

CLOSING THE GAP BETWEEN COMMUNICATION RESEARCH AND COMMUNICATION*

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Communication research and the creation of communication seem stranger bedfellows than they have to be. In a text for advertising account executives (American Association of Advertising Agencies, 1969), some creative types burned the ears of research types with an "explanation" of the relationship between research and the creation of communication. Murray L. Klein, senior vice president of creative services for Smith/Greenland Company of New York, leads off:

A lot of people can tell you a lot about the relationship between creativity and research.

But I can tell you something few of the experts will:

The relationship is lousy....

Demographics are just not enough. We don't need more than our own experience to tell us that all men between 35 and 49, making \$12,000 a year, with two and three-eighths children, 3.2 years of

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college, divorced once and living in a city of one million or more population are not alike. They don't think alike or feel alike or buy alike. (pp. 255-257)

Edward Mandell, senior vice president and creative director of Helitzer Advertising, Inc., of New York, believes that most creative people view research people as a strange breed that talks in the "darkly mysterious language of sociology" and deals in "the statistics that are the very heart and soul of research." Mandell agrees with Bill Bernback in admonishing creative people: "You don't have the answer until you sweat over that research and use your own judgment" (p. 268). Mandell's message to the aspiring account executive can easily be summarized: don't trust researchers.

Klein and Mandell are making the same point: research results are not readily useful for the creation of communication. The problem, as Klein sees it, is "there's too little basic research, the kind that tells creative people what their potential customer thinks, feels and wants." Aside from the stereotypes that victimize Mandell's thinking, their argument has merit. A great deal of communication research is not *of* communication but *about* communication.

Berlo (1960: 175) and others have written that people have common or shared meanings only to the extent that they have similar experiences or can anticipate common experiences. One reason that research has been of limited value to communicators, then, is in failing to expose the things that humans hold in common.

In his book about the advertising business, Jerry Della Femina (1970) describes the process in which he and Ron Travisano, an art director, created a campaign to reach institutional investors. The description provides an insight into the process of creating communication and suggests how research can better

help creators of communication.

Sitting there at seven o'clock in the morning we were really desperate, I mean desperate, because the guy (the client) is coming in at nine o'clock to see advertising,... he doesn't want to know that we've been backed up and busy as hell.... Ron and I always work up to the wire but this was the closest we ever were. Maybe, we thought, this will be the time when we won't make it.

Well, we started out talking about sex.... Comes 7:30 and nothing's happened. Like about a quarter of eight I say, "What are we going to do with this problem?" Ron says, "Aw, don't worry. We'll make it." All of a sudden he says, "I've been thinking about it all morning." We started feeling sorry for ourselves. "You know, it's really a pain in the ass," I say. "You never can go home and like just think of nothing, right?"

Ron says, "Yeah. That's interesting, isn't it? That you always think of your job. I bet these guys in the institutional investing business feel the same way about themselves. I bet they think they're heroes the way we think we're heroes for being here this early."

I say, "Yeah, that's interesting. I'll bet they really think they're hot stuff because they're working so hard. Hey, did you ever notice when you don't go to lunch you really feel better because you think you're working so hard?"

Ron says, "Yeah, I know. I feel great when I'm working like a son of a bitch and I don't go to lunch. I bet those guys feel the same way, sitting there with their millions of dollars to spend, they must really feel like they're something when they miss lunch or they have to order a hamburger sent in."

And I say, "Hey, a hamburger. Remember that day we were working with that guy Dave and he ordered a hamburger and it got cold? Remember how proud he was that he didn't even have time to eat?"

Ron says, "Yeah, what a headline--'The Glory of the Cold Hamburger.' That could be it, the whole campaign."

Della Femina goes on to explain how the pair developed the concept into a set of five comprehensive ads by 9:15, five minutes before the client arrived, and how successful the campaign was "because the guys it was directed at--they can feel for it, it's them, it's their life. Some of these investment guys have even called (the client) asking for reprints of the ad. They want to hang it up in their offices. 'That's me, you know,' they say. They show it to their wives and say, 'You know why I come home late at night? Here's why.' They want to frame it" (Della Femina, 1970: 172-176).

