

THE ADVERTISING REGULATION AND SELF-REGULATION ISSUES RIPPED FROM THE HEADLINES WITH (SOMETIMES MISSED) OPPORTUNITIES FOR DISCIPLINED MULTIDISCIPLINARY RESEARCH

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ABSTRACT: With a focus on advertising, the most visible and publicly criticized marketing activity, issues that impel advertising regulation and self-regulation themselves often generate headlines in the popular press as well as business magazines. Beyond the basic longtime concerns of advertising veracity, or accusations of its inherent dishonesty, advertising regulation often becomes the advocated solution for problems of public health, privacy invasions, excessive consumer debt, and public aesthetics, as well as social critics' desires to diminish the modern cultural trait of secular consumerism (i.e., "excessive shopping"). The problem is that actual research on the issues requires more than responding to the headlines. The model for understanding the existing literature of advertising and public policy research presented by Rotfeld and Stafford (2007) provides pragmatic guidelines for conducting quality research that is informed by and possibly guides advertising regulation and self-regulation decisions. The resulting inherently interesting future publications would be interdisciplinary, pandisciplinary, and multidisciplinary, but also needing discipline.

Not unlike the plethora of television police procedural programs, academic articles on advertising regulation have extensive pedantic introductory paragraphs "ripped from today's headlines." The examples are numerous; the practice is nearly universal. These multiparagraph introductions can actually be reduced to single sentences and take forms such as:

- "People are fat, various government or public health organizations can be cited that say so, and proposed solutions involve restrictions on the advertising of carbonated soft drinks, fast food, and candy."
- "Cigarettes can cause premature death and smokers start smoking at a young age despite restrictions on sales to young people under 18 years old, so advertising restrictions are an advocated solution."
- "Young people consume alcoholic beverages and advertising messages can reduce their use or abuse."
- "Some advertising messages are misleading, some advertisers lie, and a government agency has issued a new trade regulation rule or special order in a recent case on deceptive advertising."
- "Since certain people are more likely to abuse alcohol than others, a comparison of advertising content or

mass media that carries the content supposedly reveals the problems with regulatory solutions proposed."

- "Identity theft is on the rise, with misleading online advertising the implied culprit."
- "Buzz agents, product placements, and other covert marketing activities grab unwary consumers into excessive purchase situations."
- "Pharmaceutical companies spend millions of dollars to educate doctors of the value of new brand name products, but the corporate goal might include manipulation of doctors, or, with direct-to-consumer advertising, the duping of malleable patients."

It has become the standard practice; almost everyone writes this type of introduction. At conference sessions dealing with advertising regulation, the first couple minutes of each new presentation spend obligatory time repeatedly citing and re-citing the same statistics that everyone in the audience must know. However, the problem is not repetitive introductions, but instead, that the news headlines become the overarching value and guide for conducting research. Actually, there are two interrelated problems.

First, for publication in a research journal, the value of a study should be in terms of what is known from the existing research literature and what incremental new insights can be gained from additional data. Citations to a plethora of statistics or other studies saying people are fat or that the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) just ordered corrective advertising for a heavily prescribed drug puts the news reports ahead of any conceptual or theoretical research questions. Admittedly, sometimes a regulatory question is just what works in the specific case, such as proposed labels for dietary supplements

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(see, e.g., Mason, Scammon, and Fang 2007). While these are sometimes published as short pragmatic reports in special sections of public policy journals, such as the “Bits, Briefs and Applications” section of the *Journal of Consumer Affairs*, these are not news-driven articles. They apply consumer research in the context of regulatory concerns. And it would be a mistake to say that just data alone would be sufficient even in these cases. The broad context of theoretical perspectives provides a context for that data, predicts what types of proposals might work in the future, and prevents confusion of coincidence and cause. (For discussion of the need for theoretical perspectives even in individual application of another regulatory arena, see Lyons and Neelakantan 2008; see also Rotfeld 2007.)

