group influence

in marketing

and public relations

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report of a seminar conducted by
the Foundation for Research on Human Behavior
March 26-27, 1956 in Ann Arbor, Mich., and
April 19-20, 1956 at Gould House,
Ardsley-on-Hudson, N. Y.

The price of this report is two dollars.
foreword

“Group Influence in Marketing and Public Relations” was the topic of a seminar conducted by the Foundation for Research on Human Behavior in the spring of 1956. Two two-day sessions were held, one on March 26 and 27 at the Horace H. Rackham School of Graduate Studies, Ann Arbor, Michigan, and the second on April 19 and 20 at Gould House, Ardsley-on-Hudson, New York. Thirty-four persons representing 25 business and other organizations participated. They are listed on page 39 through 41 of this report.

Objectives of these seminars were to review some of the principles of group influence postulated by sociologists and social psychologists particularly during the last two decades, to report and discuss important new research, and to attempt to relate these findings and tentative principles to some practical problems encountered by business in the field of marketing and public relations.

The seminar was notable for the intercommunication it provided among those concerned with the different but related fields of marketing and public relations, and for the wide variety of types of research which appeared to throw light on the practical problems in these fields. Research from the fields of rural sociology, political science, labor relations, marketing, social psychology and sociology was brought to bear during this seminar. From the reports or participants, it apparently not only opened new vistas for some of the business representatives, but heightened the awareness of the social scientists of the pertinence of their own research to research going on in related fields.

Reports of research in the area of group influence were made by the following social scientists who also served as discussion leaders:

Charles Y. Glock, Director, Bureau of Applied Social Research, Columbia University

Harold H. Kelley, Associate Professor of Psychology, Laboratory for Research in Social Relations, University of Minnesota

Rensis Likert, Professor of Psychology and Sociology and Director, Institute for Social Research, University of Michigan

Ithiel de sola Pool, Associate Professor of Political Science and Director, Research Program in International Communications, Massachusetts Institute of Technology
Everett M. Rogers, Research Associate, Department of Rural Sociology, Iowa State College

Samuel A. Stouffer, Professor of Sociology, Director, Laboratory of Social Relations and Visiting Professor in the Graduate School of Business Administration, Harvard University

Chairman of the meetings was Samuel P. Hayes, Jr., Director of the Foundation for Research in Human Behavior. Francis S. Bourne, of the Bureau of Applied Social Research at Columbia University, wrote the seminar report which follows.
contents

Page

I. Concept of Reference Group Influence ............. 1

II. Reference Group Relevance ....................... 4

III. Identifying Influence Groups .................... 17

IV. The Audience as a Reference Group ............... 29

V. Bibliography ........................................ 34

VI. Participants ........................................ 39
I. the concept of reference group influence

Much of the discussion of group influence in these seminars was organized around the reference group concept. Basically the concept is a very simple one and has been recognized both by social scientists and, on a common sense basis, by practical men for as long as people have been concerned with human behavior.

On the common sense level the concept says in effect that man's behavior is influenced in different ways and in varying degrees by other people. Comparing one's own success with that of others is a frequent source of satisfaction or disappointment. Similarly, before making a decision one often considers what such and such a person or such and such a group (whose opinion one has some reason to follow) would do in these circumstances, or what they would think of one for making a certain decision rather than another. Put in these ways, of course, reference group influence represents an unanalyzed truism which has long been recognized. The problem to which social scientists have been addressing themselves intensively only for the last two decades, however, concerns the refinement of this common sense notion to the end that it might be applied meaningfully to concrete situations.

The real problems are to determine which kinds of groups are likely to be referred to by which kinds of individuals under which kinds of circumstances in the process of making which decisions, and to measure the extent of this reference group influence. Towards this end empirical researches have been conducted in recent years which have at least made a start in the process of refining the reference group concept.

Reference group theory as it has developed has become broad enough to cover a wide range of social phenomena, both with respect to the relation of the individual to the group and with respect to the type of influence exerted upon the individual by the group in question.

Kinds of reference groups

Reference groups against which an individual evaluates his own status and behavior may be of several kinds.

They may be membership groups to which a person actually belongs. There can be small face-to-face groups in which actual association is the rule, such as families or organizations, whether business, social, religious, or political. On the other hand, there can be groups in which actual membership is held but in which personal association is absent. (For example, membership in a political party, none of whose meetings are personally attended.)

Reference groups may be categories to which a person automatically belongs by virtue of age, sex, education, marital status and so on. This sort of reference group relationship involves the concept of role. For example, before taking a certain action an individual might consider whether this
action would be regarded as appropriate in his role as a man or husband or educated person or older person or a combination of all of these roles. What is involved here is an individual's perception of what society, in general or that part of it with which he has any contact, expects people of his age, or sex, or education or marital status to do under given circumstances.

They may be anticipatory rather than actual membership groups. Thus a person who aspires to membership in a group to which he does not belong may be more likely to refer to it or compare himself with its standards when making a decision than he is to refer to the standards of the group in which he actually belongs but would like to leave. This involves the concept of upward mobility. When such upward mobility is sought in the social or business world it is ordinarily accompanied by a sensitivity to the attitudes of those in the groups to which one aspires, whether it involves the attitudes of country club members in the eyes of the aspiring non-member or the attitudes of management in the eyes of the ambitious wage earner or junior executive.

There are also negative, dissociative reference groups. These constitute the opposite side of the coin from the anticipatory membership groups. Thus an individual sometimes avoids a certain action because it is associated with a group (to which the individual may or may not in fact belong) from which he would like to dissociate himself.

Influence on individual behavior

Reference groups influence behavior in two major ways. First, they influence aspiration levels and thus play a part in producing satisfaction or frustration. If the other members of one's reference group (for example, the neighbors) are wealthier, more famous, better gardeners, etc., one may be dissatisfied with one's own achievements and may strive to do as well as the others.

Second, reference groups influence kinds of behavior. They establish approved patterns of using one's wealth, of wearing one's fame, of designing one's garden. They set tabus too, and may have the power to apply actual sanctions (for example, exclusion from the group). They thus produce conformity as well as contentment (or discontentment).

These two kinds of influence have, however, a good deal in common. Both imply certain perceptions on the part of the individual, who attributes characteristics to the reference group which it may or may not actually have. Both involve psychological rewards and punishment.

Relative deprivation – an example of reference group influence

As already indicated, one of the chief problems in the field of reference group theory is to identify which of several groups that might serve as a frame or reference under given circumstances actually is invoked by an individual.

This is sometimes difficult to get at directly, as individuals are not always aware of which reference groups they are evaluating their behavior against, or may not be anxious to reveal them where they are conscious of such groups.

During World War II the Research Branch of the United States Army was concerned with morale of troops under different circumstances, and the morale often seemed not to reflect objective conditions. Thus, for example, soldiers in the Military Police who had received fewer promotions than their opposite numbers in the Air Force were nevertheless more satisfied with their rank than were the average Air Force men. Many similar phenomena were noted in which the men who were apparently suffering greater hardship on an absolute basis were more satisfied than others apparently suffering less hardship on an absolute basis. In an effort to explain these apparent inconsistencies the concept of "relative deprivation" was introduced. It was found that in each case there existed a reference group with which the individual soldier tended to compare his own lot. Only if he felt deprived relative to this group did his morale suffer.
Two examples should suffice.

**Army Promotions**—The fact that Military Police were often more satisfied with their progress than were the more rapidly promoted Air Force Men was explained as follows: Absolute achieved status evidently was not the key to their feelings but rather the relation of the soldier's status to that of others he regarded as his standard of comparison. Thus the Private First Class in the Military Police may have been more satisfied than the Corporal in the Air Force, because in the Military Police virtually no enlisted man expected to get higher than Private First Class, while in the Air Force soldiers saw sergeants and better all around them.

**Negro Troops**—It was found that the morale of Northern Negroes in southern army camps was higher than that of Negroes in northern camps located in the areas where presumably Negroes in general were accorded better treatment. This apparent incongruity was again explained by identifying the reference group against which the Northern Negro compared himself in each instance. The reference group which turned this apparent inconsistency into a plausible reaction in this case was the Negro civilians whom the soldiers encountered while on pass in neighboring towns. The Negro soldier's pay was the same in the North as it was in the South, but in the North he found Negro civilians making so much money in defense plants that his pay appeared small by comparison. On the other hand, relative to most Negro civilians he saw in southern towns, the Negro soldier had a position of comparative wealth and dignity. Thus the psychological values of Army life to the Negro soldier in the South relative to the Southern Negro civilian greatly exceeded the psychological values of Army life to the Negro soldier in the North relative to the Northern Negro civilian.

The practical value of the reference group concept in marketing and public relations three basic questions arise:

1. **Reference Group Relevance**—How do you determine whether and to what extent reference group influence is operating in a given situation? The reference group is after all just one of many influences in decision making, varying greatly in prominence from situation to situation.

2. **Reference Group Identification**—How do you identify the particular reference group or groups or individuals who are most relevant in influencing decisions under given circumstances? This is perhaps the most difficult question to answer in many cases, particularly where multiple reference groups are involved.

3. **Reference Group Identification and Effective Communication**—Once having identified the nature of the group influence operating in a given situation, how do you then make use of this knowledge in achieving the most effective communication with the groups or individuals?

The payoff is of course in this area, since the answers to the first two questions are of value only to the extent that they can be translated into more pertinent and effective communications, designed to influence purchasing behavior or the attitudes of various publics towards an organization.

Experimental evidence is now available which sheds light on each of these three questions. From this evidence as well as from the general advancement in the methodology of social research in recent years there have emerged some generalizations, very tentative in nature. These can be applied only with the most careful attention to the special circumstances operating in individual instances, and serve more as guides to fruitful ways of examining problems as they arise than as simple answers to problems.
II. reference group relevance in decision making

Whether or not reference group influence is likely to come into play in the decisions of individuals depends on many interrelated factors. For descriptive purposes, however, it is convenient to consider some of these factors under two major headings:

1. Influence determinants which vary primarily according to the individual making the decision, such as the feeling of security or insecurity with respect to potential reference groups, the perception of the positions of these groups concerning kinds of behavior expected or stands on specific issues, and the extent of knowledge about the matter on which a decision must be made.

2. Influence determinants which vary primarily according to the matter to be decided, such as the attributes of the product, in a marketing situation, or the nature of the organization and issue at stake, in a public relations situation.

In marketing, it is rarely practical to utilize information about individual differences (the first class above), because products must be designed and advertised with large groups in mind. In public relations, on the other hand, individual differences may be very important. In this area the general attention level with respect to a particular issue is often low. Under these circumstances the relevant public may be largely confined to a few individuals, and in such cases knowledge of the relation between these individuals and potential reference groups would certainly be to the point.