The key to the deluge of ideas was in the "discovery" by Della Femina and Travisano that people can be proud of the sacrifices they make in the process of earning a living. The cold hamburger reaction, the relevant manifestation of the phenomenon, provided not only the discovery, but the means of communicating it. The pair had created communication; they had found a relevant commonness. But the basis of communication should lie in things common to the intended audience, and what Della Femina and Travisano produced was their own feeling. The concept worked because their own feeling also was common to some institutional investors. The effectiveness of the campaign is limited by the number of investors who share in the cold hamburger syndrome. Della Femina has evidence that the campaign stimulated some investors, but perhaps it failed to stimulate others. Even so, campaigns that engender such positive reaction probably occur only rarely.

This illustration puts in focus Klein's comment that creative people need research that tells what potential customers think and feel and want. The research should tell what potential customers *commonly* think and feel and want, and it should suggest *relevant* common manifestations of what they think and

feel and want.

But if, as Klein suggests, "demographics won't do," how do creative people go about getting a feel for their audiences? John M. Morton, Vice President and Account Supervisor for Carr Ligget Advertising, Inc., Cleveland, uses a "by-product" of research for this task:

Most research is backed up with verbatim comments by the respondents. To me, these are just as rewarding and much more interesting than the research figures. I usually pull the most interesting verbatims and turn them over to the copy writer. They represent what the people out there are saying: an easy way for the copy man to get the feel of his audience (American Association of Advertising Agencies, 1969: 279).

Morton's technique, selecting "the most interesting (to him) verbatims," leaves something to be desired as a scientific process, but the approach at least provides the creative people with clues about what potential customers think and feel and want.

Q technique (Stephenson, 1953) provides a scientific approach for accomplishing what Morton suggests, a process that begins with operant verbatims and provides evidence of which verbatims are common and relevant. The interpretation of Q data provides explanations why. An image study done for a national not-for-profit organization for breeders of Angus cattle provides an example of the capabilities and limitations of Q technique in closing the gap between communication research and communication. The goals of the study included providing the kind of research material that could give a copy writer or art director a feel for his audience.

METHODOLOGY

Briefly, the study proceeded as follows. After interviews with officers to identify areas of interest,

interviews were conducted in depth with 13 breeders in Texas, Wisconsin and Missouri. From the operant statements that emerged, a Q sort of 69 statements was constructed and administered to breeders representing differences in herd size, income, division of effort between the cattle business and other businesses, length of time in the cattle business, geographic location and membership or non-membership in the Angus Heard Improvement Record program. Forty-four completed Q sorts were correlated and factored, yielding five factors, and an array of statements (a "typical" Q sort) was derived for each factor.

INTERPRETATION

For communication purposes, a study of this kind yields two kinds of information. First, the consensus verbatims, those statements with which all respondents essentially agree, are most important; these represent what all respondents have in common, which is the basis of communication among them and with them. A second kind of information emerges, namely the statements that differentiate the factors, which in a Q study represent groups of people separated on the basis of interests.

The process of interpretation of the sort for each factor is primarily abductive, i.e., one seeks "answers" or "explanations" that account for the distribution of statements that emerged. There is the danger, in interpretation, that the wish will become parent to the explanation, but at the same time, the explanation offered must fit the data. The data, of course, are not subjective: The arrays of statements are mathematically derived, based on the operations of respondents. The experimenter has little or no idea of and no control over what will emerge. The subjectivity of the interpretation is further limited by the necessity of fitting the explanations to the data. In any case, the interpretation is considered tentative.

In interpretation of factors, one proceeds with

an "if-then" approach, that is, one examines response patterns that emerge and reasons that if such patterns exist, then certain things must be true. The patterns involve pairs of statements, groups of statements, conclusions (however tentative), and demographic data, and any combination of these. Contradictions are resolved, and ideally, one finally arrives at a generality, an algorithm that explains the schema represented by the factor array in question.

