A SYSTEM THEORY's APPROACH TO ADVERTISING

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From Advertising to Communication

Lutz HUTH

1.0

SITUATION — PROBLEMS — THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE

1.1

SITUATION

If you use the word **Reklame [advertising]** in Germany nowadays you either are disgusted by it altogether or you have particular specimens in mind which deserve no better name. At least, it should be **Werbung [advertising]**. Meanwhile, **communication** is the word to be used. In spite of all derision this may cause: the change from

obtrusive puffing to refined communication about goods and services is somewhat more than the self-image of a shady branch of industry fighting for respectability.

Occasionally, even the opinion can be heard that advertising is a kind of art - or even **the** contemporary art. Apart from the fact that most of these efforts fail to explain what they mean by **art** - they tend to simply neglect the pivotal feature of advertising that it serves a clear and obvious economic purpose.

The traditional division of communication sciences between **communicator, communiqué** and **recipient (addressee)** may serve as a guiding principle to systemize the changes we observe.

○ **With regard to the communicator:** Since the last 15 years a distinct trend to professionalize advertising has become conspicuous (cf. FUCHS 1978: 596):

- Specialisation and academic background of careers
- Institutionalization of university courses and degrees
- Supervision and control of vocational education
- Organisation in associations

- Codificiation of ethical norms of the branch
- Universal orientation towards achievement
- Professional autonomy
- Increase of prestige and income

The professionalization of advertising corrsponds to an increasing routines of the working process (cf. LUHMANN 1964 d).

More frequently, reknown agencies refuse to realize suggestions of their customers which are not compatible with their own professional standars.

○ **With regard to texts (advertising design):** The formates of the <classical> advertising genres have visibly changed in a number of ways:

→ <New> communication technologies have resulted in the rise of hitherto unknown advertising instruments (cf. for survey MEFFERT 1985):

The almost 100% provision of telephones has enabled the means of telephone marketing.

In TV we witness the birth of entirely new advertising formats which enhance new shopping behaviour; even more important is the fact that the formerly clearcut boundary lines both between **individual** and **mass communication** and those between **advertising** and **programme** have begun to vanish. In addition, the latter border is transgressed from the side of the programme by promotion forms such as **Sponsoring** and **Product Placement.**

→ In the field of print media as well as in that of TV, traditional advertising design conventions are dissolving and being replaced by newer forms.

→ We are taking leave from the well-established principle that focussing on a (rationally plausible) product benefit lies in the centre of all good advertising - and this in particular in the case of low interest products.

→ **Self - referential advertising** gains increasing attetion, **i.e.** advertising that does not primarily refer to products or services but to other advertising.

○ **With regard to the recipients:** Advertising is more often appreciated **as** advertising; there are reasons to believe that the advertising impact is to a high extent due rather to the design qualities of advertising items than to any plausibility induced by logical argument.

Since advertising has become a topic of public discourse (e.g. as a result of the accessability of the **Cannes Reels** and the wide attention they find or of featuring advertising in the editorial part of TV programmes such as **Werbetrommel** on RTL 2), viewers have gained a specific communicative competence for advertising with a growing demand for the aesthetic merits of advertising. This development may well be gathered from the lack in understanding of inhabitants of the former state trade countries when they were first confronted with western advertising. Against this background it may furthermore be assumed that the gap is widening between communicator intentions when producing advertising and viewers behaviour when receiving it.

○ **With regard to the communicative connection between production and sales:** For a long time the simple causal relationship of the

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Product Development
⇓
Production
⇓
Marketing Communication

Advertising
⇓
Sales

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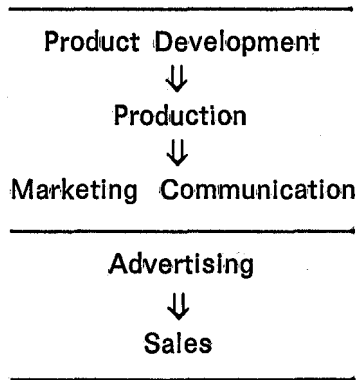
pattern has been taken for granted; when assuming this relationship all further consequences appear to be no more than negligible side effects. There have been indications, however that this assumption unduly disregards the mutual influences between the various elements such as **product** and **advertising.**

> The pop music market may serve as an illustrative example: The **commercial product** is the record, the audio tape or the CD. To promote this there are - besides advertising and sales promotion - concerts tours arranged and attempts made to get the piece of music into the charts; on top of this, a merchandizing industry is organized. More often than not the concert tours are sponsored and/or carry additional advertising. To sum up: there is no longer a real difference between product and advertizing; rather, the different elements at the same time serve as promotion instruments for each other and are products by themselves which bring money: from the sales of records, tickets or merchandizing articles; from sponsoring and advertising; and from royalties. There are cases reported where more money is earned by the sales of merchandizing articles than from the records, etc. And the same is said to be true of **Jurassic Park** and the Dino sales.

To come to a conclusion from all these observations: Advertising has conspicuously become an **autonomous** part within society.

PROBLEMS AND QUESTIONS

The situation as draughted above to formulate a number of problem areas from which several research questions may be derived. To pursue them means to gain deeper insight into the social and by this the communicative function (s) of advertising.

Two tendencies may be recognized which, at first sight, seem to contradict each other:

1. Advertising tends to develop itself to an autonomous social sphere of its own.

2. Advertising increasingly permeates other spheres of social life. As a result, neither the view that advertising fulfills a well-defined function **within** the system <economy>, nor the view that advertising is an entirely separate form of communication do justice both to the relative autonomy of advertising **and** the various interrelations between advertising and the other spheres of social life.

Thus, it will be the task to test in which ways and to what extent advertising has itself developed to be an autonomous sphere of social functions; **and** at the same time to find out how advertising - being no longer the extended arm of economy - is able to fulfil its economical functions.

When asking these questions it must be taken into account that the overall communicative functions of advertising may have changed in the course of time while its priamary function - to impart a certain kind of persuasive information to society - has stayed the same.

Advertising research with its traditional instruments including its notion of effects seems to be ill-prepared to cope with the recent changes. In particular, the concept of advertising effects which is rooted in the picture of the isolated individual to be influenced obviously has ceased to deal adequately with the varieties and the possibilities of present advertising. This is, of course, partly due to the fact, that questions of advertising effects have been controversially discussed and that, as a result, a generally accepted model of effects never has been developed. The present situation only makes this dilemma more obvious.

