

Advertising effectiveness from the hermeneutic standpoint

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Quite often customers fail to understand the message embedded in the marketing campaign. Consequently highly appreciated campaigns that were awarded prestigious awards did not deliver the goods. Advertising is a substantial component in the companies' marketing efforts, budgeted accordingly. However it turns out that the effectiveness of advertising is hard to measure, thus difficult to tell the success factors.

The failures of advertising campaigns have been investigated intensively in the literature, and few explanations were suggested. Mostly popular was the cognitive explanation, which emphasizes the data processing mechanism within the customer's mind. A distant second approach was based on social-cultural variables, related to the customers' cultural background.

The cognitive stance is criticized for being too narrow: while focusing on data processing it ignores the meaning of that data; furthermore, psychologists are blamed for neglecting too often the social context within which the individual exists [Douglas]. Since much of the advertising failures are not explainable through the available cognitive or cultural lenses, the need for an alternative approach is undeniable.

Our contribution builds on the criticism of the cognitive narrowness and takes the cultural stance a step farther, applying the hermeneutic tradition. Originally developed for interpreting the Scriptures, hermeneutics expanded later over various disciplines like literature and history. Closer to our interest, hermeneutics was used in nursing research in order to better understand the nurse-patient relationships.

The problem which hermeneutics targets is the misinterpretation of texts distant in generation or language, caused by cultural gap. Clearly the gap stretched between two parties, one of which the interpreter. Unlike the common wisdom that the other is the subject for understanding, the hermeneutics holds the opposite: the interpreter should explore his own mind. This self-exploration assists in narrowing the gap between the interpreter and the other party.

Beyond the humanities, this concept was firstly applied in the nursing discipline. In this field the gap between the nurse and the patient is immanent. During the 1990's the hermeneutic approach was applied in order to lead the nurse toward better understanding of the patient's reality. We suggest narrowing down the gap between the advertiser and the target customer using the hermeneutics approach, namely driving the copywriter to appreciate her own state of mind. By that the marketing message can be better decoded by the addressee.