CONSENSUS STATEMENTS

In determining "relevant commonness," one seeks themes, symbols, slogans and the like that have broad appeal for the intended audience. The consensus statements,¹ particularly those with high standard scores, provide some insight into the "commonness" among breeders that can serve as a basis of communication. In the present study, four statements received high positive standard scores on all factors (normalized scores in parentheses for factors I to V respectively):

- 29. (1.3 1.8 1.1 1.8 1.9)
We shouldn't lose sight of beef quality; we can go too far the big way.
- 18. (1.3 1.1 0.9 1.5 1.4)
In the past, the trend was too much toward short, dumpy, cattle.
- 22. (0.7 1.1 1.6 1.2 1.4)
I enjoy seeing cattle in the pasture, being around them, working with them.
- 6. (1.1 1.4 1.8 1.1 1.6)
There's a lot of personal satisfaction in seeing cattle grow, in seeing the breeding results, in improving the herd.

There is much discussion and interest among Angus

¹A consensus item is defined as a statement with factor scores that differ by less than 1.0 standard score across the five factors.

breeders concerning the "right kind" of cattle. With Angus breeders the argument primarily concerns ideal cattle size. The trend is toward a longer, larger, leaner animal that would offer more weight at an earlier age. Although all factors agree that "the past trend was too much toward short, dumpy cattle," the evidence also is unequivocal about beef quality. Breeders feel that Angus quality provides the major competitive advantage over other breeds. While breeders differ on ideal size for Angus cattle, they strongly agree that beef quality should not be sacrificed to increased size.

The other positive consensus items (statements 6 and 22) indicate an enjoyment and satisfaction in raising cattle, in working with them, and in improving one's herd. And, if these statements actually represent feelings important to most breeders, one would expect manifestations of these feelings to have emerged in the depth interviews. Indeed, satisfaction in raising and breeding cattle was a common theme in the interviews. For example, a Texas rancher expressed the pleasure and anticipation of breeding cattle:

I love getting up and finding a baby calf. I love working with cattle. When a man gets my age, he has nothing to go to bed for. Cattle is what I've got to get up for.

Another Texas rancher and businessman described what he enjoyed most about the cattle business and about herd improvement:

The open air. Not being confined to the walls of a city. The people are down to earth, no put on; they're good people.... Breeding cattle is like painting a picture--trying to improve on bone structure and confirmation.

It seems clear that breeders share a closeness to nature and to the land. This, a common theme in literature, seems basic to the affection for the cattle

business. Underlying this theme is a basic, tactile earthiness, an appreciation of things that appeal to the senses. There is an obvious air of independence, of doing for oneself--of *building* for oneself. And the combination of these--a tactile appreciation and a liking for independent building--suggests the importance of hands as communication symbols. The combination of an appreciation for nature and tactile appreciation suggests other appropriate symbols: the *feel* of cool black earth, the *sound* that saddle leather makes, the *smell* of dew-covered woods in the morning, the *sight* of an awkward baby calf, or the *taste* of fresh campfire coffee. At this basic level of communication, perhaps film would provide the most useful medium for conveying these sensations.

It is, of course, possible that one could arrive at these conclusions from experience and without the benefit of scientific research. The Leo Burnett Company seems to have come very close with the Marlboro man advertising, and the success of that campaign indicated that the approach was basic enough to be of very broad appeal to many people other than cattle breeders. But, curiously enough, some Angus breeders disliked the commercials, not because of the basic appeal, but because the commercials featured "those damned Hereford cattle," which seemed to be used (instead of Angus) to evoke the True West. It is apparent that an "uncommon" element can cancel the effect of common elements. The importance of copy testing is thereby illustrated.

CLOSING THE GAP -- AN EXAMPLE

Suppose, for the sake of illustration, that the breeders' organization wanted to produce a film about "the right size and kind of cattle" because of the strong interest of breeders in the subject and because many breeders apparently feel that the organization should bring Angus breeders together on the right kind of cattle. The research results, particularly the interpretation, issue directly into the process of creating the film.

