

# THE PSYCHOLOGY OF ADVERTISING

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*A Simple Exposition of  
The Principles of Psychology  
In Their Relation to  
Successful Advertising*

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1913

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## I INTRODUCTION

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THE typical business man is an optimist. For him the future is full of possibilities that never have been realized in the past. He is not, however, a day-dreamer, but one who uses his imagination in formulating purposes which lead to immediate action. His power of execution often surpasses that of his imagination, and he is frequently surprised to see his vision realized in less time than he had even dared to hope.

The advertiser may well be regarded as typical of the class of American business men. At a time when advertisements were poorly constructed and given limited circulation, certain enterprising men saw the possibilities of advertising and began systematically to improve the whole profession of advertising. Artists were employed to construct appropriate illustrations, and skilled typographers vied with each other in setting up the text in the most artistic and legible manner possible. Business system was used in ascertaining the amount of circulation of various publications as well as the kind of circulation. Advertisements were keyed, and other means were employed to discover the exact value of each style of advertisements and of each medium in which advertisements were inserted.

These improvements have been as beneficial as the most sanguine could have hoped for, but in and of

## THE PSYCHOLOGY OF ADVERTISING

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themselves they were not sufficient to place advertising upon a scientific basis. Advertising has as its one function the influencing of human minds. Unless it does this it is useless and destructive to the firms attempting it. As it is the human mind that advertising is dealing with, its only scientific basis is psychology, which is simply a systematic study of those same minds which the advertiser is seeking to influence. This fact was seen by wise advertisers and such conceptions began to appear in print and to be heard in conventions of advertising men some ten years ago. Occasionally one who was especially optimistic prophesied that at some time — perhaps in the distant future — advertisers would turn to psychology for guidance. One such prophecy appeared in *Printers' Ink* for October, 1895: "Probably, when we are a little more enlightened, the advertisement writer, like the teacher, will study psychology. For, however diverse their occupation may at first sight appear, the advertising writer and the teacher have one great object in common — to influence the human mind."

*Printers' Ink* seemed to assume that it would be many years before we were "more enlightened," and hence did not look to see advertisers actually turning to psychology in the immediate future. In *Publicity*, for March, 1901, we have a more hopeful prophet, and although each expects to see advertising established on psychological principles, the author in *Publicity* hopes to see that day in the near future: "The time is not far away when the advertising writer will

## INTRODUCTION

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find the inestimable value of a knowledge of psychology."

Previous to the appearance of this article (March, 1901) there had been no attempt to present psychology to the business world in a usable form. As far as the advertiser could see all psychologies were written with a purely theoretical end in view. They contained a vast amount of technical material devoid of interest to the layman who struggled through the pages. This condition made it quite difficult for the business man to extract that part of the subject which was of value to him.

Several of the leading advertising magazines and advertising agencies sought to father a movement which would result in such a presentation of the subject of psychology that it would be of use to the intelligent and practical advertiser. These efforts on the part of the advertisers were successful in stimulating several professional psychologists to attempt such a presentation. Psychological laboratories were fitted up to make various tests upon advertisements. Elaborate investigations were undertaken and carried through to a successful issue. Psychologists turned to the study of advertising in all its phases while, on the other hand, intelligent and successful advertisers began to devote attention to a systematic study of psychology. Investigators in the various parts of the country and among different classes of society united in their efforts to solve some of the knotty problems which are ever before the business man who desires publicity for his

## THE PSYCHOLOGY OF ADVERTISING

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commodity. Soon addresses were made before advertising clubs upon the specific topic of the psychology of advertising. The leading advertising journals in America and Europe sought and published articles on the subject. Several of the recent books on advertising and general business promotion deal more or less extensively with the subject.

As a result of all these various efforts more has actually been accomplished during the last five years than the typical optimist even imagined. Just as the manufacturing world has been compelled to turn its attention to physics and chemistry, and as the manufacturer's vocabulary is composed of many terms which were but recently technical terms used only by scientists, so the advertising world has turned its attention to the subject of psychology, and many words formerly used only by professional psychologists are to-day commonplaces with advertisers.

The changed attitude of the advertising world can be judged by reference to current advertising literature. In a recent issue of *Printers' Ink* (July 24, 1907), one article has this significant heading, "PSYCHOLOGICAL." Another article by a leading advertiser contains the following sentences. "Scientific advertising follows the laws of psychology. The successful advertiser, either personally or through his advertising department, *must* carefully study psychology. He *must* understand how the human mind acts. He *must* know what repels and what attracts. He *must* know what will create an interest and what

## INTRODUCTION

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will fall flat. . . . He *must* be a student of human nature, and he *must* know the laws of the human mind." Although italics were not used in the original, the word "must" is here put in italics to draw attention to the actual emphasis used by the author. In articles appearing on the subject before the last few years, all persons had spoken of the study of psychology as something which might be brought about in the future. At the present time the writers are asserting that the successful advertiser *must* study psychology and that he *must* do it at once.