Second, and probably more important, a focus on headlines of advertising criticisms or business news of recent regulatory actions impel a research focus on traditional research experiments or content analysis, and possibly even simplistic, quickly gathered data in response to a “hot” topic. At worst, this results in abuses of data, overblown statements of results, or studies conducted with methods familiar to the researcher that might not actually address the broader questions of regulatory importance (as pointed out by Carlson 2008 on content analysis, or Royne 2008 on experiments). At best, this misses the pragmatic research needs for information that can guide public policy.

Since the regulatory issues are legal, using data from social science as evidence, the academic need is to first understand the regulatory evidence and then seek the different social science perspectives that can provide that evidence (see, e.g., Preston 1980, 2009; Richards 1990, 2009; Rotfeld 1991). Self-regulation gains power as well as impetus from regulation, so a simple review of “the marketing literature” or “the communications literature” would be inadequate to acquire necessary conceptual insight. Quality research from multiple paradigms makes it cross disciplinary boundaries, and possibly makes the needed research discipline more difficult because the researcher might be going into unfamiliar terrain (Rotfeld 2009). A full understanding of the issues often requires insight from different traditions or different research areas.

CONSUMER FEARS OF ADVERTISING

Because of the ubiquity of advertising, many members of the general public possess strong beliefs that they understand how advertising works. At the same time, some advertisers have helped advertising earn a less than stellar reputation with the public by engaging in deceptive practices (Gallup 2006). This aspect of the field, along with the significant consumer fears, play into a research environment with incentives to study “hot” topics ripped from the headlines more than the cumulative body of decades of academic research on advertising topics. The idea that consumers might be manipulated by hidden

messages provides the most enduring example of consumers’ fear of advertising’s power. It has given rise to some unusual regulatory discussions, spreading from simple deception regulation to proposals for new policies on product placement (see, e.g., Matthes, Schemer, and Wirth 2007; Rotfeld 2008).

Some recent examples of headlines and subsequent discussions illustrate how headlines that grab attention can call advertising or promotional practices into question:

In December 2008, a 34-year-old Wal-Mart employee was trampled to death by a predawn crowd rushing into a store as they eagerly sought to be the first in line for special sales on the day considered the kickoff of the U.S. Christmas holiday buying season. In addition to claims that the store failed to provide adequate security protection, a lawsuit filed by the estate and relatives of the deceased claimed that the store’s advertising was a proximate cause of the tragedy.

In early 2009, owing to concern over pharmaceutical sales practices, the U.S. pharmaceutical industry agreed to a voluntary ban on giving out branded promotional items such as coffee mugs, pens, or soap dispensers. Where doctors’ offices are decorated with a plethora of these brand name items, the specialty advertising trinkets are accused of increasing medical costs by causing physicians to prescribe allegedly overpriced brand names instead of less expensive regulatory-certified generic equivalents.

The impact of subliminal messages, defined as those received below the threshold of consciousness, has long been a headline-driven topic for marketing literature, despite the lack of a scintilla of theoretical perspectives or substantive data that this form of communication can provide a means of persuasive messages that might impact consumer thinking or cause changes in consumer behavior (see, e.g., Broyles 2006; Moore 1988). As is stated by O’Guinn, Allen, and Semenik in an advertising textbook: “[Any] effects are very short lived and found only in laboratories, not the Svengali-type hocus-pocus that has become advertising mythology. If the rumors are true that advertisers are actually using subliminal messages in their ads, the conclusion should be that they are wasting their money” (2004, p. 122). In spite of the lack of any case that it could work or that anyone actually employs subliminal advertising with a persuasive impact on consumers, the term and idea remain in the public’s consciousness.

Ironically, the recent increase in the application of neuromarketing techniques has generated concomitant concerns about subliminal manipulation or mind control. While research on ethical, and potentially, regulatory issues in neuromarketing is needed, the tendency to rely on “ripped from the headlines” thinking can detract from a focus on advances that are being made that can potentially be beneficial to advertisers and/or consumers (see, e.g., Plassman et al. 2007; Wilson, Gaines, and Hill 2008). For example, interesting research on issues on topics that would not appear to be controversial, such as

whether consumers remember ads viewed in fast-forward mode (Siefert et al. 2008) or the degree to which attentiveness to an ad contributes to increases in purchase intention (see, e.g., Milosavljevic and Cerf 2008), can become hidden amidst the controversy.