If one is correct in attributing a sensitivity to tactile appeals and in saying that hands are important symbols, one immediately has guidance for the non-verbal portion of the film:

The film opens with a tight closeup (the tactile appeal, closeup to show textures and colors, to involve) of a pair of hands (important symbols, we have guessed) working to cinch a saddle (familiar symbol, nature theme opens). The hands are masculine, strong. The camera pulls back slightly, follows hand to stirrup, remains in tight as a boot "chunks" (familiar sound) into the stirrup. Camera tilts back, follows left hand up to saddle horn. Leather makes squeaking-leather sound. Camera, tilted up, pulls back to capture man swinging up into saddle. Sound track captures protesting leather and snort of horse (familiar sounds) as man settles into saddle. Camera booms up slowly until level with the face of the man. The camera is focused on the man's face (masculine and not too pretty, believable); the background is out of focus. The camera is focused on a three-quarter front view of the man's face, which occupies the right third of the picture. The man turns his face away from the camera toward the background, still out of focus, a brilliant haze of greens and blues. The camera now focuses on the background, a lush green valley stretching away into the distance (nature theme expanded). The soundtrack, which has carried on the "close-up" sounds of the man, the horse, and nature (the wind, birds singing) now adds swelling music. Black Angus cattle graze peacefully in the valley below.... And so on.

Several things seem apparent: first, that one is now in the creative realm of communication. The "decisions" involved in laying out the scenario involve intuitive leaps, not fully justified by the data (the reason for copy testing) and yet still close to the data and even closer to the interpretation. In fact, it is difficult to tell at what point the creation

of an interpretation leaves off and the creation of communication begins.

On the verbal level, a similar synthesis can be accomplished. The matter of "correct size and kind" of cattle should be basically a rational argument, based on research findings, experience in the markets and the like. Yet the values placed on different facets of the matter load the question with subjectivity, and the communicator is placed in the position of trying not to turn off members of his audience by treading on their valued positions while making his relatively rational case. For example, if he begins by saying, "We need bigger cattle," he turns off those who believe in "compact cattle," who interpret that beginning as, "We need bigger cattle, regardless of anything else." The interpretation provides a generic theme based on what each of the "positions" agrees on: that beef quality must not be sacrificed to size. The depth interviews even provide dialogue for the film (when "cleaned up" and placed in the context of the flow of dialogue). For example, one Texas breeder commented: "The quality of our beef has made Angus cattle the most successful beef breed in the world. We can't afford to sacrifice our quality."

THERE'S DIFFERENT STROKES . . .

The consensus statements provide clues to subjectivity held in common by all respondents, but there are important differences among respondents that must be considered. No one has expressed the principle more succinctly than singer Ray Charles, who years ago said, "There's different strokes for different folks." What the proposition lacks in grammatical excellence it makes up for in soundness of thought. It expresses the reason why Morton's practice of selecting verbatims *interesting to himself* can lead him down a blind alley.

In a Q study, the factors represent groups of persons ("different folks") selected on the basis of

special interests ("different strokes"). In the present study, five factors emerged. However, due to the length of the interpretation, only one factor is expounded, the Diligent Underdog factor.² Space limitations prohibit inclusion of demographic information and comments on statements given extreme rankings, both of which were used in interpreting the data.

THE DILIGENT UNDERDOG

To the Diligent Underdog, the phrase "building better beef" has special meaning. To him, improving his herd and documenting the improvement are his way of staying abreast in the business he loves. He is ambitious, but reasonably so, and not so much of a tough businessman, nor in his operation so large that he does not feel at a disadvantage in competing with the "big money" breeders and the "promoters." A special attraction to him of objective production measures is as an "equalizer," that is, he feels that with such measures, he can develop and improve his herd to compete with the "bigs" and the "promoters." He is the breeder most likely to join or to have joined the Angus Herd Improvement Records program or some other production records program.

However, he is still not optimistic about his ability to compete. Indeed, he is frustrated by competition, and this frustration leads him to make allegations of unethical practices on the part of some cattlemen and of "catering to big-money cattlemen" on the part of the national association. The Diligent Underdog is competitive and ambitious enough to have some success, but he is neither tough minded enough to feel that he can control his destiny, nor does he have a large enough operation to feel he can butt heads with "the bigs," who he feels control the cattle business.