Although the attitude of the advertising world has changed and even though much has been done to present psychology in a helpful form to the advertisers, the work of the psychologist is not yet available to the business world because the material has not been presented in any one accessible place. Contributions are scattered through the files of a score of American and European publications. Some articles appearing under this head are of minor significance, while others are so important that they should be collected in a place and form such that they would be available to the largest possible number of readers. The psychology of advertising has reached a stage in its development where all that has thus far been accomplished should be reconsidered. The worthless should be discarded and the valuable brought out into due prominence in systematic arrangement. In view of this condition of affairs the author has assumed the pleasing task of systematizing the subject of the psychol-

## THE PSYCHOLOGY OF ADVERTISING

ogy of advertising and of presenting it in such a form that it will be of distinct practical value to all who are interested in business promotion.

Incidentally it is hoped that the present volume will be welcomed by many who have no especial interest in business promotion. The professional psychologist will be interested in the contribution made to his science from a study of mind in a particular field of activity. The general reader will derive benefit from the reading of the book; for he will be able to grasp some of the most fundamental psychological principles because they are here presented in concrete and comprehensible form.

## VI

### SUGGESTION

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THE mental process known as "Suggestion" is in bad repute because, in the popular mind, it has too

**What is Suggestion?** often been associated on the one hand with hypnotism and on the other with indelicacy and vulgarity.

Hypnotism in the hands of the scientist or of the fakir is well known to be a form of suggestion. A story which does not specifically depart from that which conforms to the standards of propriety but which is so constructed that it leads the hearers to conceptions that are "off color" is said to be suggestive. In this way it has come to pass that the whole subject of suggestion has been passed by with less consideration than is due it.

There is no uniformity in the meanings that are attached to the term *suggestion* even among the most careful writers. If I were sitting in my office and considering the advisability of beginning a certain enterprise, I might say that one idea "suggested" a second and this second a third, etc. A scientific definition would not allow this use of the term but would substitute the expression "called up" for "suggested." Thus I should say that one idea "called up" the second, etc. *Suggestion must be brought about by a second person or an object.* In my musings and deliberations I should not say that one idea suggested an-

## SUGGESTION

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other, but if the same idea were called forth at the instigation of a second person or upon the presentation of an object, I should then call it suggestion — if it met the second essential condition of suggestion. This second condition is that *the resulting conception, conclusion or action must follow with less than the normal amount of deliberation.* Suggestion is thus a relative term, and in many instances it might be difficult to say whether or not a particular act was suggestion. If the act followed a normal amount of consideration after a normal time for deliberation, it would not be suggestion, while if the same act followed too abruptly or with too little consideration it might be a true case of suggestion.

Every normal individual is subject to the influence of suggestion. Every idea of which we think is all too liable to be held for truth, and **Universality of Suggestion** every thought of an action which enters our minds is likely to result in such action. I do not think first of walking and then make up my mind to walk. The very thought of walking will inevitably lead to the act unless I stop the process by the thought of standing still. If I think of an object to the east of me my whole body sways slightly in that direction. Such action is so slight that we ordinarily do not discover it without the aid of accurate recording instruments. Almost all so-called mind-reading exhibitions are nothing but demonstrations of the fact that every thought which we think expresses itself in some outward action.

## THE PSYCHOLOGY OF ADVERTISING

Thought is dynamic in its very nature and every idea of an action tends to produce that action.

The most perfect working of suggestion is to be seen under hypnosis and in crowds. In hypnosis the subject holds every idea presented as true, and every idea suggested is acted out with no hesitation whatever. Here the mind is so narrowed by the artificial sleep that no contradictory or inhibiting idea arises, and hence no idea can seem absurd and no action seems out of place. There is no possible criticism or deliberation and so we have the extreme case of susceptibility to suggestion.

The effect of a crowd upon an individual approaches that of the hypnotizer. The individual is affected by every member of the crowd and the influence becomes so overpowering that it can hardly be resisted. If the crowd is a "lynching party" the whole atmosphere is one of revenge, and everywhere is suggested the idea of "lynch the culprit." This idea is presented on all sides. It can be read from the faces and actions of the individuals and is heard in their cries. No other idea has a chance to arise in consciousness and hence this one idea, being dynamic, leads to its natural consequences.

It was once supposed that suggestion was something abnormal and that reason was Reasoning the common attribute of men. To-  
Not day we are finding that suggestion is Universal of universal application to all persons, while reason is a process which is exceptional, even

## SUGGESTION

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among the wisest. We reason rarely, but act under suggestion constantly.