1.3

SYSTEM THEORY AS A THEORETCAL FRAMEWORK

There are some good reasons to expect that the system theory in the form that has been mainly developed by N. LUHMANN will offer an adequate model to describe and explain the above-mentioned changes. It's especially the fundamental idea of society differenciating itself into autonomous functional systems which promises to arrive at coherent statements on the increasingly complex structure of what we call **advertising.** This concept of a variety of social (sub-) systems implies that each system operates according to specific **codes** and **programmes.** of its own. By this, we may take leave from the traditional linear - causal concept of causes and effects in the relationship between advertising and its environment.

Since we are dealing with a rather specified problem this cannot be the place to give comprehensive insight into system theory; nevertheless I hope to offer enough information to support the suggestions I shall put foreward.

> As far as I can see the system aspect of advertising and the consequences implied by this has until now been only suggested by S. J. SCHMIDT (cf. SCHMIDT 1991; SCHMIDT/SPIESS 1994). More research has been done, however, which in its methods and its results is compatible with the system perspective.

The subsequent considerations serve two purposes:

1. to show sufficiently, in which respect a system theory's approach is suitable to put the above observations on advertising into a coherent context and to arrive at plausible explanations

2. to establish research questions rooted in the coherent perspective of system theory

2.0

ADVERTISING AS A SYSTEM

2.1

SYSTEM FEATURES OF ADVERTISING

The claim to understand advertising as a social system requires sufficient evidence that it contains the pivotal features of social systems. Well knowing that this may look somewhat like woodcarving I shall try to provide such evidence.

2.1.1

AUTONOMY AND GUIDING DIFFERENCE

Since the growing autonomy of advertising has been dealt with earlier I shall not go into further detail at this stage.

It is a fundamental condition of the autonomy of a social system that the system has a perspective of its own by which it - without exception - observes and recognizes its environment. According to LUHMANN, this perspective appears as a **binary code,** as a **guiding difference,** such as:

\<Science\>	true / false
\<Economics\>	have / have not
\<Law\>	right / wrong
\<Democracy\>	government / opposition
\<Religion\>	transcendence / immanence

For SCHMIDT

> the contribution of advertising to the system of economy as well as to other social systems may be summarized thus: The system of advertising, by way of production and distribution of media material, procudes the consequentious attention of intended target groups for products, services, persons, and "messages"; it does this in an uncompulsive manner (1991: 10).

For the time being we shall not further pursue the question whether by **uncompulsive** and **consequentious attention** will in every respect serve as the guiding difference of advertising.

> Two reservations immediately come to mind: (1) **attention** corresponds to the first step of the AIDA model; so there must be more to come; (2) if **consequentious** is to comprise the further aims of the AIDA model it appears to be a rather empty formula.

In spite of these reservations let us treat - until a better suggestion is made - **consequentious attention** as the guiding difference of advertising. At least, it is the common feature of all forms of advertising from its earliest days until today.

2.1.2

GENERALIZED MEDIUM OF COMMUNICATION

The concept of **symbolically generalized media of communication** follows for LUHMANN from the consideration:

Communication, and in particular verbal communication, for the start only results in the arrival of some information and in the understanding of its meaning (however crude and unsufficient this may be); it does not, though, necessarily have the effect that this information [as a kind of selection] is taken over as a precondition for further experience and action. By communication, only a transfer of suggestions to select is achieved. To secure the success of communication, the effective transfer of selections into subsequent experience and action depends upon further preconditions (LUHMANN 1974a: 173).

It is the **generalized medium of communication** with secures the "taking over of information / selection as a precondition for further experience and action". Generalized media of communication consequently are specific to individual systems:

<Science>	true / false	Truth
<Economics>	have / have not	Money
<Law>	right / wrong	Power / Procedure
<Religion>	Transcendence / Immanence	Faith

If we accept **consenquenteous attention** to be the guiding difference of the system of advertising, **innovation** should be its generalized medium of communication (cf. SCHMIDT 1991: 16). Not only is innovation the pivotal means to gain attention; it is furthermore the standard argument with agencies both shop - internally and in discussions with clients.

Innovoation in advertising is primarly judged against the background of advertising. Accordingly - as will be argued in further detail - the advertising scene has become the predominant referential frame of advertising. It is in this context that the increasing importance and more conscious use of self-referentiality as a creative principle of advertising design (both in the verbal and in the visual) must be seen.

2.1.3
PROGRAMMES

In connection with guiding defferences, **programmes** come into existence which serve to make the guiding difference applicable. These programmes are a further prerequisite to the rise of an autonomous social system. Compared to the guiding difference the programmes are more open to variation and thus able to react to social changes.

In the case of advertising such programmes not only steer the production but also the reception of ads.

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2.1.4

SELF - MONITORING

Under simple market conditions advertising had the task to communicate a unique product benefit which had been developed in the process of positioning of the product. In this situation, the arguments required came quite <naturally>: they were provided by the producer - more precisely, by product policy.

It was rather early - already in the forties - that advertising It was rather early -already in the forties- that advertising practitioners became aware of the latent difference between objective, factual product properties and product benefits which were to be communicated. The meanwhile well-established term is **USP - unique selling proposition** (REEVES 1961: 56 ff.). The communicative nature of the USP may be seen by its linking up to a relevant topic of society (ibd.: 63), and even more by the suggestion for cases when an objective unique product property cannot be found:

> **If [in addition] the product cannot be changed you still may tell the public something about the product which never before has been said about it.**
>
> This, then, is no uniqueness of the product itself, but still you have the uniqueness of a claim (REEVES 1961: 66; translated back from German).
>
> Even more recent introductions to marketing fail to see this difference between objective product properties and communicatively mediated product benefits (cf. **e.g.** BUHN 1990: 124).

As long as objective product properties and communicated product benefit may be taken to be identical, advertising on its search for arguments has to watch the product policy of its clients which themselves have to watch the marketing and product policies of competing companies. As soon as the unique product benefit becomes a matter of communication, advertising has to watch other advertising to arrive at a unique communication.

There is another aspect to self-monitoring in which advertising is not much different from the social systems of <science>, <art>, <mass media> : the importance of colleagues' judgements : advertising, too, is not at least made for other members of the profession (**cf.** SCHMIDT 1991: 13).

To sum up: Advertising does not simply fomulate the clients' inputs; rather, it transforms them into communication. To do this, advertising does not only watch its clients and their products, but also communication about products, i.e. other advertising (**cf.** LUHMANN 1988b: pp. 108).

