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BEHAVIORISM'S IMPACT ON ADVERTISING: THEN AND NOW

by

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### Abstract

Behaviorism as defined in 1913 by John B. Watson was a science that used repeated, observable human activity to develop hypotheses that would eventually predict and control responses. Through repeated experiments, Watson developed a thorough knowledge of what he defined as base human reactions. Stanley Resor, then president of J. Walter Thompson Agency, hired Watson to promote a partnership between advertising and science, and the subsequent 15 years of Watson's career included some notable scientific contributions. This study shows that though these outcomes may not have provided many measurable positive results, they set into motion industry-wide change that continued to develop until the present. The study also argues that though behavioristic principles may not have found solid footing in a mass media environment, the current networked communication state provides much more fertile ground for analyzing message receivers and eliciting desired responses.

*Keywords:* Behaviorism, John B. Watson, JWT, networked communication

### Behaviorism's Impact on Advertising: Then and Now

In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, science was gaining a foothold in the public eye, but applied psychology had not yet been legitimized in the academic or public realm. Meanwhile, the advertising industry was beginning to dabble in the use of science and primary research via testimonials, but John B. Watson, the founder of behaviorism, and Stanley Resor, the eventual president of one of the largest advertising agencies in the world, had plans that would change advertising practice forever.

### **Behaviorism**

In 1913, John B. Watson officially publicized his theories about behaviorism, a science that analyzed human behavior through “observable activity” (“Psychologists in Marketing,” 1958, p. 1) and focused on using that information to predict and control responses (Buckley, 1982, p. 208). Though various colleagues have since been identified as having a large influence on the development of behaviorist ideas, Watson is largely credited for behaviorism’s application to psychology through his 1913 address at Columbia University titled “Psychology as a Behaviorist Views It,” which is considered the manifesto of early behaviorism (Benjamin, 1988, p. 396). The crux of Watson’s theory was based on emulating the study of evolution in which biologists observed and experimented on different species including humans. These biologists used observable traits and behavior to explain subjects’ actions. In this way, Watson believed that studying observable behavior and using that information as a predictor of actions could apply to all species. Though subsequent behaviorists, most notably B.F. Skinner, developed contrasting thoughts, “all behaviorists agreed with Watson’s basic premise that there can be a natural science of behavior and that psychology can be that science” (Baum, 1994, p. 10).

## Experiments

Watson's initial study of behavior in a laboratory setting began during his enrollment in post-graduate courses at Chicago University. There he researched rats' behaviors in a maze to determine how they learned to exit it (MacGowen, n.d.). Prior research determined rats used their senses, so Watson "blinded and deafened and anesthetized their skin" (pp. 4) to determine if any other faculties were at play. The modified rodents ran and exited the maze just as quickly as the control rats, thus, by modern science's opinion, suggesting the muscular-nervous system has a memory (pp.4). Though these experiments marked Watson's first step toward founding behaviorism, it also marked the beginning of his recurring habit of shocking and displeasing the public with his methodology and ideas.

During the following decade, Watson conducted numerous experiments, most notably on infants. These experiments were meant to decipher which human instincts are innate and, therefore, which can be taught and manipulated to achieve a desired outcome. Watson maintained that humans should be studied as organic machines, and claimed, "we know less about ourselves than we know about almost any other thing in the world" ("Influencing the Mind of Another," 1935, p. 3). Based on his infant experiments, he explained that there are two different kinds of reactions in each person at birth: physical reactions that used "striped" muscular systems and emotional reactions that used "unstriped or white muscles", i.e. respiration, circulation and secretion (p. 4-5). He outlined our societal practices of training our physical reactions—for example, riding lessons and Latin courses—as methods of striving for a particular ideal condition, but pointed out that people have never found a process of teaching emotional reactions or even identifying the "proper form" they should take (p. 5).