Clearly the regulation of advertising is a topic that needs to be informed by high-quality research from multiple perspectives. Starting papers off with the standard ripped-from-the-headlines introduction has the potential drawback of calling attention to consumer fears associated with advertising rather than keeping a dispassionate focus on the research question at hand. Certainly, it is fair game to position a paper in the context of a debate over regulation; however, it is important to examine both sides of the debate and to fully take into account the extant theoretical literature.

The same less than holistic, and often one-sided, view of marketing activities as being manipulative of consumers is behind the lawsuit blaming marketing for a tragic death or crediting specialty advertising as the cause for unnecessary prescription spending. Each provides a wealth of "hot" topics for research, and the value of the research as noted in the introductory paragraphs of manuscripts are often based on these headlines.

AN EXPLANATORY MODEL OF ADVERTISING REGULATION RESEARCH

The Rotfeld and Stafford typology of research, originally composed to review past studies on broader issues of public policy, provides guidance for advertising regulation and self-regulation research in appropriate and relevant directions. It illustrates how research can be effective in cross-disciplinary studies, and gives a basis for additional guidelines for moving the field of research on advertising regulation forward. The typology also points out the nature and problems of conducting cross-disciplinary research, since the perspectives of researchers is not an accident. A scholar's background influences how problems are perceived and how issues are defined.

In his conference presentations, classes, and writing, the late dean of the College of Communications at the University of Illinois, Kim Rotzoll, frequently described a problem of research on advertising and social issues with an old joke he first heard from one of his colleagues. In a tale of castaway professors, a physicist, an engineer, and an economist have salvaged only a can of beans from their sunken ship and are stranded on a deserted island. The physicist says, "We put a can on the fire, forcing it to open from the built-up internal pressure." The engineer says, "I can design a containment tray so we can catch and hold any of the food that comes out of the can as it opens." The economist then says, "Assume we have a can opener . . ." (see, e.g., Rotzoll, Haefner, and Sandage 1976, p. x). Rotzoll's student expands on the joke, putting a

few more people on the island, with a lawyer who writes rules for allocating the food based on each person's expected nutrition and emotional needs, complete with detailed procedures for appeals by people who feel they need an extra share. An advertising manager, after wandering down the beach at the start of the discussion, returns to announce success in finding debris on the beach that can be used to open the cans. The engineer can now tinker with design, the cans are really open for the economist, the lawyer's rules might be used, and the physicist can really eat.

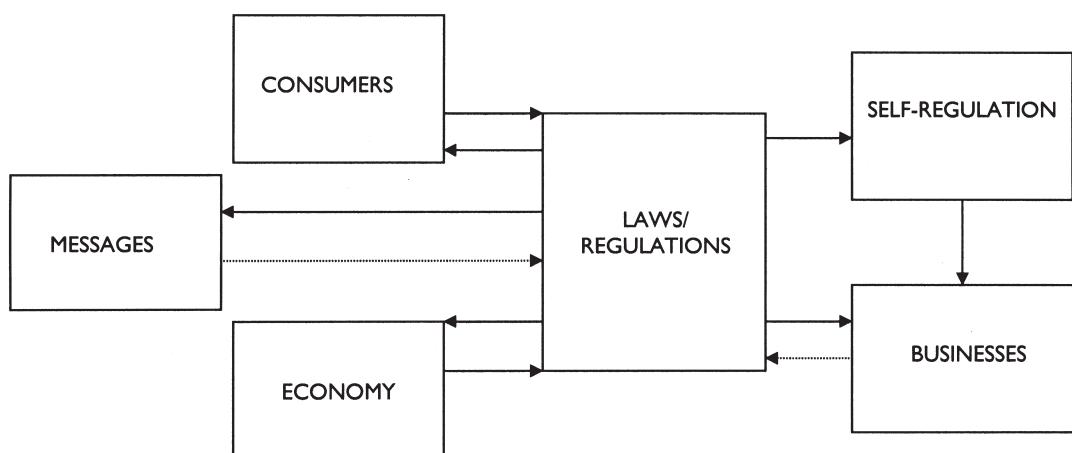
The advertising field within academia is somewhat unique in that it is a primary area of study for individuals working in journalism or communications colleges as well as for faculty who work in marketing departments of business schools. The combined perspectives have, no doubt, enriched the field. Nevertheless, when it comes to societal issues and advertising regulation, in particular, the literature can be enriched by even more diverse perspectives, as many advertising phenomena clearly overlap with fields such as law, psychology, anthropology, medicine, sociology, history, and economics, among others.