There has been a great agitation of late among advertisers for "reason why" copy. This agitation has had some value, but it is easily over-emphasized. Occasionally customers are persuaded and convinced, but more frequently they make their purchases because the act is suggested at the psychological moment. Suggestion and persuasion are not antagonistic; both should be kept in mind. However, in advertising, suggestion should not be subordinated to persuasion but should be supplemented by it. The actual effect of modern advertising is not so much to convince as to suggest. The individual swallowed up by a crowd is not aware of the fact that he is not exercising a normal amount of deliberation. His actions appear to him to be the result of reason, although the idea, as presented, is not criticised at all and no contradictory or inhibiting idea has any possibility of arising in his mind. In the same way we think that we are performing a deliberate act when we purchase an advertised commodity, while in fact we may never have deliberated upon the subject at all. The idea is suggested by the advertisement, and the impulsiveness of human nature enforces the suggested idea, hence the desired result follows in a way unknown to the purchaser.

Some time ago a tailor in Chicago was conducting a vigorous advertising campaign. I did not suppose that his advertising was having any influence upon

## THE PSYCHOLOGY OF ADVERTISING

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me. Some months after the advertising had begun I went into the tailor's shop and ordered a suit. While in the shop I happened to fall into conversation with the proprietor and he asked me if a friend had recommended him to me. I replied that such was the case. Thereupon I tried to recall who the friend was and finally came to the conclusion that this shop had never been recommended to me at all. I had seen his advertisements for months and from them had formed an idea of the shop. Later, I forgot where I had received my information and assumed that I had received it from a friend who patronized the shop. I discovered that all I knew of the shop I had learned from advertisements and I doubt very much whether I ever read any of the advertisements further than the display type. Doubtless many other customers would have given the same reply even though, as in my case, no friend had spoken to them concerning the shop.

Ideas which have the greatest suggestive power are those presented to us by the actions of other persons.

### **Effective Forms of Suggestion**

The second most effective class is probably the ideas suggested by the words of our companions. Advertisements that are seen frequently are difficult to distinguish in their force from ideas which are secured from the words of our friends. Advertising thus becomes a great social illusion. We attribute to our social environment that which in reality has been secured from the advertisements which we have seen so often that we forget the source of the information.

## SUGGESTION

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Street railway advertising is especially effective at this point because the suggestion is presented so frequently that we soon forget the source of the suggestions and end by attributing it to the advice of friends.

In advertising some commodities argumentation is of more importance than suggestion, and for such things booklets and other similar forms of advertising are the most effective. Such commodities are, however, the exception and not the rule. In the most successful advertising argumentation and forms of reasoning are not disregarded, but the emphasis is put upon suggestion. Inasmuch as more of our actions are induced by suggestion than by argumentation, advertising conforms, in this particular, to the psychological situation. It puts the emphasis where the most can be accomplished and subordinates those mental processes which hold a second place in determining our actions.

As stated above, those suggestions are the most powerful which we receive from the actions and words of other persons. The successful advertiser seems to have worked upon this hypothesis in constructing many advertisements. He has also taken advantage of the fact that we soon forget the person who originally suggested the idea and become subject to illusions upon the matter. Thus, in the reproduced advertisements of Jap-a-lac (No. 1), as I see this young lady using Jap-a-lac the suggestion to do the same thing is overpowering. Many a woman who has looked at these pictures has been immediately overcome by a desire

## SUGGESTION

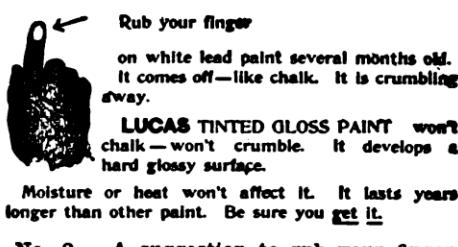
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to do the same thing and has put her desire into execution. If I had seen these and similar cards for a few months, even though I had never seen anyone actually using the paint, I should assume that "every one is using Jap-a-lac." The suggestion would thereupon be in an extreme form and be liable to cause me to imitate what I assumed every one else was doing. As a matter of fact I *was* affected in just this manner. When occasion arose to purchase some paint for household use I called for Jap-a-lac under the assumption that I had seen it used frequently. The can looked familiar, and it seemed to me that I was running no risks, for Jap-a-lac had been a household commodity for years. Soon after the purchase I began to write this chapter and I am unable to recall any instance of having seen Jap-a-lac in use. I had seen pictures of the Jap-a-lac paint can and had seen pictures of persons using the paint, but I know of no other source of information concerning this paint, although at the time of the purchase of the paint my knowledge of it seemed to me perfectly adequate. Apparently I had never heard an argument in favor of the paint but had acted upon mere suggestion. Women are, in general, more susceptible to suggestion than men, and I feel sure that many women are convinced of the adequacy of this paint by these same advertisements, reproduced above, even though nothing more than the display and the picture is noticed.