A. INDIVIDUAL DIFFERENCES AND REFERENCE GROUP INFLUENCE

1. The relation of security level and conformity to reference group influence

A tentative generalization which has emerged in this area and which has been supported by some experimental evidence is this:

Individuals enjoying the greatest amount of security by virtue of their prestige and status within a group will generally conform (both publicly and privately) to the standards of that group, but are also freest to deviate from the group norms on occasions when, to their minds, particular circumstances seem to justify such deviations. On the other hand those with lowest feelings of security and

*An exception to this generalization may be found in the case of personal selling, where knowledge of the individual's specific relation to and perception of certain groups would be highly relevant.
least status in a group are most likely publicly to conform to its norms on all occasions even though harboring private opposition and resentment. The latter holds, of course, only if there are penalties associated with loss of membership in the particular group. Conformity then serves the purpose of maintaining membership in that group.

The following experiment conducted under laboratory conditions at Yale University lent support to this hypothesis (9)*.

Eighteen groups, each composed of six Yale freshmen, were formed for the experiment. They were motivated to cooperate by being told that they would meet for several sessions to work on certain problems and that the best group would win a prize. To promote group cohesion without sacrificing cooperation, each group was told that it would stop from time to time to evaluate its own members and expel any who were seriously interfering with the progress of the group. It was pointed out, however, that such expulsion was not to be taken lightly, as it would carry a considerable stigma and hence was only to be considered under very serious circumstances. The groups were given several problems on which they were asked to come to some agreement. One of these problems was in the area of juvenile delinquency. Each of the 18 groups was presented with some information about two gangs of juvenile delinquents, and asked to decide which of these gangs most deserved help from a social worker. The information was structured in such a way as to make Gang A appear to be the logical candidate for aid from the social worker. As planned by the researchers, the various units deliberated and came to the jointly-arrived-at decision that Gang A most deserved aid. After these group decisions were made, artificial images were set up in the mind of each individual as to how highly he was regarded by the group to which he belonged. This was accomplished by having the group members rate each other, in writing; however, the experiment leader did not use this information but gave each student fictitious information on how he was regarded by other members of his six man group. One person in each group was told that he was very highly regarded, two were told that they had been given an average rating, another two that the group's regard for them was quite low, and finally one member of each group was told that he was on the verge of rejection.

After these varying images of esteem by the particular group had been established (designed to set up feelings ranging all the way from very high to very low sense of security) a new item of information about the juvenile gangs was introduced. This item introduced some counter evidence pointing rather clearly in favor of Gang B as being the logical choice for aid.

After the new evidence was introduced, private and public expressions of conformity to the originally announced judgments of the group were obtained from those of very low, average and high prestige (as artificially manipulated for experimental purposes) with the following results:

1. Men with lowest prestige and security in relation to their group—those who believed they were on the verge of expulsion—were, when queried privately, most willing to deviate from the originally established norm of their group. However, when placed in the position of having to take a public stand these same people were most likely to conform to the originally announced norms of the groups, and least likely to deviate even though their own private inclination on the basis of the facts at hand was to do so.

2. Men with average status and security exhibited considerable conformity, even in their private opinions.

3. Men with highest status and security were found, when queried privately, to be quite willing to differ from the original group decision and felt the greatest freedom to express their non-conformity publicly.

These relationships may be expressed graphically as follows:

*Figures in parentheses refer to references in the bibliography.
Practical implications

If a person has high status and feels very secure relative to a group, he can be appealed to directly on the merits of the case and is in the best position to take the lead in deviating should he so desire, with least risk of losing status with the group he prizes. Seeking to influence such people through reference group appeals, when the merits of the case are inconsistent with the appeals, may have little success.

On the other hand, as suggested by the data just reviewed, those with lesser status in their group and less feeling of security are most likely to be influenced in public or visible actions by appeals involving their reference group. They are more likely to observe the norms of the group than others, even if they privately disagree with its specific position, since they require acceptance from the group for their own security. However, if the reference group influence conflicts with their own judgement or works against their own best interests, they are likely to develop an underlying resistance to the idea. Such resistance may find expression in other ways.

A practical example of the operation of this principle in the field of public relations and specifically in the area of influencing legislation may be drawn from experience in Washington. Particularly on issues where mass public attention and interest is low, considerable effort is concentrated on the most crucial of all publics, Congress itself. A Congressman of course has several reference groups, prominent among which are his constituents and the remainder of Congress. Naturally he greatly values the esteem of both of these groups. His very existence in Congress depends on the former and his self-esteem as well as the degree of cooperation he can depend upon getting for his own projects depends upon the high regard of the latter. The Congressman's status and security with regard to his constituents may be measured by such items as the size of his pluralities and the length of his service. Within Congress his status may be measured by, among other things, such items as seniority and cooperation by other members in the past.

Suppose a group was interested in changing a long standing piece of legislation which appeared to have represented the majority views of Congress for a considerable period of time. Suppose also that there was considerable merit in the proposed change, but that the public was relatively little concerned with this legislation. The Congressman's primary reference groups with respect to this issue is likely, therefore, to be his colleagues in the House. A freshman Congressman with little security and status would not, even though he privately favored this new legislation, be likely to oppose publicly the prevailing reference group position, by introducing the legislation or placing his name on an initial list of sponsors, while a Congressman with security and status might be more willing to do so.

For those outside of Congress interested in seeing the measure passed, winning the support of so-called bellwethers within Congress for this would be a primary objective. Such Congressmen, by virtue of their secure position in Congress, are most free to devi-
ate and take the lead on occasions, where the case merits it. Though they generally show considerable respect for the norms of their "club" they are also in the best position to ignore this reference group when the right occasion arises.

2. The individual's perception of norms of potential reference group

Perhaps one of the more obvious limitations on the relevance of a potential reference group in influencing a decision is an individual's lack of knowledge or incorrect perception of the group's actual position on an issue, even where he values the group's views or at least its acceptance of him. Thus, for example, the American Legion may be an effective reference group for a substantial number of veterans with respect to veterans' legislation. It may be much less so, however, in connection with views on international affairs. The Legion has a position on such matters, but the average veteran is much less likely to know just what that position is. Along this line, a study* conducted for a Church Council found issues on which the Church's national policy was not followed by a considerable portion of the Church's members. The study revealed that these differences between Church policy and the opinions of its individual members were not necessarily conscious nonconformity with group norms, but rather in many cases reflected ignorance of what those norms were.

One practical implication from these studies is that the effective influence of a reference group, even one known to command a substantial following, may be increased by giving special publicity to the position of the group on a specific issue.

3. Independent knowledge about the matter to be decided

Experimental evidence has indicated that reference group influence is particularly potent in an informational vacuum. Where the individual has little if any knowledge about the attributes of a product or the issues involved in a public relations campaign, reference group influence is maximized. On the other hand, where the individual has personal knowledge and experience, the reference group influence is likely to be less relevant, other things being equal. Thus, for example, in the same study of a Church and its parishioners alluded to above, it was found that uninformed parishioners tended to have the same attitudes on secular issues as did their clergymen, but among those parishioners who were politically informed and had other sources of information on these issues there was a tendency more often to ignore the positions taken by their clergymen.

B. DIFFERENT KINDS OF DECISIONS AND REFERENCE GROUP INFLUENCE

1. Marketing and reference group relevance

As has already been suggested, the reference group constitutes just one of the many influences in buying decisions, and this influence varies from product to product. How then does one determine whether reference group influence is likely to be a factor in buying behavior in connection with a given product or brand? Research has been conducted on the various factors that influence buying behavior with reference to several products, and out of this have emerged some general ideas about how reference group influences may enter into purchasing.

Buying may be a completely individualistic kind of activity or it may be very much socially conditioned. Consumers are often influenced by what others buy, especially those persons with whom they compare themselves, or use as reference groups.

The conspicuousness of a product is perhaps the most general attribute bearing on its susceptibility to reference group influence. There are two aspects to conspicu-

*Source: Bureau of Applied Social Research, Columbia University.
ousness in this particular context that help to determine reference group influence. First the article must be conspicuous in the most obvious sense that it can be seen and identified by others. Secondly it must be conspicuous in the sense of standing out and being noticed. In other words, no matter how visible a product is, if virtually everyone owns it, it is not conspicuous in the second sense of the word. This leads to a further distinction: reference groups may influence either (a) the purchase of a product, or (b) the choice of a particular brand or type, or (c) both.

The possible susceptibility of various product and brand buying to reference group influence is suggested in the following figure:

According to this classification a particular item might be susceptible to reference group influence in its purchase in three different ways, corresponding to three of the four cells in the above figure. Reference group influence may operate with respect to product alone (Brand + Product -) as in the upper left cell, or it may operate both with respect to brand and product (Brand + Product +) as in the upper right cell, or it may operate with respect to product but not brand (Brand - Product +) as in the lower right cell.

Only the "minus-minus" items of the kind illustrated (Brand - Product -) in the lower left cell are not likely to involve any significant reference group influence in their purchase at the present time.

**Figure 2**

Products and brands of consumer goods may be classified by extent to which reference groups influence their purchase

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference group influence relatively:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>weak —</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strong +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strong +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>reference group influence relatively:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>weak —</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>strong +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>—</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Product</th>
<th>Reference Group Influence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>clothing</td>
<td>strong +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>furniture</td>
<td>weak —</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>magazines</td>
<td>strong +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>refrigerator</td>
<td>reference group influence relatively:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>type</td>
<td>weak —</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>toilet soap</td>
<td>strong +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>soap</td>
<td>weak —</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>canned peaches</td>
<td>reference group influence relatively:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>laundry soap</td>
<td>weak —</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>refrigerator</td>
<td>strong +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>brand</td>
<td>reference group influence relatively:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>type</td>
<td>weak —</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TV (black &amp; white)</td>
<td>strong +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>air conditioners</td>
<td>reference group influence relatively:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>instant coffee</td>
<td>weak —</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>tobacco</td>
<td>strong +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>beer</td>
<td>weak —</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>cigarettes</td>
<td>strong +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>beer (prem. vs. reg.)</td>
<td>weak —</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>drugs</td>
<td>strong +</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>beer (reg.)</td>
<td>weak —</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Bureau of Applied Social Research, Columbia University (Glock, unpublished).

*The classification of all starred products is based on actual experimental evidence. Other products in this table are classified speculatively on the basis of generalizations derived from the sum of research in this area and confirmed by the judgment of seminar participants.

What are some of the characteristics that place an item in a given category, and what significance do such placements have for marketing and advertising policy?