²See Appendix for the Q sort that emerged for this special interest group.

The Diligent Underdog not only feels that he is on the short end of the stick in competing with "biggs" and "promoters," but he feels that proposed tax reforms are sure to hurt "the common operator," of which he is one. Whereas a tough minded breeder might say that "that's the way the cookie crumbles" and look for loopholes or other routes, the Diligent Underdog laments the "unfairness" and submits. He looks for things to be concerned about. He is sure that other breeds are outpromoting his breed. He thinks the national association should inform consumers about Angus beef and keep him informed about competing breeds, government legislation, and the like.

Although he thinks the national association caters to the "biggs," he looks to the association to keep things as fair as possible through making and enforcing rules and through providing more individual help to small breeders. He wants and thinks he deserves individual attention and help from the association, and would like to see the association increase the field staff.

He is likely to belong to a local association for the help and security he gets from it, and he is sympathetic to local association problems. He favors the association devoting money and time to strengthening the local groups. However, because of the services he gets from the association, he feels that it is more important to him than the local association.

The Diligent Underdog is not totally pessimistic. He strongly thinks that Angus cattle are the best breed, and he is glad he chose them. He takes satisfaction from being a cattleman, from seeing cattle grow, from improving his herd. He thinks the cattle business is solid enough. The association should do all it can for youth, he feels, including encouraging them in cattle shows.

Such a description of a "typical" representative

of an interest group is abductive, of course, but the interpretation is supported and not contradicted by the data for that factor. It should be pointed out that a factor name, such as the "Diligent Underdog," serves primarily as a conceptual handle, and that such names can be misleading in the absence of a full understanding of the interpretation. Such names are better than numbers only because they facilitate communication about an interpretation.

Such factor interpretations provide an understanding, however tentative, of special interest groups, and can be used in the creation of communication in much the same way that the consensus statements were used. That is, if one has an understanding of what is "going on" with special interest groups, one should know better how to create communication for them. And, such understanding should make it easier for the copywriter not to antagonize such special interest groups while treading the path suggested by the consensus items.

A final note: one reason cited for the communication creator's withdrawal from research is a fear of the intrusion of research into the intuitive, subjective realm of creation. This paper attempts to make clear that closing the gap between research and creation of communication in no way constricts the intuitive work to be done. Nor does it mechanize the creative process. Instead, the research process becomes more intuitive, and the creator of communication can then "intrude" into the realm of research, perhaps more than the other way around.

APPENDIX

Statement Array for the "Diligent Underdog" Factor
(statement numbers in parentheses)

Score +5: (12) A breeder should stick near the center of the road--reasonable sized cattle, good confirmation, the ability to grow rapidly and well. (62) Angus cattle are the best breed of cattle. (29) We shouldn't lose sight of beef quality; we can go

too far the big way. (35) I'd like to see the Angus Association give more attention and encouragement to the small breeder.

Score +4: (13) I'm glad I chose Angus cattle over other breeds. (6) There's a lot of personal satisfaction in seeing cattle grow, in seeing the breeding results, in improving the herd. (19) The Angus Association caters to the big-money cattlemen. (40) The Angus Association should educate consumers about the superiority of Angus beef. (56) All things considered, Angus breeders probably should join the A.H.I.R. [Angus Herd Improvement Records] program.

Score +3: (22) I enjoy just seeing cattle in the pasture, being around them, working with them. (18) In the past, the trend was too much toward short, dumpy cattle. (33) I think the A.H.I.R. program can make me more money than I can make without it. (59) More Angus Association time and money should go into strengthening the state and local Angus groups. (1) The point of being in the cattle business is to make money. (32) The tax situation--tightening up on the hobbyists--is going to hurt the common operator.

Score +2: (8) I don't believe the Association can do too much for the junior members; we should give them all the help we can. (68) The Angus Association is being out-promoted by one or more of the other breed associations. (16) I think the Angus Association advertising on radio is a good thing. (9) The cattle business isn't just getting meat to market; it's also part of conservation--rehabilitating land, converting grass efficiently. (64) The Angus Association could help breeders a lot by keeping us informed about where we stand in relation to other breeds, about packers and retailers, about government legislation, and about other things that affect us. (66) Getting a youngster into the cattle business is sending him down a good, solid road. (49) I think the Angus Association should spend more advertising Angus advantages.