2.1.4.1

TOPICS IN ADVERTISING

In this context, the question <Where does advertising get its arguments from?> arrives at a new dimension; it must be revisited. It can no longer be answered by hinting at product properties. Even a USP may be communicated under various aspects (topics).

> Take the case of <motor care safety>: this is to be brought about and communicated by objective product properties. Still, the question remains which topic is the most suitable for communication: <technical know - how and experience of the producer>, <demonstration in a test>, <(positive) consequences for the driver>, <relief for the relatives>, etc.

According to traditional and even nowadays widely helt assumptions, the topics under which advertising campaigns are designed are more or less arbitrary. It's no wonder that there exist topic catalogues, lists meant to enhance phantasy, collections of arguments which are supposed to be particularly helpful with special products.

Occasionally, you can also find the opinion that there a product - specific topics while the question remains open whether this is due to the nature of the product or to product - specific traditions. In other cases it is shown that advertising tends to adopt topics of actual public interest and it is assumed that these are topics of particular importance. **Ecology** may be taken as a helpful example to illustrate this. There are other observations which refuse any simple explanation: Why is it that social institutions promote their issues preferably by using the verbal and visual depiction of horror accompanied by fitting graphics and layout - to show the deplorable or disgusting situation they want to change? The majority of AIDS campaigus seem to be a remarkable exception to this general attitude. And why is it that advertising which emploies social values as part of their argumentation prefer to show (verbally and visually) the positive consequences of the use of the product? Hardly

any ecological or Third - World - Children - campaign which gives an impression of how nature or society will look like when the organisation has been successful. On the other side, washing powder advertising leaves it to ecological organisations to paint that world in which their product is not used while they transport pictures of a colourful world and nature after their redemption by this washing powder. It is neither the <nature of the case> nor public opinion which require these obvious differences of approach. Without trying to deny that both product properties and public opinion are powerful sources of advertising topics there are good reasons to assume that these are further treated according to specific of the system <advertising>.

2.1.4.2

SELF - REFERENTIALITY

The increasing closeness of <advertising> which has become a more and more autonomous system results - as has been shown - in self-monitoring. This is first noticed by the outward observer while **within** the system the image of the advertiser as an agent between products and consumer needs still prevails.

Meanwhile, however, it has become obvious that **self - referentiality** has developed into a conscious play with self-monitoring and thus achieved the level of a creative principle.

The humourous solution of a narrative TV commercial may be seen as one conspicuous indicator of this change. Traditionally, the

solution is brought about or at least connected with the use of the product. There is a growing tendency, however, that the solutions offered are internally motivated narrative solutions without any reference to the product.

> A good example or the point in question is given by the current TV campaign for **Flensburger Bier** in Germany: Well-known jokes are put into scenes and the reference to the product is reduced to the fact that the <winner> of the joke drinks **Flensburger Bier.**

As the most recent step on this way of playing with traditions we may witness self-referential advertising, i.e. advertising which does not primarily refer to products or services but to advertising itself, to the signs of products and their presentations.

ADVERTISING'S CAPABILITY OF RESONANCE

By **resonance of a system** we quite generally understand its capability to transform **data** from their environments (the output of other social systems) into **connectable information** for themselves. To make sense within any one system, these outward data have to be adopted along its guiding difference. Seen from the perspective of that system to whose output these data belong they are as a rule <deformed> in this process.

The relevant environment of the system <advertising> consists - among others - of the following systems:
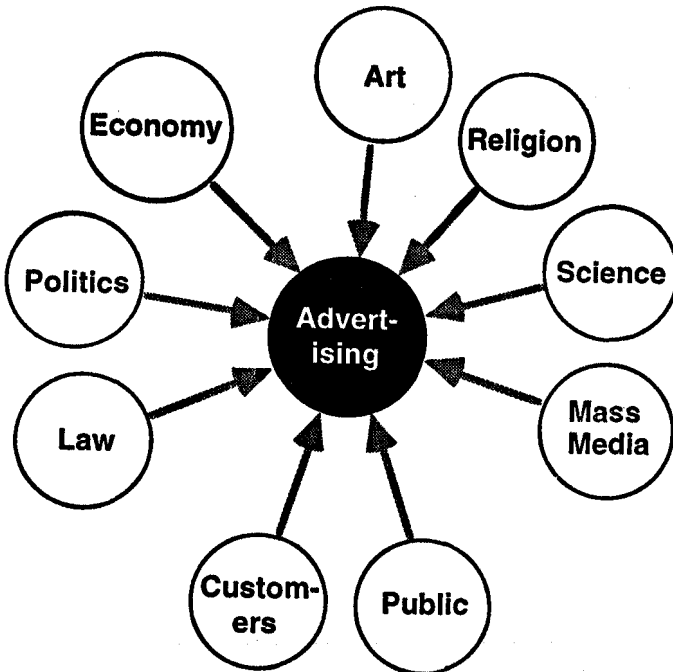
Advertising's capability of resonance with regard to other social systems has not been subject to much system theory based research so far (exept SCHMIDT 1991 and SCHMIDT / SPIESS 1994). The following hints make no claim to be complete:

Since advertising has got more autonomous, communication between **economy** and advertising has become more troublesome: Which problems occur when advertizers try to convey their criteria to clients? How can clients hope that economic criteria are appreciated by creatives? There seems to be considerable demand for research at these and adjacent problems.

It has been generally accepted that both **politics** and **law** heavily work at the institutional framework of advertising. Many regulations, however, have triggered off creative solutions to cope with them: The ban on comprative advertising (in Germany); the restrictions on advertising for particular products like spirits and tobacco, etc.

The **customers'** influence on advertising is globally thought to be seen by its sales success - provided this question is of any interest at all. Success, however, is not only ascribed to the persuasive function of advertising but also to its entertainment value, its **likeability** (cf. WILKENS 1994: 11). At the moment, there still is little evidence that advertising shows particular resonance for this aspect.

There has to be made a difference between the (potential) customer and the general **public,** which may react quite differently to particular items of advertising.

> Take the example of an ad aimed at young people trying to take up this target group's language, which otherwise is refused for sounding rather disgusting.

We don't know a lot about how the system <advertising> reacts to public discontent with what is felt to violate good taste. In Germany, the board of self-control of the advertising industry **(Deutscher Werberat)** has until now refused to allow qualified research on public complaints against individual ads and the decisions taken by this body.