Autos constitute an article where both the product and the brand are socially conspicuous. Whether or not a person buys a car, and also what particular brand he buys, is likely to be influenced by what others do. This also holds true for cigarettes, for drugs (decisions made by M.D.'s as to what to prescribe) and for beer with respect to type (premium vs. regular) as opposed to brand. Cigarettes and drugs, however, qualify as "plus-plus" items in a manner different from cars.

For example, while the car belongs to a class of products where brand differentiation is based at least substantially on real differences in attributes, the cigarette belongs to a class of product in which it is difficult to differentiate one brand from another by attributes: hence attributes are ascribed largely through reference group appeal built up by advertising. Popular images of the kinds of people who smoke various brands have been created at great cost, and in some cases additional images are being created to broaden a particular brand's market. In the case of drugs, it was found that the reference group influencing whether the product was used was different from that influencing the particular brand selected. Reference group influence was found to be prominent in determining whether or not beer was purchased at all, and also in determining whether regular or premium beer was selected. It did not appear to influence strongly choice of a particular brand.

b. "Product plus, brand minus" items

Instant Coffee is one of the best examples of this class of items. Whether it is served in a household depends in considerable part on whether the housewife, in view of her own reference groups and the image she has of their attitudes towards this product, considers it appropriate to serve it. The brand itself in this instance is not conspicuous or socially important and is a matter largely for individual choice. In the case of air conditioners, it was found that little prestige attached to the particular brand used, and reference group influence related largely to the idea of purchasing the product itself. Analysis in one city revealed that the purchase of this often "visible from the outside" product was concentrated in small neighborhood areas. Clusters of conditioners were frequently located in certain rows and blocks. In many cases clusters did not even cross streets. Immediate neighbors apparently served as a powerfully influential group in the purchase of these appliances. In this general class may also be found the black and white TV set, with its antenna often visible on the outside of the house. As the saturation point in black and white TV set ownership rapidly approaches, however, the influence of reference groups may soon become minor, and the product can then be put in the "brand minus, product minus" quadrant, along with refrigerators. Color TV may remain in the "brand plus, product minus" quadrant, with type (color) rather than brand per se the element which is strongly related to reference groups.

c. "Product minus, brand plus" items

This group is made up essentially of products that all people or at least a very high proportion of people use, although differing as to type or brand.

Perhaps the leading example in this field is clothing. There could hardly be a more socially visible product than this, but the fact that everyone in our society wears clothing takes the product out of the area of reference group influence. The type of clothing purchased is, however, very heavily influenced by reference groups, with each subculture in the population (teenagers, zootsuiters, Ivy League collegians, western collegians, workers, bankers, advertising men, etc.) setting its own standards and often prescribing within fairly narrow limits what those who feel related to these groups can wear. Similarly, though not quite as dramatically, articles like furniture, magazines, refrigerators and toilet soap are seen in almost all homes, causing their purchase in general to fall outside of the orbit of reference group influence. The visibility of these items, however, coupled with the wide variety of styles and types among them make the selection of particular kinds highly suscep-
tible to reference group influence.

d. "Product minus, brand minus", items

Purchasing behavior in this class of items is governed largely by product attributes rather than by the nature of the presumed users. In this group neither the products nor the brands tend to be socially conspicuous. This is not to say that personal influence cannot operate with respect to purchasing the kind of items included in this group. As with all products, some people tend to exert personal influence and others tend to be influenced by individual persons. Reference groups as such, however, exert relatively little influence on buying behavior in this class of items. Examples of items in this category are salt, canned peaches, laundry soap and radios. It is apparent that placement in this category is not necessarily inherent in the product itself and hence is not a static placement. Items can move in and out of this category.

While it is true that items which are essential socially inconspicuous, like salt and laundry soap, are natural candidates for this category, it is not entirely out of the realm of possibility that through considerable large scale advertising and other promotional efforts images of the kind of people who use certain brands of salt or laundry soap could be built up so as to bring reference group influence into play on such items, much as has been the case with cigarettes. The task here would be more difficult, however, since the cigarette is already socially visible. On the other hand, items such as radios and refrigerators which are conspicuously visible and whose purchase was once subject to considerable reference group influence have now slipped into this category through near saturation in ownership.

Implications of strong and weak reference group influence for advertising and marketing

It should be stressed again that this scheme of analysis is introduced to show how reference group influence might enter into purchasing behavior in certain cases. It cannot be regarded as generally applicable to marketing problems on all levels. There is still a need to know more precisely where many different products or brands fit into this scheme. Attempts to fit products and brands into the classification above suggest research that needs to be done to obtain more relevant information about each product.

Assuming, however, that a product or brand has been correctly placed with respect to the part played by reference groups in influencing its purchase, how can this help in marketing the product in question?

Where neither product nor brand appear to be associated strongly with reference group influence, advertising should emphasize the product’s attributes, intrinsic qualities, price, and advantages over competing products.

Where reference group influence is operative, the advertiser should stress the kinds of people who buy the product, reinforcing and broadening where possible the existing stereotypes of users. This involves learning what the stereotypes are and what specific reference groups enter into the picture, so that appeals can be "tailored" to each major group reached by the different media employed.

Although it is important to see that the "right" kind of people use a product, a crucial problem is to make sure that the popular image of the product’s users is as broad as possible without alienating any important part of the product’s present or potential market in the process. Creating or reinforcing a stereotype of consumers which is too small and exclusive for a mass-produced item may exclude a significant portion of the potential market. On the other hand, some attempts to appeal to new groups through advertising in mass media have resulted in the loss of existing groups of purchasers whose previous (favorable) image of the product-user was adversely affected. One possible means for increasing the base of the market for a product by enlarging the image of its users is to use separate advertising media through which a new group can
be reached without reducing the product's appeal to the original group of users. Another method might be to appeal to a new group through cooperative advertising by a number of companies producing the product, possibly through a trade association. This would minimize the risk to an individual producer who, trying to reach a new group of users through his own advertising (women as opposed to men or wealthy as opposed to average people, for example), might antagonize people who had a strong need to identify with the original image of the product's kind of user.

Product attributes versus reference group influence

A technique which could serve to assess the relative influence of reference groups, as compared with product attributes, on the purchase of any given product was employed in research on a food product which will be referred to as product "X".

A cross-section of "X" users was asked several questions relating to particular attributes of "X", such as whether it was more harmful or beneficial for one's health, whether or not it was considered fattening, whether it was considered extravagant or economical, whether or not it tasted good, and so on. These same people were also asked a reference group-oriented question about "X", to determine whether or not "X" was popular with most of their friends. It was found that there was usually more "X" eating among people who reacted negatively to "X"'s attributes but admitted to its popularity among most of their friends, than among those who reacted positively to "X"'s attributes but indicated that it was not popular with their friends.

These relationships are shown in Table on the next page.

In this table, the scores in parentheses are those of people whose replies showed both attribute influence and reference group influence exerting pressure in the same direction.

Special attention should be directed towards the other scores. These represent situations in which people are under cross-pressures. For each of the four attributes considered, the reference group influence is stronger than the attribute influence, in the use of "X". This is brought out by the arrows, which point toward the cross-pressure situations where the reference group influence is adverse. In all of these, consumption frequency is less than where attribute influence alone is negative. Or, put another way, positive perception of reference group behavior with respect to the food product ("X" is very popular) coupled with negative perception of its actual attribute value ("X" does more harm than good, is fattening, etc.) leads to more consumption than negative perception of reference group behavior ("X" not very popular) coupled with positive perception of actual attribute value ("X" does more good than harm, not fattening, economical).

As can be seen from the comparisons indicated by the arrows, reference group influence is markedly stronger than attribute influence for three of the four attributes, only for "taste" does the attribute influence come close to competing with reference group influence in determining consumption of "X".

One implication of this finding would be that advertising by the "X" industry might stress the variables that are related to the products' social utility for its consumers, rather than base its advertising solely on the physical attributes of the product.

In a study of a beverage, it was found that, of those who drank the beverage in question, 95% claimed that their friends also drank it, while of those who did not drink this beverage 85% also claimed that their friends did not drink it.

Some products, then, must be sold to whole social groups rather than primarily to individuals.
### Table 1

Relation between reference group and attribute influence in use of food product "X"

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reference Group</th>
<th>+ Product Attribute</th>
<th>- Product Attribute</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>With most of respondent's friends &quot;X&quot; is:</td>
<td>Very Popular</td>
<td>Not Very Popular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Effects of &quot;X&quot; on health</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ more good than harm</td>
<td>(.41)</td>
<td>-.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- more harm than good</td>
<td>.08</td>
<td>(-.51)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ do not avoid fattening food</td>
<td>(.30)</td>
<td>-.21</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>and/or feel &quot;X&quot; is not really</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ or a little fattening</td>
<td>.14</td>
<td>(-.29)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ try to avoid fattening food and</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>feel &quot;X&quot; is really or a little</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ fattening</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Economic Value Judgment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ fairly economical</td>
<td>(.29)</td>
<td>-.20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- sort of an extravagance</td>
<td>.11</td>
<td>(-.33)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Taste Judgment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>+ tastes good</td>
<td>(.42)</td>
<td>.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>- no reference to good taste**</td>
<td>.09</td>
<td>(-.38)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*All scores in the above table constitute an index of the frequency of "X" eating among respondents falling into the given cell. The scoring procedure used was:

Frequent "X" users - score -1
Medium "X" users - score 0
Occasional "X" users - score -1

The final score is derived by subtracting the number of occasional "X" users in a given cell from the number of frequent users and dividing the remainder by the total number of respondents in the cell.

For example, the index score .41 was obtained as follows:

329 respondents felt that a moderate amount of "X" does more good than harm AND report that "X" is very popular with most of their friends.

Of these 329 respondents 178 are frequent "X" users, 97 are medium "X" users, and 43 are occasional "X" users.

The score: \[ 178 - 43 = 135 \]

The Index value: \[ \frac{135}{329} = .41 \]

**"Tastes Good" represents the selection of this phrase from a word list of various attributes that might be applied to "X". "No Reference to Good Taste" refers to those respondents who did not select "Tastes Good" from the word list.