Score +1: (48) The Angus Association should try to get more news stories in farm journals and newspapers. (58) The Angus Association should encourage youngsters more through prizes at cattle shows. (10) The Angus Association should help Angus breeders to get together on the right kind and size of Angus cattle. (27) The Angus Association should have more field men; there aren't enough to go around. (67) The Angus Association provides important service in teaching youngsters things they need to know in the cattle business. (45) The Angus Association should tighten A.I. [artificial insemination] rules. (52) The Angus Association needs some fresh ideas or a fresh approach to its advertising. (61) I'd be happier with the Angus Association if the field men came to see me on occasion.

Score 0: (28) Cattle breeders are no different from other people. People are people. (63) I'm tired of women complaining about the prices of beef. The farmer should show them who's not coming out. It's the farmer! (65) Angus Association participation in and support of cattle shows is vital to us. (51) The Angus Association should try to get all the youngsters it can as junior members. (23) Membership in the Angus Association makes you feel more a part of the business. (57) The Angus Auxiliary could do a lot for Association progress. They are a largely-untapped resource. (34) The Angus Association should keep me better informed about the things that are going on in the cattle industry that affect me. (43) The registration rules are not strict enough. (37) The field men could have a lot more help from people in the state and local associations if they worked at it. And they should.

Score -1: (5) In some matters, Angus breeders need broad leadership at the national level that only the national association can provide. (44) The field men don't do enough of the little things to keep people happy. (21) One of the strong points of the Angus Association is in helping me to learn more about the cattle business. (7) The cattle business is tied in

very closely to this thing of general affluence.

(55) The state and local associations are more important to me than is the national association.

(26) There is nothing wrong with the Angus Association rules in theory, but breeders can get around almost every one in the book. (39) The Angus Association is a necessity to cattle breeders, they do a good job. (14) The advertising program is one of the Angus Association's strong points.

Score -2: (30) The Angus Association has changed; there are too many high-powered men at the top and not enough men in the field. (4) The Angus Association should worry less about getting new breeders and more about the ones they've got. (17) When cattle breeders get together, they swap tales. Talking about cattle business is like telling fish stories. It's all good fun. (47) One of the things I really enjoy is showing cattle. There's a great deal of pride in that. (20) I'm sure the increased price in registrations was necessary because of increased expenses of the Angus Association. It had to come sooner or later. (3) I get my money's worth out of the Angus Association. (53) It just seems like the whole country is against the cattle breeder making a living.

Score -3: (60) I would not want to change the Angus Association. (36) The rules on A.I. are good, but they cannot be policed. (42) Other breed associations are not as strong overall as the American Angus Association. (31) The Angus Association has built a big organization, a big plant and a big computer. Maybe we don't need all that bigness. (46) I don't know enough about what the Angus Association does. (24) I don't see any breed as a threat. We Angus breeders have to do our own work and go our own direction and let other breeds do what they want.

Score -4: (2) If it weren't for the record-keeping necessities (registrations and transfers), I wouldn't pay money to belong to the Angus Association. (15) The subject of A.I. rules is discussed way out of

proportion to its importance. (69) How the market man judges beef animals is much more important to cattlemen than what the consumer wants. (38) Keeping the records on registrations and transfers is the main purpose of the Angus Association as far as I'm concerned. (54) The cattle business is not controlled by a few big people; the small breeders are in on it too.

Score -5: (50) The A.H.I.R. program is not worth the extra work and trouble to me. (41) The Angus Association should loosen the rule on the number of owners to a bull. (11) The A.H.I.R. program is not important to me. I can tell good cattle from bad ones. (25) Cattle breeders are more honest than other men. You can take a cattleman's word.

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...all knowledge in the subjective domain now comes under the sovereign principle of inherent factor structure: everything ever written in the subjective domain or investigated by research in the hypothetico-deductive framework, is now suspect until its inherent structure has been examined. (W. Stephenson)