As evidenced in Rotzoll's joke, multiple perspectives that emanate from people who are educated and trained differently can help advance the literature and influence policy decision. This is particularly important with regulation research that requires a variety of methodologies and approaches to be applied, and different backgrounds frame the issues.

Clearly, multidisciplinary perspectives have the potential to advance knowledge. Yet two types of balance need to occur for such perspectives to be of maximum effectiveness. First, at least one member of the multidisciplinary research team should be familiar with the cumulative body of knowledge on the policy subject of interest. This is necessary to avoid simply accepting the most recent headlines as reality, and instead developing theoretical perspectives and research designs taking into account what the advertising field already knows about the phenomenon at hand.

A second type of balance that needs to occur when assessing advertising regulation topics is to keep in mind the various audiences for whom such research is relevant. It is in this vein that the application of the Rotfeld-Stafford typology is relevant in that its main contribution draws a holistic consideration of a research issue in the context of possible regulation or self-regulation. For example, Petty (2008) points out uses, abuses, and presumptions of appellate court decisions based on their own presumptions of consumer interpretations of brand names. Wilcox, Kamal, and Gangadharbatla (2009) examine economic effects of advertising as well as the perspective of both the consumer and company in researching whether soft drink advertising expenditures have an impact on aggregate demand for soft drinks. In addition to an econometric analysis, the article explores the impact of advertising on consumers

FIGURE 1
Rotfeld/Stafford Model of Advertising and Public Policy Research



Source: Rotfeld and Stafford (2007), p. 72.

and the motives of business in advertising, providing evidence that restricting or banning soft drink advertising would not have an impact on primary demand for soft drinks. Kopp and Kemp (2007) also provide a holistic view of marketing and advertising regulation in the death care industry, analyzing both consumer and business concerns, as well as the existing regulatory framework.

The focal point of the model (see Figure 1) is the large center box labeled "Laws and Regulations," because the laws themselves form the foundation of government-based consumer protection. Analyses of issues must start from the point of familiarity with the current state of regulation.

Of course, not all analyses of the social effects of advertising practices need to propose a legal remedy, but then these are not studies of advertising regulation. For example, some studies of portrayals of minority groups in advertising have suggested that stereotypes of specific minority groups (see, e.g., Taylor and Stern 1997) exist in advertising. Or consider that research has shown that picture–text incongruity in advertising has a negative effect on low-literacy consumers (Jae, Delvecchio, and Cowles 2008). Yet the authors do not recommend regulatory or self-regulatory solutions to these societal issues, such as a law or mandating that advertisers portray a minority group in a certain way or that a government agency review ads to ensure congruent information between the picture and text of an ad. Rather, the authors of both studies recommend that advertisers be attentive to these issues and the latter study recommends that marketers include visual aids at the point of purchase to help low-literacy consumers.

While laws and regulations should be at the center of research on advertising regulation, the impact on other stakeholders should be considered as well. Not every study needs to explicitly collect data pertaining to all of the stakeholders

shown in the model. In making recommendations, however, these various perspectives should be considered.