Source: Bureau of Applied Social Research, Columbia University
Relevance of reference groups in area of public relations

Can the same type of classification of reference group influence, previously applied to products and brands in the marketing field, be applied to companies and industries in the public relations area? Some such classification could conceivably be made in a general manner. For example, popular attitudes toward certain industries, which have come under political scrutiny and in reference to which political parties have taken definite stands, such as the power industry, may well be influenced by reference group thinking. Similarly, popular attitudes toward a particular company may be influenced by labor union reactions to the company's specific policies in labor relations. This could take place either in an industry which itself was in the public eye and hence more susceptible to reference group influence, or in an industry relatively little in the public eye. Using a classification analogous to that presented above, the first of these two hypothetical cases would fall into a "Company plus, Industry plus" classification, with respect to reference group influence on attitudes towards the industry, while the second would fall into a "Company plus, Industry minus" category. In the first category might be a company that has had a prolonged and highly publicized strike in the steel or coal or railroad industry, for example, while in the latter category might be found a well-known company with a similar experience, let us say in the hat industry, an industry in which the public interest is not particularly involved. Finally, to round out this classification scheme, industries not visibly related to an important public interest and made up of many relatively small companies which have not been involved in serious disputes with particular groups would tend to fall into the "Company minus, Industry minus" category with respect to reference group influence.

The factor of social visibility is an important clue to reference group influence both in marketing and public relations. However, the value of the above classification by reference-group influence appears to be much more limited for public relations than for marketing. Public relations problems are far more varied and complex, and these complexities limit the value of such a gross classification scheme as that advanced above.

Some of the limitations on the usefulness of such a classification scheme are:

1. Little if any relevant research is available in the public relations field to support such speculative classification.

2. Relatively few industries and companies, nationally speaking, elicit stable images of great force of one kind or another among the general public.

3. While a generally favorable image of a company is, of course, highly desirable, usually a company's public relations problems break down into several component parts, and can best be measured along several separate dimensions. In fact, one national survey organization, which conducts a biannual audit of company public relations, uses twelve separate components on which attitudes towards the company are based.

4. Just as the attitudes towards a company must be broken down functionally, they must often be considered separately on a geographical basis. The same industry and even the same company may have different public relations problems in the different localities where plants are located. Local problems can best be evaluated in their specific contexts, and lend themselves to a minimum of generalization at the present stage of knowledge in this field.

5. From a public relations standpoint, the general public is just one of many publics with which a company or industry is concerned at various times and with respect to various aspects of its operation. Other special publics which may be of concern, depending upon the particular problem at hand, include customers, employees, suppliers, stockholders, associates in the industry, Government officials either local or national, and so on. Each of these groups may constitute a reference group influencing company action at one time or another, and each of these groups in turn has its own ref-
ence groups, through which the company may seek to influence the group.

6. Finally, whereas in marketing the implications of reference group influence are often quite clear, because they can be evaluated against a measurable criterion—the act of buying or not buying—there is in public relations only rarely any equivalently unambiguous criterion against which reference group influence can be measured. Except where issues at stake are of very direct and great importance to the public concerned, it is difficult to tell what the significance of a particular attitude towards a company or industry is. Is a widely held superficial attitude more, or less, important to a company than a central and deep seated feeling held by a smaller group, and what implications does each have for action? These are researchable questions, but more difficult than in the marketing field, where buying behavior provides in most cases a more convenient test.

An example of how varied the possibilities are for reference group influence in the public relations area is provided in the experience of a large utilities company. The company was seeking a rate increase in a state and this, of course, required government action at the state level. At first an attempt was made to exert direct influence on the special "public" which was in a position to grant the raise in rate. Negotiations between the company's top management and members of the state Commission, however, failed to achieve the objectives of the company. The company next began a campaign in which it was explained to company employees in each local community what the rate increase would mean to them in terms of new equipment, jobs, and so on. These local employees at all levels undertook to make this information known to the members of their communities. In each community, some local company employee talked personally to each important opponent who had spoken out against the rate increase. When the Commission met again, it authorized the increase in rates. The company's local employees and the groups of which they were members in each local community served as reference groups to others in the community and to the decision-makers at the state level. A similar approach was later successfully tried in another state.

Had the rate increases not been justified, it is likely that the public relations of this company would eventually have suffered, whether or not the request for a rate increase had been granted. Resentment is created when people feel that they have been influenced to act against their own interests. In this case, however, no adverse reactions were reported.

Reference group relevance in labor relations

From a company's standpoint, its labor relations have a direct bearing on its public relations. The discussion that follows illustrates how some internal reference groups within the company have relevance for labor morale and hence, indirectly, for public relations.

One problem which quite frequently occurs and can sometimes have serious consequences for labor relations arises when one group misperceives the standards or attitudes of a body that it looks to as an important reference group.

In certain studies conducted within industry, on attitudes towards unions at different management levels, it was found that there was a considerably stronger anti-union bias on the part of middle management officials than among top management. For the managers at the middle level, the top management group was naturally important as an anticipatory membership reference group. They thought they were expressing the viewpoint of the latter group toward unions. Moreover, in order to be on the safe side those in middle management expressed a position more conservative than that held by those they used as a reference group.

Similar misperceptions were found to occur in studies of what foremen, workers and management think about production standards, and what each of these groups thinks the other groups think about produc-
tion standards. The reference group concept also helps explain some morale problems that might otherwise be puzzling. For example, it has been found that the morale of the highest-paid scientists in a company frequently is the lowest among all the company's employees. Men in this position were generally found to have, from an occupational standpoint, one or two reference groups against which their own lot (superior though it was among company scientists) suffered in some respect by comparison. The senior scientists' position in the company was high enough to make the top management group visible to them. They saw in top management a group of men often of their same age and with the same or less education, making more money and in a position to make policy and decide on the disposition of the creative efforts of the scientists. Another key reference group for many of these scientists were their professional colleagues, especially those in the universities. While the latter were ordinarily making far less money, the university scientists were freer to publish the results of their research and to enhance their professional reputations.

Comparing himself with these two groups, the company scientist had considerable cause for frustration, a feeling of relative deprivation. Although he may have been doing pretty well by general standards, he had neither the money nor the decision-making power associated with top management, nor the scientific prestige and freedom of some of his professional colleagues in the academic field.

Another reference group phenomenon significant for labor relations appears when there is conflict between reference groups. These conflicts can take several forms. One illustration comes from a study of the International Harvester Company's central training school for foremen. This study identified two important dimensions of leadership behavior, labelled "consideration" and "initiating structure". The first of these dimensions concerns the way in which a leader treats his men, how he considers their problems. The other, "initiating structure," refers to the emphasis which the supervisor places on instructions, explanations of organizational goals and methods to be used in the work process.

It was found that the type of leadership considered most appropriate in any particular company plant was that characteristic of the supervisor's boss—the kind of leadership desired by him. At the school, where the teachers served as the reference group for the foremen, emphasis had been placed on "consideration," on the human relations side of the supervisor's leadership task. Back in the work situation, where the boss and management comprised the influential reference group, the emphasis was ordinarily on "initiating structure." The foreman's internal conflict in attempting to reconcile these two opposing reference group influences was one of the reasons that the central training school program for foremen was not regarded as very successful.

A more generalized kind of reference group conflict which typically affects middle management or supervisory employees is illustrated by studies of relations between the various ranks in the Army by the Army Research Branch during World War II.

The Army noncommissioned officer is often peculiarly subject to cross pressures from conflicting reference groups. If he is ambitious for promotion he is likely to use his superior officers and the Army code they represent as his reference group, yet at the same time he is an enlisted man and must often live at very close quarters with other enlisted men of lower rank—who form a reference group which he finds difficult to ignore.

In one study a group of noncoms were rated both by their superiors and by the men under them. These ratings placed them in three groups:

1. Those rated favorably by their superiors and unfavorably by their men.

2. Those rated unfavorably by their superiors and favorably by their men.

3. Those rated favorably by both their superiors and their men.
These noncoms were then asked how they would act towards their men in various ambiguous situations. It was found that in these situations the noncoms rated favorably by their superiors and unfavorably by their men generally assumed their superiors' points of views. Those rated unfavorably by their superiors and favorably by their men generally tended to assume the viewpoint of their men. The noncoms who were rated favorably by both their superiors and their men exercised great skill in adhering to the values of their superiors and the Army code and yet doing it in such a way that it was understood by and pleasing to their men, too. These noncoms exercised a linking function between their men and their superiors. This is usually the most satisfactory way of resolving reference group and role conflicts, whether by an Army noncom or a plant foreman, but is often very difficult to achieve. Foremen who are perceived by the workers to be more closely oriented to the men than to the management have, as one might expect, generally been found more successful in labor relations work than foremen who identify themselves closely with management.
III. identifying influence groups

Once the fact is established that reference group influence is relevant to people's decisions in a given situation, the task still remains of identifying which of several possible reference groups is in actual practice most relevant. The discussion that follows will first summarize some of the methodological approaches generally available in the investigation of this problem and then present some specific researches designed to help in identifying influence and reference groups.

A. METHODS OF IDENTIFICATION

1. Direct questions of the public

This involves asking the respondent directly about the groups that may be influencing his opinions or actions in a given situation. This is sometimes successful, but more often this approach cannot be relied upon by itself. Frequently people are not actually aware of the source of influence for a particular action of theirs. Where a person's ego is strongly involved, moreover, a direct question may lead to concealment of real reasons for behavior.

2. Associative-projective techniques

These techniques are regarded as having advantages over direct questions in many situations because they are designed to get measurements of the motivational forces that are functioning within individuals at both the conscious and unconscious level. Individuals may or may not be aware of these forces.

Projective tests may be used both to identify relevant reference groups and to ascertain the image held of them. The respondent is asked to react to a situation directly through asking his opinion of someone else behaving in a given fashion. This can be achieved entirely on a verbal level. It may also involve the use of a picture (thematic apperception test) which the respondent is asked to characterize or interpret, or he may be asked to tell a story illustrated by it. What is achieved at best is to place in a less threatening context a question which might otherwise present some threat to a person's ego. It may also serve to help the respondent formulate answers in a relatively unstructured situation, bringing to the surface dormant reactions which might not be at once prompted by a direct question.

An illustration of the use of this projective-associative technique in the field of marketing is to be found in a survey of consumer reactions to instant coffee. When people were asked directly why they didn't use this product they were most likely to react in terms of the product's attributes. More indirect inquiry was required to bring to the surface other potential influences on a person's attitude towards the product. In this case, housewives were shown two shopping lists represented as belonging to two different women. All items on these lists were identical except that one of the lists contained regular coffee and the other in-
stant coffee. The respondents were then asked to characterize the kind of women who were likely to have each of these shopping lists. A fairly consistent image emerged from this test, revealing that most housewives saw the users of instant coffee as lazy, and as poor homemakers.

The implication was that housewives shied away from instant coffee because they feared that other housewives (an important reference group in such a situation) would regard them as inferior homemakers. This suggested an advertising approach directed towards building up a positive image of instant coffee users who are busy, active, people and capable homemakers—a positive image that would be consistent with the particular physical advantages of the product itself.