According to Watson, humans are emotionally infants who have three innate, unconditioned emotional reactions: fear, rage and love. Watson used the first of these responses in what was likely his most referenced experiment—that of Baby Albert. In this experiment, Watson conditioned the child to fear a white rat by clanging on a dish pan each time the animal was present. After “three or four” (p. 9) trials, Watson had “found the way fear spreads” (p. 9), and repeated the experiment with consistent enough results to be confident that he “could make any human being afraid of any object in the world” (p. 10). This fear was also transferable; Baby Albert also feared similar objects like white rabbits, leading Watson to believe that our other fears could be transferred as well. He also successfully experimented with unconditioning—reversing these undesirable fear responses in the infant (p. 11). “Man is born a squirming mass without any instincts,” (MacGowen, n.d., pp. 5) and, if caught at birth, could be programmed as desired (pp. 5).

### **Potential Commercial Applications**

Watson had a concise and efficient explanation of his ideas, which was especially helpful when explaining them to professionals. This new avenue of science focused on the malleability of man, and Watson claimed it would be useful for numerous business applications. He presented behaviorism in such a pragmatic way that the field of psychology gained acclaim not previously attained in the science community; behaviorism “provided psychology with a theory and methodology that satisfied contemporary requirements for achieving status as a science” (Buckley, 1982, p. 208) while presenting practical applications “in the interest of efficiency, order and progress” (p. 208).

Throughout Watson’s career in advertising, he maintained a prominent presence in the science community and public eye based on his largely radical ideas on potential applications of

behaviorism. One such concept was the idea of raising children in groups on a three-week rotation system between parents, who would be kept as unaware as possible of which offspring were theirs (“Scientific Orphans,” 1928).

The notion that humans were so moldable led to Watson suggesting they could be conditioned to be successful in any occupation “regardless of his talents, penchants, tendencies, abilities, vocation and race of his ancestors” (“Dr. John Watson,” 1927, pp. 5). Probably the greatest fear of behaviorism was its inherent challenge against the power of the individual (“Scientific Orphans,” 1928) or man’s free will as well as religious determinism. Behaviorism is based on a certain amount of *behavior* determinism, or the idea that an individual’s behavior or reaction can be assumed, and many people found this unnerving as it ran contrary to the common notion that an individual had a choice in his or her actions. The religious ramifications led to direct confrontations with the church, which Watson challenged could not “[tell man] why to live or how to live” (“Dr. John Watson,” 1927, pp. 8). However, Watson proposed using behaviorist techniques to manipulate human behavior to the point of developing people for specific vocations beginning at infancy in order to “select the proper vocation for them when they are still in their cradles” (“Can Science Determine,” 1922, pp. 30). Though this possibility created assurance of “happier and more successful future[s]” (pp. 3) for future generations, it arguably meant to do exactly what Watson said the church was doing—tell people how to live, or at least how to make a living. But as he later explained in his article “Personality and Choice of Personnel: The Behaviorist Looks at Personality,” the “human being is made—not born” (Watson, 1927, p.3), and that humans only appear to be an amalgamation of their parents’ traits because they’ve been nurtured into it. This clarified that though the church (or any authoritative body)

was capable of telling a man how to live, Watson did not believe in religious determinism, and for possibly personal reasons, thought the church was not suited to make such decisions for man.

Despite reluctant acceptance from mass audiences, behaviorism had obvious applications to business by promising predictable results based on observation and catering to people's preconditioned emotional responses. Two books titled *Psychology and Advertising* were published before 1920 and attempted to discuss psychology's application to the field, but frequently referenced the free will that behaviorism so openly challenged (Cohen, 1979, p. 175). Though this science would not have had strong legs in society's previously fragmented and decentralized communication structure, mass media offered a particularly fertile environment for Watson's notion of garnering a similar desired response from large, like-conditioned audiences. Watson explained that, as the element of "prediction and control... really makes up the essence of any kind of science," (Watson, 1931, p. 1) by "studying, watching, experimenting, [and] measuring" (p. 2) he could successfully predict and control what human beings do, reinforcing the proposition that people are all just organic machines.