It seems that no form of action can be suggested by an advertisement that does not successfully challenge

## THE PSYCHOLOGY OF ADVERTISING

the reader to do what is proposed. The suggested idea haunts one and even though the action may be absurd, it is difficult to resist. The three following advertisements have all appeared in street-cars and have met with phenomenal success. Many persons



No. 2.—A suggestion to rub your finger.

doubtless feel the suggestion to be irresistible to rub the end of the first finger when looking at this advertisement of Lucas's Tinted Gloss Paint.



No. 3.—A suggestion to solve this.

What could be more absurd than Westerfeld's advertisement? The fact that this advertisement was highly successful is sufficient justification for its use. Kerr's studio was flooded with answers to the suggestion of "Guess who?" The suggestions in these three advertisements lead the readers to desire to act in the ways suggested, and that of necessity

## SUGGESTION

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leads to a careful reading of the entire advertisements.

As stated above, the words of our friends have strong suggestive power. We are not cold, logical machines, who take data in and then, by a logical

### A SISTERSVILLE GIRL

#### GUESS WHO?

the first Successful Guesser we will  
give One Dozen of our \$5.00 Photos.



Eastman Kodaks and Supplies.  
Everything for the Photographer.

#### KERR'S STUDIOS

Sisterville, New Martinsville and Smithfield

No. 4.—The action suggested by this advertisement makes it effective.

process, come to a reasonable conclusion. On the contrary, we are so highly susceptible to suggestion that the words of our companions are ordinarily held for true and the actions proposed by them are hastily carried out. The suggestiveness of the words of companions is a value available to the advertiser. He

No. 5.—The venerable doctor seems to make  
the suggestion.

places before the public a statement and then, to give it greater suggestive power, he shows the likeness of a person whose face indicates the possession of a judg-



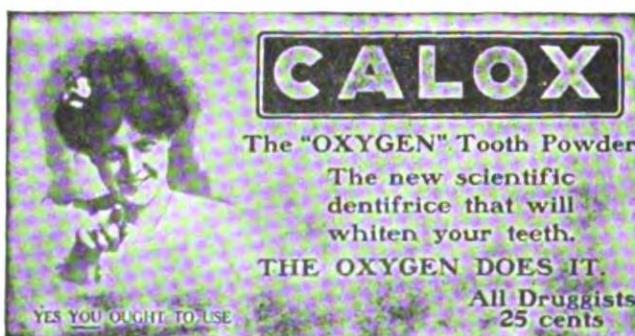
## THE PSYCHOLOGY OF ADVERTISING

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ment we should be willing to take. The advertiser does not state that the words are those of the person depicted, but this relationship seems to be suggested and it adds greatly to the value of the advertisement. Thus in the reproduced advertisement of Postum Food Coffee the picture of the venerable doctor becomes associated in our minds with the statement, "If coffee don't agree, use Postum Food Coffee." Later these words seem to have issued from a responsible person and come to have undue weight with us all. Likewise



No. 6.—The washerwoman seems to recommend Arrow collars.



No. 7.—The portrait doubles the suggestive power of this advertisement.

in the reproduced advertisement of Arrow collars the genial washerwoman seems to assure us that "Arrow Collars don't shrink in the wash." In the case of the

## SUGGESTION

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Calox advertisement I am convinced when this beautiful girl points her finger at me and seems to say, "Yes, you ought to use Calox." As I happen to need more tooth powder just now, I don't wait for further evidence but accept uncritically the words which she is represented as using. When we stop to think of it, it is absurd to place additional credence in these words of the advertiser simply because of the presence of an appropriate picture, but the absurdity of the situation



No. 8.—A good advertisement in which suggestion is subordinated to argumentation.

does not detract from the practical value of such forms of suggestion.

Many forms of suggestion, in addition to those presented above, are available to the advertiser. There is also no necessary divorce between suggestion and the presentation of arguments. Indeed, the application of the two in the same advertisement often increases the value of each. Thus in the reproduced advertisement of Hand Sapolio (No. 8) the direct suggestion, "Hand Sapolio should be on every washstand," is strengthened by the "reasons why," and

## THE PSYCHOLOGY OF ADVERTISING

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the reasons why are strengthened by this suggestion.

These reproduced advertisements are presented as mere illustrations of a few of the many ways in which suggestion may be used by the advertiser. We have but to consider the millions of persons who at least glance at advertisements, to be impressed by the possibilities opened to the man who can present his advertisement in a form that suggests powerfully the purchase or use of his commodity.