Indirect approaches of this kind have yielded valuable insights for the marketer and copywriter, but a caution must be introduced with regard to the reliability of interpretation of projective test results. Alone, the responses to indirect questions can no more be taken at their face value than can direct questions. Corroborative evidence is always desirable. As an example of the possible difficulties in interpretation in this area, a study of attitudes towards Negroes conducted at a woman's college in New England was cited. When the girls in a dormitory were asked directly if they would mind having a Negro girl as a roommate in the dormitory, the majority of them said they would not mind. When asked if they thought the other girls in the dormitory would mind, the majority reported that they thought the others would mind. The partisan of projective techniques might regard the latter as an expression of the true feelings of the girls involved. This indirect question, they would maintain, shielded the girls from having to express personal prejudice. This could be a plausible explanation of the discrepancy in answers. However, it is also possible that the response to the indirect question involved simple misperception regarding the attitudes of the other girls, and hence should be discounted on that score. Actually, other evidence would be required before one could assess with confidence the attitudes of these girls on the question at hand. Valuable as projective tests undoubtedly are, techniques for their interpretation are still in their infancy. Confirmation from other tests is still needed.

3. Check of actual homogeneity of attitudes within a group

If most of a group are believed to manifest the same attitude, this is usually taken as evidence that their attitude is at least partly the result of their group membership. This should be checked, however by actually canvassing the membership group to see if the attitude attributed to it is in fact held by a substantial majority of its members and not held by a substantial majority of non-members. Thus, for example, if people were asked to characterize "a teacher who advocated progressive education," and if a frequent response was a "graduate of a certain teachers' college," this would supply a clue as to a possible reference group for progressive education. However, it would then be necessary to check whether this particular teachers' college did in fact number among its graduates a substantially larger proportion of progressive education advocates than did other institutions or whether this was merely a case of misperception on the part of many people.

4. Check the difference in attitudes between old and new members of a group

Another kind of evidence helping to identify a reference group on a particular subject can be obtained by comparing the attitudes of people who just joined the group with those of older members. This gets at the influence of membership on attitudes directed toward the subject in question. For example, if seniors at Teachers' College exhibited significantly greater leanings toward progressive education than did freshmen, and if this was not the case at some other college, it might be fair to conclude that Teachers' College did to some extent
serve as a reference group for students in this particular question.

5. Compare the attitudes of prestigeful, accepted members of an organization with those of peripheral members

If the influential members of a group are more generally and more strongly committed to a particular viewpoint than are peripheral members, this is good evidence that the viewpoint depends heavily on membership in that group. In general, determining whether a group serves as a reference group for its members on a particular subject is relatively easy when the given group is a formal one, but considerably more difficult when the group represents an informal relationship. This calls for other techniques.

6. Sociometric technique

This technique can be used to locate informal social groups which serve as reference groups for individuals. Since no formal membership is involved in such groups, interpersonal relationships must be traced by detailed questioning of an entire group of people who are in significant association with each other. People are asked a whole battery of questions about their social relationships. Whom do they associate with? Whom do they like and respect? To whom do they look to for advice on Subject A, on Subject B, on Subject C, etc.? To what extent do people turn to them for advice on given subjects, and so on? Ideally, the sociometric technique requires an exhaustive tracing of association patterns until the entire community of people with whom one is concerned have been questioned. In this way distinctive groups can be identified which have no formal identity but which can be observed to behave and think with a certain uniformity with respect to certain questions. Furthermore, the flow of influence within these clusters can be traced, and the more influential members with respect to certain subjects can be identified.

7. Direct observation of behavior

In studying buying behavior, clues to the influences (including reference group influences) which affect purchases can sometimes be obtained by direct observation of the act of buying and the interchange that transpires between the purchaser and salesman.

B. EXAMPLES OF IDENTIFYING RELEVANT REFERENCE GROUPS

When an individual's own predispositions and those of all the groups to which he may belong are in agreement over any kind of decision, whether it be in the field of voting or purchasing behavior, there is no great difficulty in predicting his action, nor is there any need for identifying one reference group as having greater relevance or influence than another. When, however, large numbers of individuals belong to several groups and have friends whose predispositions toward certain ideas differ among themselves or with those of the individual himself, the problem of cross-pressures appears. It is in this normal type of real life situation that research is required to indicate which of several potential reference groups appears to carry the greatest weight in influencing a particular decision.

Cross-pressures in voting

Some of the most successful attempts to assess the relative influence of various reference groups have been in studies of voting. An example is the detailed study of voting behavior in a presidential election conducted in Elmira, New York (2). In this study, a panel of voters was interviewed and re-interviewed at various intervals in the months preceding the 1948 national election. This made it possible to relate changes in voting intentions, and the actual voting behavior of individuals, to the voting preferences of various groups that might serve as the potential reference groups for these voters.

The analysis focused on the particular problem of cross-pressures. All voters were interviewed who in June 1948 claimed that they would vote in November for the party opposed to the one for which they had voted four years earlier, in November 1944.
It was then determined whether these June 1948 voting intentions were in harmony or disharmony with those of the majority of the individuals' family, friends, co-religionists and co-workers. Actual voting behavior in November was then traced separately for individuals who in June were either in harmony or in disharmony with the voting intentions of the majority in each of four potential reference groups. In this way it was possible to see which of the reference groups had the greatest effect in bringing its members back into conformity with the majority of the group.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>June 1948 voting position of respondents who had changed between 1944 and 1948 was in ........</th>
<th>Voted same as June intention %</th>
<th>Failed to vote %</th>
<th>Voted opposite to June intention %</th>
<th>Total %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Harmony with family</td>
<td>69</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disharmony with family</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harmony with friends</td>
<td>76</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disharmony with friends</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harmony with religion</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disharmony with religion</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harmony with occupation</td>
<td>63</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Disharmony with occupation</td>
<td>52</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Reference to Table 2 above shows, for example, that family and friends appeared to have greater weight than did occupation and religion in bringing deviants back into the fold. Thus 63% of those in disharmony with their friends and 54% of those in disharmony with their family in their June voting intentions reverted to the norms of these groups in November. Only 39% of those in disharmony with their co-religionists, 93% of the respondents in Elmira voted for that party. This constitutes an example where the reference groups reinforce each other and there is relatively little problem in predicting final behavior. Where a majority of a voter's co-religionists differed in party choice from a majority of the voter's three closest friends, however, the individual voted more often than not in agreement with his friends and in opposition to his co-religious group came back into conformity with their voting norms in November. All of these associations have considerable influence on voting behavior, but family and friends seemed to be the more significant reference groups.

The extent to which voting behavior (in Elmira in 1948) was influenced by two groups—close friends and those of the same religion—can be illustrated even more directly. When all of a voter's three closest friends favored the same party and when that party also coincided with the choice of
religionists. Thus, despite the fact that a large majority of Protestants (82%) voted Republican in Elmira, 69% of those Protestants having two or more closest friends intending to vote Democratic themselves voted Democratic. In like manner, though a clear majority (64%) of Elmira's Catholics were for the Democratic Party, 57% of those Catholic voters who had a majority of Republicans among their closest friends voted Republican themselves.*

The above data illustrate both the working of cross-pressures on decision-making and, in a rough way, the relative importance of certain groups in influencing voting behavior. To allocate influence among various reference groups more precisely would require controlling for other possible group influences, such as income and educational level.

In like manner, the various groups of which consumers are members may set up cross-pressures on purchasing behavior. The final nature of such behavior might depend upon:

a) The particular groups that have greatest relevance for the kind of purchasing behavior in question, or

b) The ability of the marketer to recognize these cross-pressures and to develop effective promotion that takes them into account.

In the consumer field, for example, the attitudes of various groups of one's associates toward television ownership may markedly influence purchasing behavior of television sets. Whereas one's neighbors and children probably serve as positive reference groups favoring the purchase of a set or a new kind of set (color), there are situations where business or professional colleagues, especially the latter, apparently serve as a negative reference group. Research could be conducted to determine, for various classes of people, which groups have norms that are closely associated (positively or negatively) with ownership or color television. Finding out why certain influential groups are either positively or negatively oriented toward ownership of color television might then suggest advertising approaches which would offset the negative, and support the positive, reference group influences in this situation.

Personal influence in marketing

A substantial number of studies have now been made, tracing the patterns of influence in the purchase of various products and in the adoption of new practices. Some of the earlier community sociometric studies, such as that conducted in Decatur, Illinois in 1945, established certain generalizations about the role of personal influence in decision-making and the nature of those who exert influence in various areas (14). In this study a panel of women were interviewed and later re-interviewed. Those who changed their opinions or their purchasing habits or adopted new products between the two waves of interviews were singled out for special questioning as to what influenced the changes in their behavior.

These studies suggested that the importance of personal influence, relative to the influence of mass media, was considerably greater than had been commonly accepted. Also established was the notion that different individuals are the opinion leaders or "influentials" in different situations or for different decisions. These opinion leaders are not necessarily distinguished by special characteristics of wealth or social status. Marketing influentials appeared to be distinguished more by their positions in the life cycle (size of family, age of children, etc.) than by their socio-economic status.
and their contacts tended to be with those on the same soci-economic level. Only in the case of political influence did there appear to be considerable vertical contact in the social scale, with opinion leaders higher on the scale than those influenced. In order to obtain practical marketing guidance, it is evidently necessary to find out who are the opinion leaders for each product, how they can be reached, and what attributes of the product should be emphasized.

Considerable interest has been shown recently in tracing the patterns of influence in the adoption of new products and practices in commercial, professional and agricultural fields.

Adoption of a new professional practice

One study of innovation of new practices in a professional area, based in part on sociometric analysis, traced the process by which these professionals decided to accept innovations in their field. Diffusion of information was studied by interviewing the entire universe of professionals, numbering slightly over 200, in four small urban communities in which the practice in question had been introduced, for a period of about two years. The normal network of social relations among the professionals in each of communities was first determined by posing the following three sociometric questions:

1. (Purely social) "Could you name the three or four professionals you meet most frequently on social occasions?"
2. (Discuss professional affairs with) "Who are the three or four professionals in your conversations with whom the subject of the practice in question comes up?"
3. (Seek professional advice) "When you need added information or advice about the practice in question where do you usually turn?"

Then, each professional who had recently decided to adopt the new practice was asked questions to bring out the channels of information and influence which entered into this recent decision. The replies were compared with the professional's position in the social network.

The sources of information about the new practice are shown in the table below:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sources of information used by professional men in adopting a new practice</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>First Source</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>%</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Commercial sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>salesmen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>commercial mail</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>commercial periodical</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>journal advertisements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Non-commercial sources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Colleagues and professional journals)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Bureau of Applied Social Research, Columbia University.
It should be noted that the first sources of exposure were largely commercial in nature but that subsequent exposure tended increasingly to be professional.