The three boxes to the left side of the model (see Figure 1) represent three areas of research that can address key impacts of regulatory actions: advertising strategy, consumer behavior, and economics. This, of course, forms the areas that provide the evidence used for regulatory decisions. Because of its long history and its status as the "mother discipline" of business education, economic analyses of marketing topics have long been considered important by lawyers and regulators. Actually, it is only in recent decades that studies conducted by marketing academics have gained some influence in the regulatory realm.

Studying the advertising practices themselves (see, e.g., Lee et al. 2009; Sheehan 2007) is also a common practice and one that can be beneficial if stakeholders are considered. Normally, studies in this realm investigate advertising content or the types of images portrayed. These studies are often motivated by an existing regulation or a regulation or self-regulatory guideline that is being considered. However, as indicated by the dotted arrow to the right from advertising to government action, these studies appear to have only limited influence on subsequent regulatory actions. Too often, the studies that focus on this box are overly descriptive and do not consider enough other components of the model.

While consumer research is clearly of interest to advertising regulators, a legacy of the past ties to economics persists, at least to some extent, at the Federal Trade Commission (FTC), the FDA, and other agencies. On the one hand, it is clear that relevant consumer research studies published in business journals are welcomed and encouraged by staff in these agencies, especially if they appear in publications they have indicated they regularly read, such as *Journal of Consumer Affairs* or

Journal of Public Policy and Marketing. On the other hand, the FTC has a large staff of economists whose training primarily involves economic analyses and who operate in an environment where “consumer research” findings must be applied within the context of legal decisions. Just because a regulatory question or case deals with an advertising issue does not mean that the law will be adjusted to conform to common definitions used in consumer research (e.g., as noted by Preston 1980, 1983, 2009; Richards 1990, 2009). Thus, when consumer researchers want to conduct relevant research, they must keep in mind that many studies that purport to be on advertising regulation topics are not necessarily relevant to decisions by regulators. For example, highly theoretical exercises on a topic such as how consumers process information may lead to long-term academic gains but give those at the regulatory agencies little they can use or work with. Again, keeping in mind the full view provided by the Rotfeld-Stafford typology helps to avoid this problem.

The two-way relationship between the boxes on the left on “consumers” and advertising content and the central box on “regulations” in the model is limited. This is because it is too infrequent that links to the other realm are made effectively. Just as lawyers have sometimes been accused of making statements that mischaracterize how advertising is used in business, advertising scholars sometimes ignore legal definitions and realities in making recommendations (Rotfeld 2009). Working in cross-functional research teams can help lead to more actionable recommendations.

Laws and regulations also influence “self-regulation” activities, illustrated by the one-way influence from the center box. Self-regulation is not an arm of the government, yet government activity does influence self-regulation activities as a collective set of business decisions (Rotfeld 2001), hence the one-way line from government to self-regulation. Actual or threatened government regulations provide a context and comparative for viewing various self-regulation activities. At a basic level, these can involve reviews of various self-regulation practices, descriptions of cases, or possibly assessments of the relationship between laws and self-regulation practice. For instance, Boddewyn (1989) pointed out that the government prefers to leave sex and decency issues to the industry, while Rotfeld (1992) noted that stations self-regulate through the use of their own decisions or internal business guidelines.

In the end, laws as well as regulations influence actual “business practices,” and advertising researchers can assess the pragmatic influences that these constraints exert on business decision making, as reported in surveys, depth interviews with managers, or, at a more macro level, in assessments of the economic effects of regulatory actions. These influences can be as simple as having all advertising copy proofed by a legal department to ensure a defensible legal position (Morgan and

Stoltman 1997). Rotfeld (1992, 2003) suggests that the mere existence of advertising regulations has a positive effect on practice because such regulations generate a strong incentive for advertisers to tell the truth.