Mass media call for the resonance of <advertising> in at least three ways: They are commercial institutions which impose their economic conditions on advertising; advertising design has to take into consideration the technical possibilities and the programme environments the media offer; thirdly, mass media are one of the main sources for the common stock of knowledge and images advertising draws upon to appear up-to-date.

Art and **religion** are of similar importance (**cf.** KLOEPFER/LANDBECK 1991; SCHMIDT 1991):

> Owing to the system-specific contribution to produce consequentious attention with the intended target groups, the system <advertising> is required to precisely observe other social systems. Advertising must be <zeitgeist> - oriented if it hope to excite attention and acceptance for its media productions and - by this - for the products, persons, and <messages> they wish to promote (SCHMIDT 1991:16 f.).

Next to the general public, it is the religious institutions in particular which are readily prepared to publicly take offence at some creative advertising ideas.

It is a general impression that <advertising> is especially deaf to the output of the system <**science**>. This does not mean that the results of scientific research remain altogether unnoticed; rather, the opposite is true. In a sometimes grotesque manner science authorities are referred to to substantiate truisms. There is the impression that the blind reliance on scientifically established data, which offers good changes even to charlatans and quacks, often prevents advertising from making proper use of the scientific potential. It would be most interesting, therefore, to know more about how science output is treated by advertising practice.
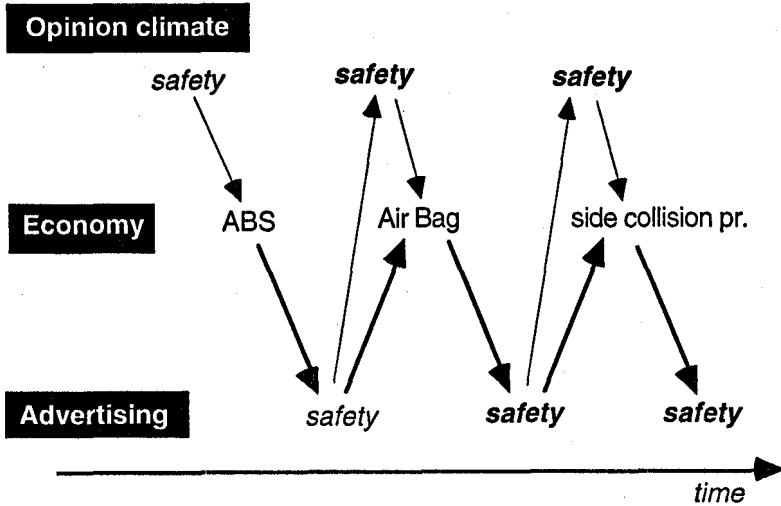
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3.0

ADVERTISING AND ITS ENVIRONMENT

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The title of this chapter looks somewhat misleading. No doubt, the last passage, too, had to do with system-environment-relations. It's
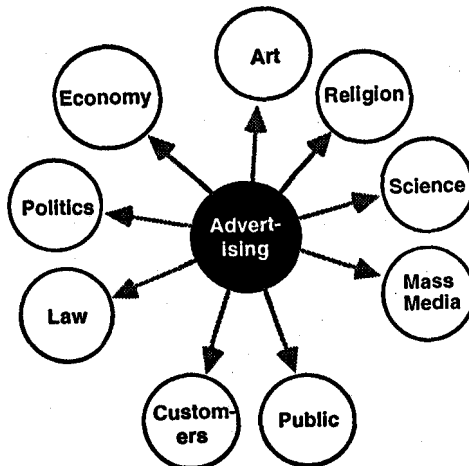
for readibility reasons only that the resonance of the system <advertising> to its environment (last chapter) and the resonance of various social systems to <advertising> are dealt with separately. Even this procedure, however, does not give full credit to the complexity of the relationships between systems and their environments - as the subsequent example is intended to illustrate. This case - for the time being - is hardly more than an informed guess which we hope to valididate by content analysis in due course.

Opinion climate

safety   **safety**   **safety**

Economy   ABS   Air Bag   side collision pr.

Advertising   *safety*   **safety**   **safety**

time

In the 80ies, motor car advertising mainly focussed on the topics of **power, ecology,** and **economic fuel consumption.** After the anti-blocking system (ABS) had been developed, the product policy had a proper, traditional USP; in consequence the topic of **safety** gained hightened attention. At this point, we leave it alone whether by this time the topic of safety had already become a covering social theme - **e.g.** with the airlines (WILKENS), nuclear power stations, etc. It is our hypothesis that once the topic of safety - initiated by the ABS innovation, probably enhanced by the public opinion climate, and certainly put foreward by advertising - had been established, it had a favourable effect on a deepened concern with safety and further product development such as air bag and side collision damage prevention. These innovations, then, led to an increased attention for safety in advertising. As a result, we witness a sequence of mutual observations which goes far beyond simple linear causal assumptions.

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We refrain - at this point - from sketching the several influences of <advertising> upon all other social systems and concentrate on one only:

3.1

CUSTOMERS

Among the system-environment-relationships of advertising the one concerning the customers is taken to be the most important. It is the purpose of advertising to make people buy goods or services; advertising is to have an **effect.**

3.1.1

CONCEPTS OF ADVERTISING EFFECTS

It is generally know that there is considerable disproportion between the results of advertising effects research and the efforts and expecations which go into it. The difficulties begin with the ambiguities of the terms used.

(1) There are various uses of the term **effect.** From the point of wiev of communication it would be erroneuos to simply identify effect with the subsequent actions intended (sales, voting, etc.) since these depend on a number of further influence factors, the uses of the other instruments of the marketing - mix, for instance, which lie beyond the reach of advertising. It is for this reason that a differenciation has been introduced between **marketing aims** and **communication aims** including **advertising aims** (cf. GAEDE 1982; SCHWEIGER/SCHRATTENECKER 1986). This, in a way, corresponds to the several aims hierarchy models such as the **AIDA** model with its steps: attention, interest, desire, action (cf. KOTLER 1980). The distinction between marketing and communication aims, although indispensible for theoretical reasons, does not meet with the requirements of <economy> which solely and exclusively is concerned about economic aims and only too readily prepared to blame advertising and communication with even those negative consequences which are due to marketing policy. However necessary it is to insist upon the difference between **communication** and **marketing success** (the effect of all the marketing activities), it is undispensable to recognize the systematic relationssships between both and to take these into account, since each concept of advertising which is undocked from its economic objectives is misguided in principle.

