**Which half of your budget is being wasted?**

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--Through the 195 Persuasion Principles, the “Goldbach Conjecture” in advertising industry can be solved easily.

More than a century ago, renowned department store owner John Wanamaker was reputed to have said, “Half the money I spend on advertising is wasted; the trouble is I don’t know which half.” More than a hundred years later, his question is still the “Goldbach Conjecture” in advertising.

J. Scott Armstrong, Professor of Marketing at the Wharton School in the University of Pennsylvania has solved this question through tens of years of research. Scott thinks the reason the performance of an advertisement is hard to predict is because it involves so many variables. According to recent research, on average, 85 variables are involved in designing one ad. The complicated interaction between these variables results in the difficulty in performance prediction.

In his book *Persuasive Advertising,* Armstrong summarized 195 Persuasion Principles basing on over 3000 studies during the past century. The principles are organized into 10 groups, like information, emotion, message, attention, etc. Also, it tells advertisers what to do through evaluating the principles from another three dimensions: strategy, tactics and media.

These principles ignite advertisers’ creativity. What’s more, advertisers can use the Persuasion Principles Audit and Persuasion Principles Index to evaluate the performance of ads so as to make right choice and save budget.

**Wrong common sense**

According to Armstrong, many of the principles are against common sense. So they are frequent errors in advertising. In daily life, lots of ads violate some of the principles and their performance has been affected.

A good example is the warning message on an ad. In ads for cigarettes and alcohol, it’s not hard to find warnings like: “smoking is bad for your health” or “excessive consumption of alcohol is bad for your health.” Normally, these warnings are mandated by government to protect consumer.

However, these warnings don’t work as expected. Armstrong conducted lots of experiments on Mandatory Disclaimers. According to the data collected, disclaimers not only can not warn consumers but also can confuse them into making worse decisions. Sometimes, it causes reverse psychology. The existing intention and action of consumers might be strengthened. About this issue, Armstrong suggests government to stay outside and give freedom of speech to ads.

Of course, more principles target advertisers through pointing out what to stress and what to avoid, especially those principles against common sense. He provided two examples of frequently violated principles.

Principle 1: don’t mix rational and emotional appeals.

Many advertisers like to combine emotional and rational appeals inside their ads trying to move more consumers.

The result turns to be the opposite. In one experiment collecting funds for children, the researchers used two ads. One described the poverty of the children, the other described the same thing plus how the donation could help them. The result turns out the first one attracts more donations.

Armstrong believes the second ad triggers donators to think about what they actually can do or to think their donation is too minimal. He made many comparison experiments on the same topic. The results turned to be the same: ads utilized only one appeal are1.24 times more persuasive than with both.

Principle 2: don’t ask customers to evaluate their satisfaction while using a product.

This is another common error of advertisers. As consumer experience becomes more important, to invite consumers to experience the product or evaluate it is common among advertisers. They believe the feedback from consumers helps them improve their products.

Armstrong believes consumers look for disadvantages in the product more critically under the situation. The evaluation brings them bad experience and causes negative impact.

In practice, many advertisers don’t like the results from experiments and they prefer to trust their own experience. But actually, a lot of common sense people live on violates the Persuasive Advertising Principles. Thus, for advertisers, the 195 principles can be a brain storm.

**What’s the score for your ad?**

To utilize the 195 principles in practice is a big project.

Lucky enough, one ad does not involve all the principles. But advertisers are still confused by how to predict the performance of their ads through these principles.

To solve this problem, Armstrong designed the Persuasion Principles Audit. Users can test where does the ad follows the Persuasion Principles and where it does not. Combining the two calculates an Armstrong Index. When there are several designs to decide, AI can be a reference.

Another method is Persuasion Principles Index. The inspiration for PPI came from Benjamin Franklin. In 1772, Franklin wrote a letter to his friend suggesting him to list all important variables at the extent to which each variable favors each alternative, and to then add the ratings to see which alternative is better. The method Franklin described forms the rudiments of the index method that we use in this paper.

PPI was designed by Armstrong mainly to evaluate changes in consumer behaviors. It includes 5 steps: first, user decides which principles are relevant; then evaluates these principles. Generally, principles have more proofs in the ad will be rated higher. Strategy principles will have higher score than tactics. Step 3: rating. Five raters will rate the relevant principles. Principles with more than 3 raters agreed on will be a Consensus rating; step 4 calculates PPI. PPI is an unweighted average of Creativity Score and Weighted Mastery Score. Finally, ad with higher PPI score is predicted to be more persuasive.

To test the accuracy of PPI, Armstrong conducted comparison experiments. He selected 96 pairs of ads. Each pair is for the same product. Among these pairs, PPI successfully predicted which one is more persuasive in 75% of them.

Many advertisers worry about which design to pick from piles of ads. After frustrating debate, they still are not able to pick the best one. This is the “wasted half” of the budget. However, everything inside one ad, like color, music, message, emotion, ration, etc. can all be quantified. Print ads or motion ads can all be turned into a score. Then making decision will be an easy question: What’s the score of your ad?