As noted, the building of an integrated understanding of advertising regulation and self-regulation requires a variety of approaches to research, and sometimes a review of the areas *between* the boxes requires a scholar to understand multiple perspectives or research paradigms. A quantitative mass communications scholar might be impelled to learn legal analysis and case reviews to compare the history of an issue under common law rules of *stare decisis*; a lawyer can have added insight from the completion of a doctorate in mass communications. And a combined perspective utilizing the training of people with both perspectives might help a research team review the law and applications and come up with conclusions about better ways to assess policy (see, e.g., Preston 2003), or call on the government to improve regulatory activity to better serve the consumers’ and societal interests (Preston 1994). This latter approach is likely the most feasible for most scholars.

ADDITIONAL SUGGESTIONS FOR CONDUCTING RESEARCH ON ADVERTISING REGULATION

In addition to careful consideration of the full range of relevant issues and stakeholders, a review of the literature leads to several suggestions for conducting high-quality research on advertising regulation and self-regulation.

The Need to Give Two-Sided Arguments

Perhaps the most problematic aspect of some articles that are ripped from the headlines is the tendency to cite prior academic literature that is supportive of their positions while ignoring literature that has reached opposing conclusions. As noted by Rotfeld and Stafford (2007), there seems to be a greater risk of this happening in “out of field” journals, whether this involves advertising scholars publishing in other fields or scholars from other fields publishing in advertising journals; it is possibly a product of the reviewers having a lower level of familiarity with the full array of relevant literature.

For example, some articles that have appeared in prestigious medical journals on food, pharmaceutical, or tobacco advertising appear to present a one-sided view of the issue (see McConnell and Dubas 2004). This could also explain the examples of conclusions that go beyond what the data or method validly allow, as the research is swept up by headline-induced presumptions (Carlson 2008). As noted by Rotfeld (2009), some law or medical journal articles make presumptions about mass communications theories that business or mass communications scholars would find to be inconsistent with material contained in introductory advertising textbooks (see

also Preston 2009; Richards 2009), and business publications sometimes make similar erroneous statements about the law. As many editorial review boards of marketing and advertising journals do not contain many lawyers or finance professors, articles related to legal issues or financial information might ignore relevant literature and such errors would not be as effectively detected in the review process.

To guard against the potential for following a ripped-from-the-headlines approach, where only research that supports the criticisms made in the news is used, authors should set out to provide a comprehensive review of the literature that explores both sides of an issue. In doing so, they are more likely to make a persuasive case to both the general audience of the journal and to policymakers.

The Need to Employ Appropriate (and Often Advanced) Methodologies

Of course, the choice of the methodology used in a study needs to be based on the research question at hand. However, a few generalizations about areas where more studies could be used can be made. As noted in the literature review contained in the Rotfeld and Stafford (2007) study, experimental research is not as commonly employed in research on advertising regulation. This is unfortunate, given that experiments are widely considered to be the most effective method to gain insights on cause and effect (Royne 2008). While experiments do face the challenge of attempting to maintain real-world applicability while simultaneously holding many variables constant, they have the ability to provide a deeper insight into the "whys" behind consumer response in many instances (Taylor 2005).

With a growing body of knowledge in several areas of advertising regulation research, meta-analyses can provide a quantitative summary of all the studies done in an area. While it is necessary for a sufficient number of studies to have measured that same effect to successfully conduct a quantitative meta-analysis, the result of these studies can be particularly useful to policymakers by providing an understanding of what the cumulative state of knowledge on a very specific issue is. Recent examples of such studies in the advertising regulation realm are Keller and Lehmann's (2008) assessment of the literature on effective message tactics for health communications and Capella, Taylor, and Webster's (2008) study of the relationship between bans on cigarette advertising and consumption of cigarettes.

One other area ripe for contribution is surveys that focus on unique or difficult-to-contact samples. For example, Rod and Saunders (2009) study the much-researched topic of persuasive versus informative components of direct-to-consumer (DTC) advertising. However, they were able to make a unique contribution by conducting interviews of both health-care practitioners and pharmaceutical salespeople.