The pattern of adoptions of the new practice was then related to the social networks identified by the replies to the questions above. All the professionals were placed in four different categories on the basis of the stage at which they adopted the new practice. The first adopters are referred to as "innovators." They took the lead in adopting the new practice, but their action did not result in a great rush to follow their example. The next group of professionals adopting the practice were called the "influentials," since their action was followed shortly by similar behavior among most of the other professionals in the community. Next came the largest group, the "followers" who adopted the new practice shortly after the so-called "influential" group, from whom they took their cue. Finally, after a long pause, the remaining small group, termed "diehards", adopted the new practice. This pattern of adoption is shown in the figure below:

What sort of men were the professionals in each of these groups? What characteristics did they have in common? From the available sociometric data and other information contained in the interviews, certain generalizations about the men in each class can be made.

Innovators—These early adopters among the professionals tended to be on the outskirts of sociometric patterns. They were relatively isolated from the professional community. Their information about the new practice came largely through commercial channels. Denied status in the professional community, they compensated by trying to get a reputation for innovation. They tended to be either quite young or older than average.

Influentials—Sociometrically speaking, the influentials tend to be outstanding professional men to whom many others looked to for professional advice, and with whom difficult cases were discussed. They were looked upon as leaders in their profes-

figure 3
Adoption of a new practice by professionals follows a distinctive pattern

Source: Bureau of Applied Social Research, Columbia University.
sional community. Much of their information came through commercial channels but, unlike the innovators, the influentials placed far greater reliance on professional channels such as professional journals, colleagues and professional conventions. They also were aware of the success of the first applications. They were slower to adopt the new practice because, in considerable measure, they were unwilling to take a chance on a new practice until they had had the opportunity to see the reports in the professional journals, to check with professional societies and to talk with the innovators about their experience with the new practice. Influentials, who constituted from 10 to 15% of those professionals surveyed, were also distinguished by the greater frequency with which they attended specialized conventions. Here is an example of a directly applicable research finding. With information of this kind, marketers and advertisers can both identify and isolate a crucially influential reference group and make direct contact with them. Thus, attendance at such specialized conventions by salesmen well equipped with literature would reach a target group selectively and with great efficiency.

Followers—The professionals who took their cue from the influentials were on the outskirts of the sociometric diagram. While in contact with the leading professionals of the community and approved by them, they tended in nearly all cases to receive advice in these contacts. Their information sources on the non personal level tended to be more commercial than professional, but their chief source was their more respected professional colleagues whose approval they sought before adopting new practices. Followers also were inclined to attend general rather than specialized meetings of their professional association.

Diehards—Like the innovators, the diehards also tended to be isolates, but they were generally older than the latter and apparently had little interest in raising their status. They were less inclined to seek advice from others than were the other professionals, and generally came to adopt the drug finally only at the insistence of some of their own clients.

Two cautions should be introduced regarding the generalizability of such findings:

1. The informational source leading to adoption may be different for an innovation which is a complete departure from a previous product or method from what it is for a partial departure. Where the innovation is a radical one and little doctrine exists for interpreting its validity, then commercial sources and purely social sources play a relatively larger role, and advice from colleagues plays a lesser role. When an innovation is less basic in nature, however, commercial sources are generally less important and the advice of colleagues relatively more important as informational sources leading to adoption.

2. It cannot be assumed that "Innovators" are never "Influentials." While this was true among professionals in the adoption of the new practice reported above, and also has been found to hold in the innovation of several agricultural practices, there have also been agricultural practices where innovation has started among "Influentials." The nature of the innovation and also, in some cases, the norms of a particular community or neighborhood with regard to innovation affected the extent to which "Influentials" were or were not "Innovators."

Agricultural innovation

Agricultural sociologists have been conducting parallel research on the acceptance of innovation in farm machinery, new seeds, wheat sprays, etc. In much of this research the S-Curve of adoption noted above in the professional study was closely approximated.

Stages in adoption of new products or practices

In adopting new farm products or procedures, five stages have been noted. The time it takes to get from the original stage to final adoption of course varies. For instance, the average time span from awareness to adoption of hybrid seed corn in Iowa
was seven years. However long the span, however, the five stages which have been generally observed are (1) Awareness, (2) Interest, (3) Evaluation, (4) Trial and (5) Adoption.

1. **Awareness**—At this stage, the individual learns of the existence of the idea or practice but has little knowledge about it. Studies such as that of hybrid corn in Iowa indicate that salesmen are important in creating awareness of new ideas which involve the use of a commercial product. Neighbors and friends are important creators of awareness of new ideas among the lower socio-economic groups.

Some studies reveal that government agencies, such as the Extension Service, are the second most important source of information during the awareness stage. It is also at this stage that the mass media have their greatest impact. For the majority, mass media appear to become of less importance as sources of information after general awareness is achieved.

2. **Interest Stage**—The individual develops interest in the idea. He seeks more information about it and considers its general merits. The channels of communication which rural people consider reliable are the most influential at this stage, including mass media, agricultural agencies, neighbors and friends and farmers with outside contacts.

3. **Evaluation Stage**—The individual seriously considers the idea and weighs its merits for his own situation. He obtains more information about the idea and decides whether or not to try it. The data available indicate that as people are evaluating an idea for their own use they usually consult with neighbors and friends whose opinions they respect.

4. **Trial Stage**—The individual usually applies the idea or practice on a small scale. At this stage agricultural agencies become more important, along with neighbors and friends. Salesmen are important when a commercial product is involved.

5. **Adoption Stage**—This is the stage at which the idea has been completely accepted, leading to continued use. The greatest single influence in continued use of any idea is the individual's personal satisfaction with early trials.

**Promptness of adoption of farm practices**

The promptness with which new farm practices are accepted depend on several factors:

1. **Types of change**
   a. The relative advantage of the new as compared to the old way of doing things.
   b. The relative ease with which the new practice can be demonstrated and communicated.

2. **Social factors**
   c. The values and expectations of the particular community and the extent to which the individual is expected to conform.
   d. The nature of leadership and control in the community.
   e. The extent and nature of social contact and organization in the community.
   f. The degree to which social contacts are confined to the immediate locality. The broader one's social orientation, the more likely he is to accept new ideas.
   g. The fluidity or rigidity of the social class structure in a given farm community. Rigid class structure impairs interclass communication of ideas.

3. **Individual and family variations**
   h. Amount of education—The more education the more likely to adopt new farm practices.
   i. Age—Young operators tend to be more receptive to new practices but are not always in a position to put them into practice.
   j. Participation in farm organizations is associated with greater predisposition towards innovation.
   k. Individual and family goals and values relate to attitudes toward innovation. High value placed on individual achievements is...
positively related to acceptance of innovation, while high value placed on security is negatively related to innovation.

Classification of adopters

Out of a number of researches on the adoption of new farm practices has come a scheme for classifying those accepting new innovation by the promptness with which they accept these innovations and their relations to the other farmers. This classification has several factors in common with that developed in connection with the professional study reported above.

Five different classes of adopters of farm practices have been identified: (1) Innovators, (2) Community Adoption Leaders (3) Local Adoption Leaders (4) Later Adopters and (5) Non Adopters.

1. Innovators—They tend to have a wider range of contacts than others and are known as "experimenters" and "people who are always trying out new things" many of which failed in the past. In some communities they are even regarded as crackpots. They are seldom named as persons to go to for advice in farming. Such persons may not be present in every farm community.

2. Community Adoption Leaders—They are not the first to try new ideas but are among the first to use approved practices in their community areas. They are usually the larger and more commercial farmers in their areas. They have direct contacts with agricultural agencies and may be the leaders in farm organizations. They tend to have a higher level of education and read more bulletins, magazines and newspapers than do the average. They participate more than the majority in formal organizations and have wider social contacts.

3. Local Adoption Leaders—These are the people to whom the majority look for information and ideas in their farming operations. They are sometimes called informal leaders. In their personal and social characteristics they are similar to the majority. Studies indicate that they are identified by the majority of farm people as neighbors and friends rather than as "leaders". Their followers, more than those whom they may consider to be "leaders", serve as their major reference group.

4. Later Adopters—These are the majority of the people in the community who adopt new ideas. They depend primarily on the local adoption leaders for information and ideas. The later adopters have less education, participate less in community affairs and are older than those who adopt ideas earlier.

5. Non Adopters—There are some to whom a practice might apply who never adopt it. They have even less education and social contacts than the later adopters.

Perhaps the most crucial figure in getting innovation accepted in the farm area is the informal leader. Whoever seeks to promote acceptance of innovation must work with him in an informal way. Giving the informal leader public recognition may jeopardize his position of leadership and thereby the influence which makes him an important channel for the acceptance of innovation.

These classes of adopters of farm practices closely resemble the classes of adopters of a professional practice described above. In both classifications there are the Innovators, the Influentials (including groups 2 and 3 here), the Followers (here, the Later Adopters) and the Die-Hards (Non-Adopters).

Identifying reference groups in industrial marketing

The industrial consumer or purchasing agent has his own reference groups. These have not, however, been subjected to much systematic examination. Some of these potential reference groups are:

1. Other Buyers—What they think of him; his relation to professional associations of buyers.

2. Company Influentials—The known or imagined preferences of the president of the company or of other influential senior officers.

3. Company Technicians—The attitudes of other company departments, such as
the engineering department, which writes the specifications.

4. Customers—The factor of reciprocity as it effects the desire to do business with one's customers if possible.

5. Community Pressures—For example, business or community pressures to "Buy American," or to buy local products rather than outside products.

Data on reference group influence in the purchasing behavior of industrial purchasers might be obtained in the following ways.

First, select a locality and observe the behavior of purchasing agents in that locality. Determine whether there are any regularities in the pattern of purchasing behavior displayed by these industrial consumers in particular companies. Are there companies which are opinion leaders and others which are followers in this activity? Are there differences between small, medium and large companies in purchasing patterns?

Second, interview purchasing agents directly, to get at their own criteria for their buying behavior. Let the purchasing agent describe his own sources of information and explain what considerations entered into his decision in specific buying situations. One might find that the purchasing agent's behavior could be explained simply by the attributes of the product. Alternately, one might find that his behavior could be explained by certain predispositions on his part, such as ambition for promotion within the company and his perception of how that could best be achieved. Or it might turn out that his behavior could be explained by his following a leader or a reference group which had importance for him.

Again, one might collect case history or qualitative but concrete information by asking the best buyers or salesmen what factors influence buyers. From this initial qualitative study a pattern might emerge which would indicate the importance of particular reference groups. Salesmen and buyers know a lot about these matters but may not have verbalized them. This initial look at the problem would show whether more information seems feasible to obtain, and would give more "leads" to the important variables in a variety of situations. One of the difficulties in getting to the core of reference group influence in this area, however, is the fact that companies and individuals often regard industrial purchasing behavior as a trade secret.