(2) The term **advertising effects research** comprises two kinds of activities which considerably differ both in its aims and in various details.

There is, on the one side, research for prognostic purposes with the intent to gain insight into the effectiveness of the various elements of advertising - in particular of specific design elements like arguements, coulours, typography, etc. For methodological reasons, these factors are isolated and tested in more or less artificial situations. On a wider scale, this kind of research links up with and draws upon the results of market research. It is dominant objective of this kind of research to arrive at data which yield the basis for t he conception and planning of communication campaigns.

On the other side, research is done to evaluate the processes and results of communication campaigns. Certainly, it again is **one** of the objectives of these studies to gain information to be used for further campaigns. Apart from this, it may be important to analyze mistakes and to spot responsibilities.

Beyond the vagueness which accompanies the avertising effects the all have in common

1. that they are indebted to a linear-causal model of effects according to which specific factors account for specific effects. In this model, it is implied that the individual factors (causes) can be investigated in isolation and that it is possible to attribute specific effects to isolated causes (**cf.** SCHENK 1989);

2. that they make the assumption of individuals who may be refractory but, in the end, will be open to external perpuasino; these individuals may be classified by certain features to build behaviour pattern groups which can be related to consumption groups (**target groups.**) More advanced models try to differenciate by implementing this concept by intermediate steps such as the **opinion leader.** At any rate, the individual still remains to be the addressee of the campaign who is to be persuaded to change his attitudes and behaviour.

3.1.2

SELECTION

Apart from effects conceptions rooted in theories of individual psychology there has always been the opinion that advertising serves a **selectional function.** Here, the emphasis does not mainly lie with the creation of needs by advertising, but rather to offer guidelines for decisions.

3.1.2.1

SELECTION BY TOPICALIZATION

According to LUHMANN, public opinion does not consist of opinions in favour or against any one issue (in favour of or against hunting whales, stance but in the fact that this issue is a topic public concern at all - that it may be mutually assumed in a given society that this issue is important. In consequence, LUHMANN arrives at a difference between public opinion and various meanings related to this. Seen this way, public opinion serves as a selectional instance regulating within a given society what is important and what is not. Applying this concept of public opinion to advertising, we come to the conclusion that any advert contains two different messages: the open one **Sunlight offers the whitest white of your life,** and the hidden one **White wear is a high value of society.** Only if the hidden message (public opinion) is accepted the open message has a change at all to be effective; thus, the hidden message is the **presupposition** of the open one. It is the speciality of presuppositions that they may preserve their claim to truth even if the adjacent statement is denied; in other words: Even if I maintain that Omo washes whiter the presupposition remains valid - otherwise I wouldn't care.

> This does not mean to re-activate the opinion that advertising **creates** needs. In the first place, advertising rather selects out of the indefinite number of needs in society a certain amount to give them the status as generally accepted and understandable forms of self-expression. By this, advertising reduces the complexity of behavioural possibilities. Secondly, this must be seen as a circular process. To give an example: Without empirical evidence it can be said that ecological consciousness could become a topic in advertising (for washing powder, motor cars, wrappings, etc.) at that moment when it was widely helt to be an important question. Thus, advertising could hardly be the van of ecological thinking - or of any other social issue. On the other side, when ecological consciousness became an advertising topic, the necessitly and legitimity of ecological thinking had been finally ratified in society.

3.1.2.2

FIELDS OF PRODUCTS AND OF SELECTION

The function of selection becomes particulary relevant with respect to the aspect of **time** - or rather, the shortage of time (**cf.** LUHMANN 1986c; SCHMIDT 1991: 9) :

[...] we want to be persuaded in the shortest time possible so that we have at least some basis, however irrational, for our decisions and enough time left over after shopping to actually use and enjoy many things we come to possess (LINDER in LEISS / KLINE / JHALLY 1986: 41).

This is an almost decisionistic theory of consumer behaviour: It's less the reasons and motives that matter but rather the fact that a decision must be taken in reasonable time (**cf.** further SCHENK concerning **low involvement**; LEISS / KLINE / JHALLY 1986: 39: **no reason - based motivation**). This means that the traditional approach has to be recansidhed that the individual has to be addressed by arguement in order that he or she can arrive at a delberate decision.

The tobacco consumers' behaviour in the United States during the first half of this century has repeatedly been quoted to illustrate the selective function of advertising:

Michael Schudson (1984) concludes that while advertising cannot create new needs, it can help to satisfy an old need in a new way and accelerate trends in consumption. [...] Schudson points out that while cigarette sales have grown enormously this century, overall tobacco consumption has increased much less; for example, in the period from 1918 to 1940, cigarette consumption increased steadily, but the overall level of tobacco consumption was unchanged, suggesting that, if advertising indeed was having an effect, it was to switch cigar and pipe smokers to cigarettes, thus satisfying an old need in a new way.

What advertising did was to latch on to a change in consumption patterns. Compared to traditional smoking practices, cigarette smoking is a short, simple activity involving little skill or fuss, and well suited to modern urban living, which does not normally allow long breaks during a day. Schudson thinks that the success of the cigarette industry has less to do with advertising and more to do with its suitability for modern living (LEISS / KLIN / JHALLY 1986: 33 f.).

This means that both product policy and advertising will have to offer and promote functional equivalents for given needs.

It is by **product policy** and by **positioning of products** that marketing tries to fulfil this task. As a rule, this is done - without deeper reflection - on the basis of a mainly static model which disregards subsequent communication. Within a range of competing products the product to be positioned is distinguished by one or more specific

product features in order to locate it at a position not yet occupied (**market niche**). In order to secure the economic success of this product, market research tries to find out whether and to which extent there is substantial demand for it, whether there is a relevant **target group**. It's up to advertising, then, to present by communication the product in question to the members of the target group as a superior functional equivalent within the range of competing products because of its particular benefits. Let us call such a field of products or services, from which a selection between several functional equivalents is possible, a **field of selection**.