Another suggestion is that, where appropriate, multimethod studies can make unique contributions to the literature. For example, while content analysis remains a commonly used technique (e.g., Roberts and Pettigrew 2007) in advertising regulation research, some authors are now using content analysis to better identify a research question or aspect of a study's design and then use another research technique in the same study. For example, Kim, Cheong, and Zheng (2009) employ a content analysis of advertising claims in food advertising and then follow up with a quasi-experiment where the claim type is developed with the aid of information learned in the content analysis. One other area where content analysis has been used effectively is in assessing whether a regulatory guideline is being followed. For example, Hoy and Lwin (2007) used content analysis to assess whether disclosures in banner ads actually adhere to FTC guidelines. While such studies do not have the ability to look at underlying motives of advertisers or consumer response, they can lay important groundwork for assessing whether the regulation is effective and suggest whether additional research is needed.

The Need for More Cross-Disciplinary Research Teams

Assuming that a focus is kept on having a full familiarity with relevant literature, cross-disciplinary teams can add considerable value to the literature. For example, Liu and Pearson's (2008) article on DTC marketing of predictive medial genetic tests, which makes use of both legal and empirical analysis, clearly benefits from the former author's background in marketing and the latter author's training in philosophy. Capella, Taylor, and Webster's (2008) study of whether DTC advertising affects prices of prescription drugs represents a case where marketing authors teamed with an economist to study an issue at the intersection of economics and advertising. Working cross-functionally can help avoid the issues discussed earlier pertaining to needing to know the definitions that are relevant to regulators.

The Need to Draw Appropriate Samples

A recent review of the nutritional labeling literature by Hieke (2007) concluded that many high-level studies have been conducted on this topic, but that sampling issues represent a significant limitation in looking at the overall literature. Hieke notes that effective use of nutritional labeling information has been shown to be moderated by factors such as education level, motivation, and existing nutritional knowledge. As college students have already reached a high educational level and have been shown to be, on average, more motivated to learn nutrition information, few generalizations to the broader population can be made if student subjects are used in this context. It may

well be that a certain type of disclosure can be of interest to an educated student group, but would not resonate with a broader sample of consumers (see Kemp et al. 2007 for a contrast of a study with a broad-based consumer sample).

While student samples certainly have their place for studies with certain types of goals, such as theory building, or instances in which the students are an important portion of the target audience, they often do not excite regulators because of justified concern about generalizability. On the other hand, studies of topical issues such as the impact of DTC advertising on samples of general consumers (e.g., Choi and Lee 2007; Lee, Salmon, and Paek 2007) or physicians (Huh and Langteau 2007) can be very much of interest to regulators. Qualitative studies using sample of interest to regulators can also make important contributions. For example, the use of qualitative interviews of pairs of friends (as well as focus groups) in a study of attitudes of 11- to 14-year-olds to antismoking messages by Devlin et al. (2007) helped provide an important contribution to the literature.

Too often, students are study subjects because they are available, not because they provide appropriate insight into a population impacted by an issue of advertising regulation. Clearly, some of this concern is justified, as evidenced by the findings of a recent study of consumer attitudes toward product placement by Sung, de Gregorio, and Jung (2009). In this study, the authors explicitly set out to determine whether attitudes of nonstudents were similar to those found in studies of student subjects, finding important differences on key areas of possible regulatory interest.

The Need for More Truly International Research Teams

To date, a high proportion of studies of advertising regulation issues published in prestigious journals have been published with a U.S. focus. There are some understandable reasons for this, such as the complex regulatory structure and active judicial system in the United States, as well as a high level of interest among some U.S. academics. In addition, policymakers who are overseeing regulation of practices in their own country will be most interested in data emanating from consumers from their own country. Still, in an age of globalization, where more firms are marketing products across the world than ever before, there is a need for regulation research in countries around the world. From an academic perspective, a wealth of knowledge from around the world can help facilitate theory building and advances in knowledge. Examining how a policy being considered in one country has worked in others may also be of interest on a more practical level.