Problems in identifying "influentials" in public relations

One of the basic principles derived from the study of leadership is that there are no universal qualities that spell out leadership in general nor are there any fixed official positions in the community which can be counted on to represent real influence in that community. There is considerable variation in both aspects, from situation to situation. Usually, the significant leader to search out will depend on the particular kind of public relations question involved.

Two of the important functions associated with leadership are:

1. The creating, initiating function (analogous to the "Innovator")

2. The moderating, judiciary function (analogous to the "Influential")

Many experiments have shown that the idea man and the moderator are rarely the same person. In a given community, it may be necessary to reach both kinds of leaders to get a particular position across.

Sometimes both kinds of people are initially opposed to a new idea. It is then necessary to identify and neutralize the aggressive opponents. Even though they do not have ultimate veto power they may have substantial nuisance value. It is often also necessary to identify the more silent individuals in the background whose strategic position, frequently in the financial structure of the community, gives them a vital final say in what goes and what does not go. It is ordinarily necessary to have both of these types of men either in favor of the idea or at least not actively in opposition, in order to get the idea successfully across in a community.

This oversimplified model, of course, ap-
plies primarily to a small community. As pointed out above, identification of significant leaders can be meaningfully discussed only in terms of an actual situation in an actual community setting. Studies of racial tensions, community health and educational problems clearly reveal that the initiators and legitimizers of ideas differ from problem to problem.

How then does one go about identifying influential with respect to a particular problem in an actual situation? One approach suggested might be termed an informal sosiometric survey. A list of supposed influences might be obtained from the middle management group of a company's plant in a given community. Those on this list could be interviewed and their associations traced. Persons of position or repute may not in fact be the key men with respect to a particular problem but, if they are part of the power network in the community, they can usually point out the key men. Their suggestions should at least provide good leads which can be checked through subsequent interviews.

Some companies, especially in small and middle sized communities, are able to identify the influential individuals and groups by having one or more executives participate in every leading group activity in the community, on a continuing basis. For example, in one small community, the management of a plant delegated several of its executives to participate in all meetings of such organizations as the Retail Merchants Association, the Parents and Teachers Association, the leading Churches, the United Fund, the Chamber of Commerce, the Hospital Board, the Settlement House, the Industrial Development Board, the Lions Club, the Board of Education and the Country Club. In the course of these associations, the company executives were in a very good position to find out who were the most relevant initiators and legitimizers of ideas of various sorts. More and more large companies are beginning to study carefully the communities in which their plants are located and to systematize their approach to community public relations by participation of this kind.

At the present stage of knowledge about community leadership and influence patterns, however, generalizations and speculations must be made with great caution. It is necessary to look at many different kinds of situations and make specific distinctions. Among the variables that must be considered are:

1. Size of Community—Identifying significant influence and reference groups in a community of 20,000 obviously involves considerations entirely different from those involved in a metropolitan area.

2. Composition of Community—The relative size of its wage-earning and white collar groups, ethnic and religious composition, and similar demographic variables are all of importance.

3. Relevant Publics—For different issues, different reference groups come into play. Some issues involve only part of the community and other issues involve the entire community.
IV. the audience as a reference group

The audience to which a communication is addressed is a reference group which affects the nature of the message in a variety of ways. This section describes some new research showing how the communicator’s perception of his audience may influence and even distort his message, and how more accurate perception of the audience helps to determine effective ways of presenting ideas in either marketing or public relations.

Distortion of communication

An important communications phenomenon, which has until recently received little research attention, is that of the influence of the perceived audience on the communicator. Experimental research on this phenomenon has recently been carried out at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (30). In this research, the following specific hypothesis was tested: When the audience to be addressed is not congenial to the point of view to be expressed by the communicator, then forgetting of speech material will be much greater than when the audience is expected to be in accord with the communicator’s remarks. The subjects of the experiment were a group of graduate students preparing to be teachers and another group preparing to be journalists. Both these groups of students were given material for a lecture they were told they would give and were told whom they would address. Some of the students were told that they would address the Massachusetts Taxpayers Association and others the Massachusetts Teachers Association. Part of each group was given material which suggested that teacher’s salaries were too low, and part of the group was given material which suggested that teacher’s salaries were too high. Those with the high salary material would, of course, be presumably addressing a congenial audience in the Teachers Association and one that was less so in the Taxpayers Association, while those with the low salary material would be presumably in accord with the Taxpayers Association and not with the teachers audience. One week later, all of the students were told to write down the material they had been given a week earlier. The result was that, regardless of which speech they were giving or which audience they were addressing, those whose speeches were congenial to their assigned audiences recalled significantly more of the material they had been given a week earlier than did those assigned to speak to an audience presumably hostile to the content of their speech.
The journalists, who were expected to be more sensitive to their audience than teachers, forgot an even greater amount than did the teachers, when told that they would face a presumably unfriendly audience. These results are shown graphically in the chart below:

![Figure 4](image)

How the expected attitude of the audience affects recall

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recall of Information</th>
<th>Favorable</th>
<th>Unfavorable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>High</td>
<td>Teachers</td>
<td>Journalists</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Center for International Studies, Massachusetts Institute of Technology.

Communicating with a less-than-friendly audience, of course, raises certain special problems in communications. The fact that people tend to expose themselves more to, and retain more of, material toward which they are already favorably disposed provides a cue to the communicator to associate the material he desires to get across with ideas that are already familiar and acceptable to the audience and with subject matter that is known to be of interest to the audience in question.

Deciding whether to present both sides

Experiments which have been conducted on the relative effectiveness of various ways of presenting an idea have far-reaching implications, both for advertising and public relations. One of these experiments was designed to bring out the factors determining the relative effectiveness of one-sided versus two-sided arguments (12a).

The findings of this research are shown in Figure 5 below:

![Figure 5](image)

Relative effectiveness of one-sided and two-sided arguments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>One-sided Argument</th>
<th>Two-sided Argument</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>More effective</td>
<td>More effective</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>With initially</td>
<td>With initially</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Favorable audience</td>
<td>Unfavorable audience</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Among less educated</td>
<td>Among more educated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When no counter</td>
<td>When counter</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Argument is</td>
<td>Argument is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anticipated</td>
<td>Anticipated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Over short run</td>
<td>Over long run</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(Little significant difference)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Department of Psychology, Yale University (12a).
Whether a one-sided or two-sided presentation of a case is more effective depends on at least four considerations:

1. Whether the audience is initially favorable or unfavorable to the communicator's position.
2. Whether the audience is more or less educated.
3. Whether a counterattack is anticipated.
4. Whether short run or long run effects are being considered.

In general, the one-sided argument is most effective when presented to an initially favorable audience, of less education, where counter arguments are not anticipated, and where short run effects are sought. On the other hand, the two-sided argument proves to be more effective among people who are initially unfavorable to the communicator's point of view, who are better educated, who are likely to be exposed to a counter argument, and where long run effects are sought.

For example, when an attempt was made to sell an experimental group on the idea that it would not take Russia a long time to develop the A-Bomb, a one-sided and a two-sided argument sold about the same number of people on the idea when they were reinterviewed just one week after being presented with the argument. The net change in opinion in the direction of the communicator's message was 64% for those who had been presented with only the pro argument and was 69% for those who had been presented with both a pro and a con argument. When these same people, however, were queried again after a considerable period of time had elapsed, during which they had the opportunity to hear the opposite point of view, those who had been presented originally with both sides of the argument retained the desired attitude to a large degree (the net change in the desired direction dropping only from 69% to 61%). On the other hand, those who had been presented with only one side of the argument virtually all switched back to the position they had held before being indoctrinated (the net proportion having changed in the desired direction dropping from 64% to only 2%).

**"Net change" equals the percent changing in the desired direction minus the percent changing in the opposite direction.**

---

**Figure 6**

Short and long run effects of one-sided and two-sided arguments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>QUESTION:</th>
<th>&quot;How long will it take Russia to develop the A-Bomb?&quot;</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Argument</td>
<td>Net percentage changing attitude in direction desired by communicator</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>short run effect</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>one-sided</td>
<td>64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>two-sided</td>
<td>69%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Department of Psychology, Yale University. (12a)
A similar experiment indicated the differential effect of the one-sided and two-sided argument on those initially favorable to the communicator's views and those initially opposed.

As can be seen, those who are originally favorable can be influenced more effectively with a one-sided argument. In this case, the one-sided message brought about a net gain of 52% whereas the two-sided message brought about a net gain of only 23%. On the other hand, if people are originally opposed to a message, the one-sided message will evidently be relatively suspect and the two-sided argument more effective. In this experiment, when the group was initially opposed, a net gain of only 36% was achieved by the one-sided argument while a net gain of 48% was achieved by the two-sided presentation. Education is also an important factor. In this experiment, the program which presented both sides was more effective with better educated men, while the one-sided presentation was more effective with less educated men.

A word of caution should be introduced about generalizing to all kinds of questions the magnitude of the differences observed in the above examples. Thus, the extremely sharp reduction in net change among those structured, such sharp fluctuations in attitude are less likely.

Nevertheless, these findings raise some interesting questions both for marketing and for public relations. How does one decide in given situation whether to concentrate on one side of an issue or the advantages of a product?

Among the considerations are the education and sophistication of the public to be reached, and the likelihood that the public will be exposed to conflicting claims or an opposing point of view. Another consideration is whether an immediate reaction by members of the public is desired (a buying decision) or whether a more-or-less permanent attitude or opinion is the objective (a position on an issue).

In relation to product advertising and marketing of a mass-produced article, the research findings described above tentatively suggest that an approach emphasizing only the positive features of the product is usually sufficient. Competing products are nor-
mally advertised on their own merits, rather than on directly conflicting claims. Unless the public to which the advertising is directed is made up primarily of well educated and sophisticated individuals, an approach introducing both sides is apt to raise doubts. The direct approach stressing only the product's merits is more likely to lead to a buying decision; once the consumer has tried the product, he will, if it is of the expected good quality, be favorably inclined toward it and somewhat resistant to change. If the purchase is a substantial one, he may also, to some extent, be inclined to justify the wisdom of his decision.

In the rather special cases where information derogatory to the product has been released or is likely to emerge (from medical sources, safety groups, competitors, etc.), the question of whether and how the criticisms should be answered is a matter of judgement in each case. This would depend upon the seriousness of the adverse claims, the attention they receive, the importance of the reference groups involved, and other relevant factors in the particular situation.