The question of functional equivalence is decided by the use which may be made of a product or a service. Soap, **e.g.**, is made for the use of washing; cars are built to move in reasonable speed from one place to another. The field of selection, then, is the set of products amongst which selection for a particular use is made. As long as it is true that -as in the case of soap or motor cars- products bear a one-to-one relation to the uses made of them, the **field of selection** may be seen as identical with the **field of products**.
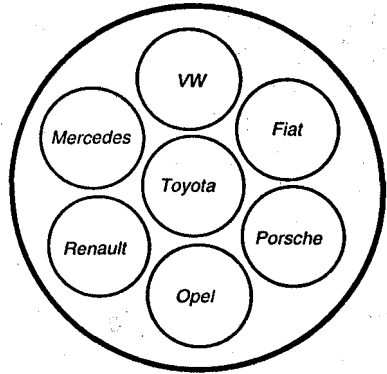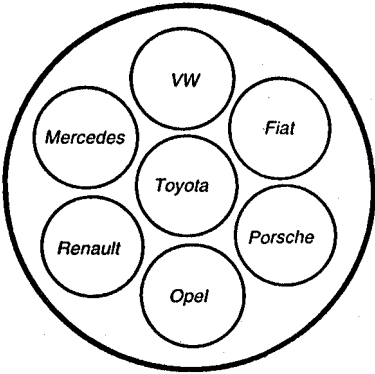
A **field of products** consists of a set of products considered to be equivalent by reason of a number of objective product features; all cars - from a **Morris Minor** to a **Silver Shadow** - have four wheels, are not driven by manpower, have a roof, drive at a reasonable speed, etc. A **field of selection**, on the other hand, is a set of products or services which -from the point of view of the consumer - may be used alternatively in a given situation; all cars may be used to move from A to B within reasonable time, without particular physical effort, without getting wet, etc.; they are functionally equivalent.

To be successful, it is required that the field of products within which the particular product is positioned is identical with the field of selection within which consumers decide between functional equivalents.
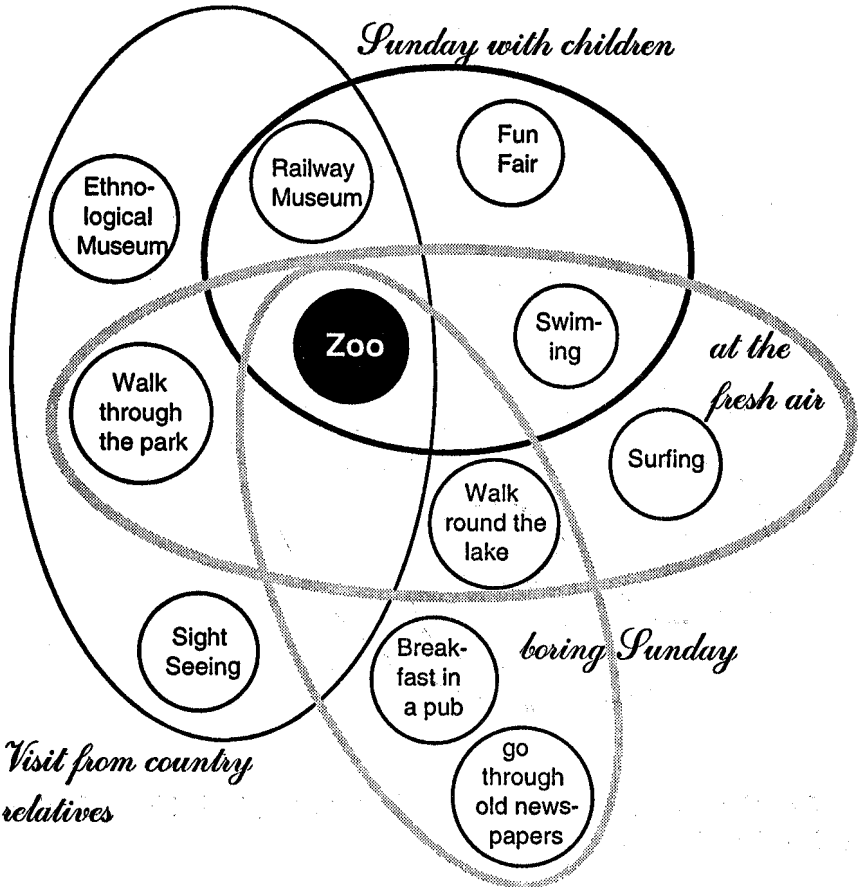
In the case of the motor car market it may be - intuitively - justly assumed that there is a high agreement between the field of selection. There does not seem to be a functional equivalent to motor cars. Cars are made for and used for moving from A to B.

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VW
Mercedes
Fiat
Toyota
Renault
Porsche
Opel

VW
Mercedes
Fiat
Toyota
Renault
Porsche
Opel

Possible Fields of Selection of a Zoo

Sunday with children

Ethno-logical Museum

Railway Museum

Fun Fair

Zoo

Swim-ing

at the fresh air

Walk through the park

Surfing

Walk round the lake

Sight Seeing

Break-fast in a pub

boring Sunday

Visit from country relatives

go through old news-papers

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In contrast to the car situation, the case of a zoo is entirely different. You can't refuse positioning a zoo on the grounds that there is only one in the city and therefore there is no competition. In fact, the zoo competes with quite a number of leisure time activities; but, there is no clear-cut field of products for a zoo which could be derived from the <nature of the product>. There are - different from the car situation - quite a range of various activity types within which a zoo may be positioned; and in each of these types the zoo competes with partly different equivalent activities. To have a few examples, see left.

By the zoo example it becomes obvious that the congruence between fields of products and fields of selection is far from being self-evident. Even with regard to cars, an overlapping of fields of selection is imaginable:

New Fields of Selection
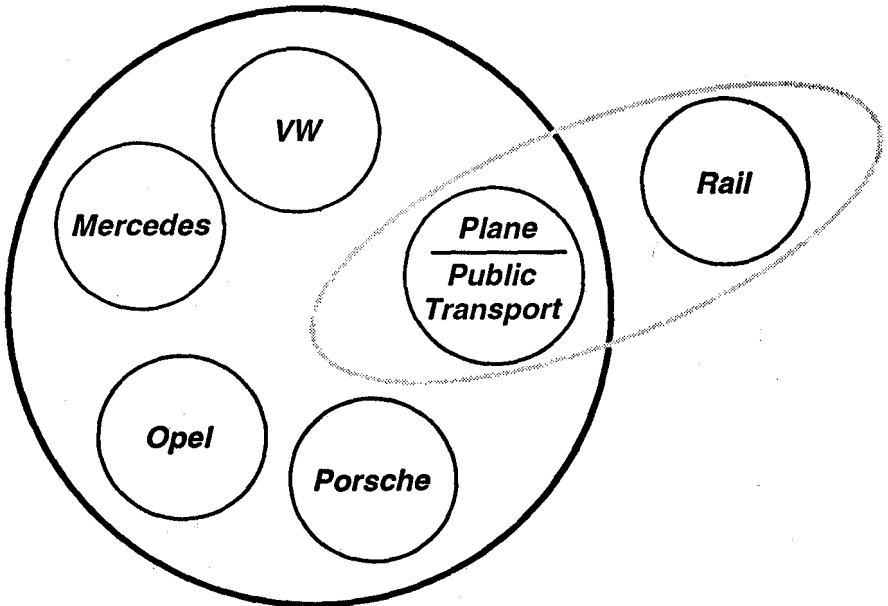
In the case in question, the leading conceptual idea of airline campaign could be:

By bus to work - With us to the holidays

suggesting to do without a car and to employ the resources on far distance holidays.