While interest in research on advertising regulation in non-U.S. contexts appears to be increasing, the number of studies that focus on other countries remains a relatively small propor-

tion. Of course, there have been several exceptions to this (e.g., Ambler 2008; Ashton and Pressey 2008; Gao 2008; Laird and Fine 2008), and there appears to be an upward trend in the number of studies using data sets or analysis from outside the U.S. context. Beyond this, however, there is a relative lack of cross-national analyses and a lack of such research being conducted by cross-national teams.

Advertising regulation research is an area where cross-national comparative studies have been relatively rare. Exceptions include a recent study of disclaimers in children's television advertising in the United States and Turkey (Bakir 2009). Another example is Muk's (2007) study of whether privacy concerns affect young people in the United States and Korea in terms of opting in to SMS (short message service) advertising. A study by Schwaiger et al. (2007) represents a case where German and U.S. authors teamed to assess whether comparative advertising, or certain types of it, could be effective in Germany. An overview of the U.S. regulatory framework and practices as well as EU guidelines was helpful to the authors in designing and executing this study of comparative advertising in a market where it was only recently allowed. Paek, Yu, and Bae's (2009) study of antismoking messages on South Korean and U.S. Web sites, while not distinctly focused on regulatory or self-regulatory guidelines, provides an example of how cultural perspectives can be helpful in understanding issues related to advertising and society. These cases illustrate how cross-cultural research can make contributions to advertising regulation research.

Emerging Topics of Melding Disciplines

While debates on issues such as the economic effects of advertising, advertising of certain product categories, nutritional labeling effectiveness, or consumer privacy issues can be long-standing, there are currently some areas that provide fertile ground for further research. A first general area involves regulation of new media. While a significant number of studies have now been published on the privacy issues and the regulation of advertising over the Internet, the future will no doubt see more debate on advertising and product placement in video games as well as on social media (e.g., Twitter), social networking sites (e.g., Facebook and MySpace), user-generated content sites, and on blogs.

Because of the rapid and sometimes unpredictable evolution of advertising in new media, studies that examine regulatory issues in these media will continue to be needed. It simply takes some time for a medium to evolve, and as a result, it takes additional time and study for effective regulations (or self-regulation) to be developed. The growth of privacy concerns pertaining to Internet advertising and information conveyed on Web sites has spawned some strong recent studies on privacy issues (e.g., LaRose and Rifon 2007; Turow, Hennessy, and Bleakly 2008).

In general, the continued trend toward more fragmented media and increased advertising clutter will make research on the regulatory environment for alternative promotional outlets such as sponsorships and product placements important. As alluded to earlier, recent advances in neuromarketing techniques, particularly the combining of technologies such as fMRI (functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging), galvanic skin response, or eye tracking studies with traditional methods appears to have increased the potential of this type of research (Wilson, Gaines, and Hill 2008).

THE FUTURE OF REGULATION RESEARCH

In the context of research on advertising regulation, for each study cited and others, any reader should readily note how the approaches and issues addressed were tied to the training and perspectives of the researchers as much as the issues or questions addressed. In some ways, this is a strength of the multidisciplinary nature of research on advertising regulation and self-regulation, but it can also be a weakness. The studies have ended within the boxes, but have been limited in their ability to look at the relationships between the different boxes themselves.

And therein lies the greatest challenge for the future of research on advertising regulation and self-regulation. Too many researchers pick up the “hot” issues or topics from the headlines—many of the studies in the advertising journals reference a recent news story in opening paragraphs—and not enough have dropped their own perceptual blinders to other views or research paradigms. What might be needed are more interdisciplinary partnerships, or questions and studies designed from multiple points of view. In general, it is critically important to take into account the current state of research knowledge and to consider all of the stakeholders associated with the research questions. The Rotfeld-Stafford typology is a useful tool for keeping these issues top of mind.

The model provides a perspective for seeing how different areas of work can interrelate. And the relationships themselves provide a solid basis for integrating and understanding the use or abuse of research for public policy concerns. Such integration, as well as the implementation of some of the other suggestions provided in this paper, provide the potential for improving the real-world impact of research on advertising regulation.

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