Where public relations issues are involved, on the other hand, these research findings tentatively suggest that presenting both sides would normally be more effective. In most situations, it can be anticipated that the public will be exposed to differing points of view or claims by opposing groups. Taking account of these views by presenting both sides seems more likely to establish firm opinions and support within reference groups significant to the particular issue, than would be the case with a one-sided presentation.

Next steps

A number of the previous seminars conducted by the Foundation have included a period devoted to suggestions and recommendations for new research which should be undertaken. In view of the wide variety of fields in which reference group influence appeared relevant—advertising, marketing, public relations, labor relations—and the corresponding numerous research disciplines which might be involved, it was felt that completion of this task would require more time than was available at the seminar. The discussion of specific problem areas and pertinent research findings in the preceding sections of this report should make it clear that research to date has done little more than scratch the surface. It is hoped that the report does, however, indicate the emerging outlines of principles and theory application to operating problems in marketing and public relations.
V. bibliography


   Both these studies deal with the effects of group norms on judgments made by individuals who are members of the group. Both show how (some people more than others) individuals tend to change their judgments to conform to those of the congenial group.


   See particularly chapters 4 (the greater the psychological meaning of a class or group to a person, the more likely he is to share the political preferences prevailing within it), 5 (the voter's conceptions of which party is favored by various groups of people), 6 and 7 (the effects of primary groups and face-to-face discussion on political preference and changes during the campaign, including the effects of cross-pressures).


   The major focus of the analysis is on group differences in political attitudes and voting in the 1954 congressional elections. Groups studied were not face-to-face membership groups, but broad demographic categories which make up the national population and the probability sample of 1139 on which the data are based. These large categories include not only the basic socio-economic, religious and racial groupings but also labor union membership and political party affiliations. Group differences in attitudes and votes clearly exist. The most pervasive theme underlying group differences in political orientation was found to be social class. Conflict due to overlapping membership in groups of different orientation tends to be resolved in favor of the more cohesive group.


   Outlines a number of principles of achieving change in people derived from research showing that the individual's behavior, attitudes, and beliefs are often firmly grounded in groups to which he belongs. Considers the group as a medium of change and as a target of change.

A study of class consciousness, based on a nationwide survey of social class identification and associated opinions (mainly on political and economic conservatism). In addition to determining the economic class each person objectively belongs to (as indicated by his occupation), he was asked which social class he would say he belongs to. The evidence is quite clear that in order to predict attitudes from social class membership, one needs to know not only the objective class membership but the subjective class identification.


Any given person belongs to many groups simultaneously—e.g., to a religious group, to an occupational class, etc. This experiment shows that individuals are more likely to respond in terms of a particular group if their membership in it has just been called to their attention.

Catholic college students were asked to fill out an attitude questionnaire. One group was told that they had been brought together, as Catholics, to help construct a questionnaire on religious beliefs. This group gave significantly more orthodox answers than Catholics who answered the same questionnaire without special instructions in a lecture hall containing members of all faiths. A third group of Catholics were in a room by themselves like the first group, but did not have this fact called to their attention and received no special instructions. Their responses resembled those of the group in the lecture hall.


Of particular relevance is the discussion by W. H. Whyte, Jr., of consumer attitudes in the "new suburbia": the new rule of "inconspicuous consumption" and the replacement of social class criteria by those of "culture" and "good taste". Also reports a study by Survey Research Center, University of Michigan, which shows the role played by social factors (family discussion, information from friends and relatives) in making decisions to purchase durable goods.


This study of professional men, college alumnae and college sophomores sheds new light on the extent to which men and women differ among themselves in their general degree of conformity to group pressure; how they individually perceive situations in which group pressure is applied; and the question of whether there are circumstances under which the power of the group to influence the judgment of the individual may be reinforced.


An experimental study of how conformity to group norms (both public and private) is affected by the individual's status and feelings of security in the group.


How the people see "big business" was investigated with interviews of a national sample of 1227 adults, chosen on a probability basis to represent a cross section of the American public. A quarter of the population express
concern over business size in the general belief that it has a direct effect on their lives. Some of these people are strongly in favor and some are strongly opposed to "big business." Another half of the population are fully aware that "big business" exists and conscious of both good and bad effects of its activities. Most respondents do not seem to adopt a simple ideological approach to big business; their attitudes hinge rather on perceived benefits to themselves or to groups with which they identify. However, no specific group (financial, educational, geographic, etc.) of significant size was found that is more or less in favor of big business. The amount of power (control of jobs, wages, prices) that large corporations are seen as holding or exercising is a major concern in public thinking.


Investigates the extent to which people tend to alter their expressions of opinion to match what they think are the opinions of those around them. In groups studied most persons tended to modify their expressed opinion toward the individual's idea of the group norm, and each person modified his opinion to some degree in response to perceived group opinion. Those exhibiting the greatest degree of conformity were those who were in need of security and of acceptance into the group, and who felt acceptance was more important than self-assertion.


Reports experiments on the effectiveness of different ways of presenting arguments in a persuasive com-
which studied the persons exerting influence on women's opinions and behavior in marketing, fashions, movie attendance, and public affairs.


A brief discussion of the two different phenomena to which the term "reference group" has been applied: (1) groups which set standards and enforce conformity to them by rewarding or punishing individuals and (2) groups used by the individual as reference or comparison points in evaluating himself or others.


A general article on research on motion picture audiences. Of particular interest is brief section on "the opinion leader", which reports that adolescents function as opinion leaders (reference group) for movie choices of adults.


This study, done for the Chicago Tribune by Social Research, Inc., is one of a series examining consumer motivations underlying the use of various broad product classifications. It underscores the importance of working in terms of the public image of each line of cars and the audience which fits the product personality.


A basic paper on reference group theory and empirical research. The authors attempt to fit certain concepts in reference group theory to empirical data on the behavior of Army personnel as reported in The American Soldier. The paper is particularly useful as a synthesis of contemporary formulations in reference group theory.


While primarily a report of an exploratory study of the role of the mass media in patterns of interpersonal influence, this paper provides an example of how differing orientations to content area, in this case news, influence the selection of individuals and groups in a community as reference sources.


A basic study of the attitude changes resulting from entering a new group. Women attending an Eastern college were found to adopt the liberal opinions prevalent in the college community. Sheds much light on the kinds of persons who conform most closely to group norms. For example, conformity to the norm of liberalism was found to be greater for women who had been in the college longer, who had weaker attachments "back home", and who were more popular and active in college affairs.


Seems to show that the effect of foreign travel on American businessmen is not to persuade them of any
foreign view, but to reinforce their allegiance to the views of the domestic reference groups with which they are most strongly identified.

   Describes the different possible types of relationship of group members toward their leader. The leader can be, for example, a model, an inciter, a reassurer, etc. The analysis of group dynamics stems from Freud's *Group Psychology and the Analysis of the Ego*.

   Presents in schematic form the apparent relationship between reference groups and response to communications.

   This exploratory study is designed to reveal the range and variation of factors which contribute to political apathy, by means of unstructured interviews with 70 respondents in Ithaca, New York. Three general factors are discussed: (1) the threatening consequences of political activity, (2) the futility of political activity, and (3) the absence of spurs to interest and participation. Group influence is discussed under the first heading.

   A review of the literature to 1951 on primary groups, their structure and their influence on the behavior of their members (particularly on the behavior of their members in relation to the objectives and rules of formal organizations.)

   Shows the determining effect of group relationships in the German army in regard to response to surrender propaganda.

   A classroom study of responses to a situation where the individual is faced with the problem of conforming to two more or less incompatible norms. Most respondents were able to find at least one compromise act that they thought would be tolerated by the persons enforcing the conflicting norms.

   Discusses the stages through which an individual goes from the time he first learns of an idea until he adopts it, the media which are most effective at these various stages, and some situational and group influences affecting adoption.

   When an audience is seen as agreeing with the new information or arguments presented, recall of that information by the speaker is more accurate than when the audience is perceived as disagreeing.
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41
the foundation for research on human behavior

Scientific methods are as applicable to problems of human behavior as they are to problems of the physical sciences, yet our society has lagged far behind in the use of those methods to study social behavior. Moreover, the technical language that scientists employ makes it difficult for others to understand, use and criticize research results. The basic goals of the Foundation for Research on Human Behavior are to promote the wider application of scientific methods to the study of problems of human behavior, to improve two-way communication between those who carry out and those who use social science research, and to encourage full utilization of research results in the operation of organizations.

Good research is often expensive, in studying human behavior as in all science. Experience has shown that sound research programs must have adequate and stable financing, in order to keep an able staff intact and to carry over valuable experience from one study to another. An immediate goal of the Foundation is to increase the amount and stability of financial support for fact-finding research in the social sciences.

Origin

The Foundation was incorporated in Michigan in 1952. Although its offices, in Ann Arbor, are provided by the University of Michigan, it has no organic connection with the University, or with any other organization. A generous five-year grant from the W. K. Kellogg Foundation has assured an adequate trial period for the new ideas represented by the Foundation, during which time the Foundation expects to become self-supporting. Substantial annual contributions to the Foundation for the support of research on human behavior are being made by leading industrial concerns. A small permanent staff organizes seminars, publishes research highlights and summaries, and administers grants to qualified research agencies for projects arising out of seminar discussions and other meetings. The Foundation itself does no research.

The seminar program

The seminar on “Group Influence in Marketing and Public Relations” is one of a series conducted by the Foundation for Research on Human Behavior in different fields of research on behavior.

Reports of other seminars and meetings have been published. These reports are listed below:

- Psychological Surveys in Business Forecasting — 1954
- Projective Techniques in Consumer Motivation Research — 1955
- Also: Psychological Surveys in Business Forecasting:
  - A Follow-up Report — 1954
  - Leadership Patterns and Organizational Effectiveness — 1955
- Plans, Expectations and Business Forecasting — 1954
- Training in Human Relations — 1955
- Psychological Surveys and Spending Decisions — 1955
- Training Foreign Nationals in the United States — 1956
- Ike’s Illness and Economic Expectations — 1956
- Planning and Training for Effective Leadership — 1956
- Spring Survey — Slump Ahead? (in preparation)
- Human Factors in Research Administration — 1956

Copies may be ordered from: The Foundation for Research on Human Behavior
1141 E. Catherine Street, P.O. Box 11
Ann Arbor, Michigan

Other important areas in which research projects will be supported by the Foundation are indicated by the titles of projected future seminars:

- Personnel Tests and Selection
- Secular Changes in Consumer Behavior
- Mediation of Disputes
- Needs for Modifications in Management Theory
- Introducing Change in an Organization
- Selection and Training of Americans for Service Abroad

The purpose of these seminars is to bring new research to the attention of potential users, to clarify the uses to which research may be put, and to direct new research toward problems of practical as well as scientific importance.