Strategically, this would mean for the airline to push themselves - together with public transport - into the field of selection <motor car>, to offer themselves as a functional equivalent.

There has been quite a number of cases recently, where advertising attempts to embed a particular product into an originally alien field of selection:

Für die einen ist es Duplo, für die anderen die längste Praline der Welt

For some, it is **Duplo**-for others, it's the longest chocolate of the world
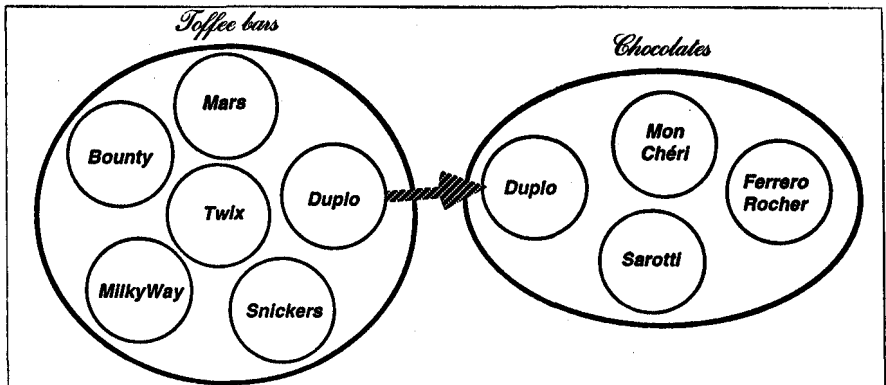
Or take the campaign for **Nintendo Gameboy** (1994):

Your reward for being grown up

Further examples for this strategy are:

○ the **Macdonald/Coca-Cola** campaign to introduce Cola as a drink for breakfast (at **Macdonald's**)

○ the succesful attempt to make **Mon Chéri** accepted a little present for visits

○ the finally less successful attempt to include Berlin hotel restaurants into the field of selection for an evening out

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○ the effort to established cross-country cars (like **Land Rover** or **Range Rover**) as acceptable for city business or even to drive to the opera (W. KREBS). This has been so successful that for some years there have been - cars on the market - which only look cross-country cars without fulfilling their functions (**Suzuki**)

In these cases, it's not the point to develop and introduce new products, but to embody products which already exist on the market in further fields of selection. This implies two aims of communication:

1. to give consumers new guidelines for selection in given situations

2. to create social acceptability or even social preference (as particularly in the case of **Coca-Cola / Macdonald's**) for the behaviour suggested

> Closely seen, all this is a continuation of **image improvement, trading up** or **trading down** strategies. To given an example: During the 80ies, the **Parker** company decided to have their high class pens sold in department stores. This put the pens into a new field of selection. In this as well as in other comparable cases, it is not the acquisition of a further field of selection for the product, but rather abandoning one field in favour of another one.

On a different level we witness the rise of <syntactic> fields of selection as WYSS (1986) noted as a feature of New Marketing. A case at hand is **Dunhill** who originated as producers/sellers of high quality pipes, tobacco, cigars, and cigarettes. Nowadays, the house deals with all kinds of things which - taken together - combine to a homogeneous world of a certain way of life; meanwhile, in the shop in Duke St. / Jermy St., pipes etc. have been withdrawn to a remote corner of the premises. So, the company no longer offers a class of products but a particular world. Another case mentioned by WYSS is **Ikea,** formerly inexpensive soft wood furniture, now the living world of young unconventional people (including cloth, wallpaper, pictures, etc.).

To sum up: To organize the selectional behaviour of consumers is a central communicative function of advertising. And looking back, advertising may be seen as an instrument to establish fields of selection and to co-ordinate these with behavioural types and types of activities.

This function of advertising could remain in the background as long as fields of products, contexts of use, and fields of selection were

widely congruent. As soon, as these disintegrate, communication grows to be the pivotal marketing instrument. Communication no longer simply organizes fields of selection and makes attributions; its job increasingly becomes to **create** them.

The present state of advertising, as described above, requires certain **economic developments**:

○ A level of production must be reached which allows and even encourages (on reasons of affluence) the differentiation between fields of products, activity types and fields of selection

○ On this level products and - especially - services become multifunctional because of a lack dominant and clear-cut product benefits

This development reacts to certain **social changes** such as an increased consumer readiness to venture upon new modes and life styles - least for a limited space of time.

When the shifting of fields of selection comes to be the central marketing operation this will have a number of consequences for **differentiated marketing**:

○ Market research will have to discover fields of selection aligned with behavioural patterns as seen from the consumer's perspective . This task was unnecessary as long as an identity between product fields and fields of selections could -naively- be assumed to be identical. Looking back, however, this assumption of identity in many cases reveals itself as rather careless und unreflected.

○ When occupying further fields of selection, communication policy plays a decisive role. Compared to its importance, the remaining marketing instruments are of secondary influence.

○ It's up to communication policy to enlarge, to reshape, to encourage, and even to invent and construct fields of selection.

Against this background, the impact and potential of the above - described new forms of advertising (**e.g.** humourous or self-referential advertising) can be more easily understood than by using effect models which presuppose the persuasion of individuals.

3.1.2.3

OBJECTIVES OF COMMUNICATION AND ADVERTISING DESIGN

Recently, a number of publications on advertising have suggested a historical development of advertising desing (**e.g.** LEISS / KLINE / JHALLY 1986; KLOEPFER / LANDBECK 1991; SCHMIDT/SPIESS 1994). More often than not they arrive at four steps. From our own work, the following model has been emerged which particularly emphasizes the inter-dependency between the economic conditions, the communication situation, and the creative forms. In general - and this includes the model proposed here - all suggestions of steps of advertising development are highly compatible with one another.

