit of communication at the cutting edge of a rapidly changing world and inspire us to consider the impact of such change on communities and organisations. Delegates and invited speakers gathered over three days in July to consider a broad range of communication perspectives across 24 conference streams and experience the changing bicultural identity of Aotearoa New Zealand, including diverse forms of communication, Māori korero and tikanga, and communication as 'performance'.

The conference opened on Wednesday morning with a *whakatau*, our keynote speakers were acknowledged and supported with *waiata* (songs) following their presentations, and wherever possible we added details that represented our Māori heritage. For example, delegates were given little *taonga* (treasures) representing *poi* used in traditional action songs, and keynote speakers received gifts handcrafted by Māori *kaumatua* (elders) working with us on research projects. Conference delegates were officially welcomed by the Deputy Vice-Chancellor Alister Jones, and we concluded the conference with a *poroporoaki* (de-brief) as an opportunity to reflect on the conference.

The opening keynote speaker was Professor Cynthia Stohl, University of California, Santa Barbara, whose presentation was very relevant to delegates across all streams of interest, and focused on *Paradoxes of global connectivity: Boundary permeability, technological variability, and organizational durability*. Our second keynote speaker was internationally renowned New Zealand film-maker Gaylene Preston, who talked about the stories behind her recent film *Home by Christmas*. A public screening of *Home by Christmas* was shown to delegates and members of the public on Wednesday evening. On Thursday morning the keynote speaker was Professor Linda Tuhiwai Smith, Pro-Vice Chancellor Māori and Dean of the School of Māori and Pacific Development at the University of Waikato. Professor Smith captivated the audience with her thoughtful discussion of *Kaupapa Māori working the edges pushing the boundaries transforming spaces*. We also had a plenary 'conversation' with Tainui Stephens, an independent film and television producer, writer, director, and presenter. His comments on a range of social issues affecting bicultural development were widely appreciated by the ANZCA audience. Our final keynote speaker was Professor Michael Stohl, University of California, Santa Barbara, whose presentation focused on *Terrorism, Identities, Organizations and Shifting Boundaries*, a topic very relevant in today's world.

Kerry McCallum, ANZCA President, coordinated a plenary panel that discussed *Evaluating academic research: Challenges, issues, and opportunities for communication academics in new research assessment frameworks*, which was of wide interest to ANZCA scholars. Two other special interest panels led by Terry Flew and Margie Comrie focused respectively on the *Australian National Classification Scheme Review*, and on *Teaching journalism in 2011: Technologies, techniques, trials and tribulations*.

The organising committee is proud to present a strong body of published work in this collection of proceedings from the 2011 ANZCA conference. Of the 134 papers presented during the three days of the conference, 44 fully refereed papers are included in this volume, each of which has been subject to double-blind peer reviewing. The papers represent the diverse research and teaching interests in which ANZCA members and delegates are engaged, across 23 conference streams including: Advertising and Communication, Age, Ageism and Elder Identities, Children and Communication, Communication and Creativity, Communication and Pedagogy, Communication Ethics, Contemporary Social Movements, Disability and Communication, Gender and Communication, Health Communication, Indigenous Media, Intercultural communication, Interpersonal communication, Journalism and News Media, Media and Citizenship, Media and Religion, Mobile, Digital and Social Media, Organisational Communication, Political Communication, Public Relations, Revisiting Documentary, Science and Environment Communication, and Sports Communication.

The following prizes and awards were presented at the 2011 Conference: Grant Noble Prize for Best Paper submitted by a Postgraduate Student (supported by the Faculty of Arts, University of New England, Australia): Kris Vavasour - *Music to watch girls by: Pop songs and carnival culture at the 2007 Netball World Championships*; Christopher Newell Prize for Best Paper dealing with disability and communication, or questions of equity, diversity and social justice as pertaining to communication: Frank Sligo - *Although they are looking at the words they are not actually reading: Apprentices liminal literacy and literacy tutors dilemmas*; Peoples Choice Best Scholarly Contribution: Amanda Bateman, *Watch, listen and learn: Analysing childrens social conduct through their communication*. Kris Vavasour's paper will feature in the *Australian Journal of Communication*, 38(2), 2011, and the remaining papers are included in these proceedings.

We thank delegates, presenters, guest speakers, members of the organising committee and student volunteers from the University of Waikato for making the ANZCA 2011 conference such a memorable and enjoyable event. We look forward to seeing many of you again at our next conference, to be hosted by the University of Adelaide, Australia, from 4-6 July 2012. For further information about the conference, to submit a paper or register your attendance, contact the conference organizers, [Professor Kerry Green](#) or [Dr Chika Anyanwu](#).

Alison Henderson, Conference Convenor, ANZCA 2011 conference planning team

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