Step **(1)** marks the transition from a buyer to a seller market: There are more goods offered than needed; but needs are still quite <natural>; what is needed and what is not, lies in the nature of the product. This is connected with a high price consciousness. People (still) hesitate to reward product differences - even those of quality - by higher expences.

Level **(2)** may be seen as the beginning of marketing in its own right: beginning of marked over-production and increased purchasing power. The aspects of need and usefulness still remain leading; but people become open to ideas as to try or develop new habits. There is a generally accepted hierarchy of the symbolic value of products - with respect both to products (TV, car, etc.) and to brands.

Step **(3)** presupposes a further increased productivity accompanied by an equally increased purchasing power. Socially, it requires the leave from a traditional, universally accepted life plan and a corresponding hierarchy of values. Instead, different life styles arise with different ways of expressing themselves and different consumer habits. On the production side, the adjustment of many products concerning price and quality ask for an increased consciousness of the symbolic value of products. As the rational aspect of usefulness of products reclines, the one-dimensional functionality of products loosen the fields of selection become open to manipulation. Owing to the differentiation of life styles, the society - covering meaning of status symbols diminishes; rather, sectoral status symbols come into existence which are no longer appreciated by all members of society - often not even recognized as such. The consumer habits of the so-called **multi-optional consumer** are not necessarily coherent; he or she may drive a Lamborghini car while at the same time wearing clothes from Marks & Spencer. There is no longer a clear-cut hierarchy of products and brands, there are different life styles with internal hierchies defining themselves mainly by consumption.
At level **(4)**, this tendency is further radicalized.

Beginning with level (3), the marketing instrument of communication achieves an importance at least equal to product development.

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Apart from these features of the development of advertising it must be stressed that it requires an increased consumers' consciousness and competence for the quality of advertising which also creates a higher demand for its quality.

Stages of Advertising Development
(Lutz HUTH / Jürgen SCHULZ)

	Function	Strategy	Reason Why	Types of TV-Spots	Product Features	Recipients' Prerequisites
❶	Request Induction of Product, knowledge Persuasion by reasons to buy	Appeal Product Information Argumentation	Use of the Product	Presenter[2] Testimonial[2] Spot as News[2] Demonstration[2] Problem solving[2] jingle[2]	Precise Use Benefit of the Product Unique Selling Proposition Additional Benefit	Prevailing Interest in the Product's Benefit Purpose-Rational Orientation
❷	Installation of the Product within an Activity	Design of Sequences of Activities	Enlargement of the Margin of Action	slice of life[2] jingle[2]	Enrichment of the Scope of Ones Activities	Desire to Make Use of/ Enjoy the Possibilities Life Has to Offer
❸	Creation of *life styles* and Worlds of New Experience	Staging of Persons, Objects, and Situations Postmodernity	To Become Part of *Life Style* Worlds	jingle[2]	Part of the *Life Style* World	Dominantly Aesthetic Relationship to the World
❹	Simulation	Self Reflexivity Play with Traditions of Advertising <Making Advertising a Topic of Discourse>[1] Postmodernity	Intellectual Mutual Agreement between the Communicator and the Customer that Advertising must not be Taken Serious	In Principle: all - as Quotation	Familiar Signs of the Product	Competence for the Code of Advertising

[1]KROEBER-RIEL 1988: 82 f.   [2]LÜTZEN

It remains to point out that the steps of advertising described here are to be seen as a development in the course of time. Nevertheles, it remains true that they cannot altogether be separated from the nature of products. A real innovation with an obvious product benefit - like the air bag for motor cars - will even today mainly rely on strategies of the first type. According, the development will be faster with services than with large kitchen machines. Similary, the social and economic situation is of influence on the preference of types. During the economic recession of the last years, it could be observed that the **price** argument was revived in advertising.

Shifting the communication aims of advertising from individual persuasion to orientations for selection does not mean to discard advertising's function of influencing people. What is discarded is the idea of <massaging> people which found its most extreme form in the concept of **subliminal advertising.** The point to be made is that advertising creates over-individual validities which are motivated by arousal of attention. It is an integral part of these validities that they can be mutually presumed - at least within specific life style groups.

The shaping of fields of selection and the positioning of given products are two closely connected tasks. This means, that the

rational argumentation on the grounds of a clear-cut product benefit as well as emotional adresses in advertising are specific forms under certain conditions; they may well be integrated into the wider concept of advertising as orientation for selection. This understanding of **communication** for economic purposes goes far beyond the concept of **advertising** with its associations of individual persuasion. It is more appropriate to the change of creative traditions of advertising design since it can integrate narrative, mythic, humourous, or self-referential forms which cannot easily be explained by models of individual persuasion.

Finally, this approach may encourage a shift of advertising effects research which is still mainly communicator-fixed. Following the **uses and gratifications approach** it could be helpful to apply the question which KATZ / FOULKES (1962: 378) put to communication research in general to advertising: Not only to ask what advertising does to the people, but <What do people do with advertising?>. It may be noted that the ideas put foreward here are not meant to be solutions to questions of advertising theory and design, but as an attempt to arrive at a theoretical framework for further research.

4.0

CONCLUSION

Which benefits may advertising resarch draw from the system theory's approach?

1. System theory may help to put together the various divergent observations on advertising within a unifying framework related to society.

2. System theory offers a unified framework to understand the development from advertising to communication and of the differing concepts of advertising effects. On this basis the communicative functions may be more cleary analyzed.

3. With reference to system theory, the complexity of <advertising> can be clarified which forbids to unreflectedly apply to advertising everyday experience such as opinions about effects. As a prominent example for this point we may refer to the (grossly underestimated) role of **routines** compared to the (may be correspondingly overestimated) role of **creativity.**

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4. By drawing our attention to system-environment-relationship system theory hightens our consciousness of the net of dependencies in which advertising is situated. Both the contributions of advertising to its environment and the resonance of advertising to environmental data can more adequately be appreciated.

5. Against this background, system theory may serve as a helpful frame for discussions on ethics which have come into fashion recently (cf. in general LUHMANN 1990a).

6. Finally, the question in which respect and to what extent advertising may be seen as a social system is by itself a challenge to theoretical development.

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