### **Science and Advertising**

#### **20th Century Media Environment and Cultural Shift**

Prior to the 20<sup>th</sup> century, cultures throughout history had executed effective oral and written communication, but the 1920s to 1960s introduced a new type of media donning the moniker of "mass" (Peters & Simonson, 2004, p. 1) that offered a more efficient means of disseminating information to a group. Radio, film, television, newspapers and magazines "were genuinely *mass* in every context: in their content, which was aimed at middle-range cultural tastes; in their audiences, ranging in the millions; and in their mode of production, which was industrialized, bureaucratized and organized in output" (p. 1).

**Mass media messaging.** Any communication, in order to be effective, needed to be understood by the second party. There was more pressure on mass messaging to be easily relatable simply because it was one-sided. The message was delivered via a given medium, but did not allow for a back-and-forth conversation. Thus, the message and call-to-action needed to be clear. In a paper titled *The Changing Concept of "Human Nature" in the Literature of American Advertising*, Professor Merle Curti identifies three periods of advertising "measured by changes in concepts of the nature of 'human nature'" between 1888 and 1954 (Curti, 1967, p. 337). This research will address the first two time periods and provide context for the introduction of scientific and behaviorist methods into advertising.

During the first period of 1890 to 1910, the "majority [of advertisers] conceived an advertisement to be a method of *informing* the public... in other words an education device" (p. 338). This definition assumed man's rationality without questioning whether it was an inherent or learned trait, despite the nature-nurture conversations happening in the science community at the time (p. 338-340). This opinion of human nature focused on "winning people over" with logic by changing their minds, and was in line with the concept of "the economic man," meaning that individuals pursued self-interest above all else (p. 345).

During the second period from about 1910 to 1930, the tables turned, emphasizing a use of advertising for the creation of desire in consumers and assuming an irrational, emotional and impulsive nature. With the American economy shifting to a national, mass-scale format, advertising became less concerned about selling products and competing for one consumer "want," and instead emphasized selling products to "satisfy one want rather than some other want" (p. 346). For example, as Curti references, selling the desire for a new appliance as an alternative to a family vacation (p. 346). This time period also saw a new interest in scientific

market research and the application of psychological principles to manipulate consumer behavior and accurately gauge consumer habits, preferences and reactions—an effort to create order by controlling consumer response. It was during this time that collection of consumer data began. For example, the Audit Bureau of Circulations began tracking circulation of magazines and newspapers (Cohen, 1979, p. 174). As the fastest growing business in the United States at the time, the industry also had a plethora of funding, and the willingness to spend it, to introduce new skills and expertise to the field. As advertising flourished, billings from 1925 to 1928 alone rose 498 percent (Cohen, 1979, p. 186).

**From one-to-one to one-to-many.** Before the shift to mass messaging, communication occurred largely on a one-to-one or one-to-few scale. Established institutions like church and family served to transmit messages and maintain social order, but mass messaging exponentially increased the scale of communication, allowing for one-to-many messaging and giving “rise to a demand for methods of behavior control” (Buckley, 1982, p. 208). This format of message delivery allowed for one broadcaster to send one message to a mass audience that had no structured way to respond, and aside from conversations with other individuals, had no way of communicating with other viewers or “message receivers” about the message. While media transitioned to function on a national scale, so did advertising.

### **J. Walter Thompson Agency**

The J. Walter Thompson (JWT) agency, a pioneer in market research techniques and one of the largest advertising agencies in the world, was one of the first to rise to the new market challenge when it publicly committed to “finding scientific solutions to marketing problems” (Buckley, 1982, p. 211) that were scalable to meet the needs of the developing advertising environment. When Stanley B. Resor became President of JWT (“A Pioneer,” 1961), he set out

to pioneer change in the industry. A few years earlier, after reading Thomas Henry Buckle's *History of Civilization in England*, Resor latched on to the idea that human nature is largely predictable ("A Pioneer," 1961). This spring-boarded a newfound focus on fact-finding and testing regarding his accounts, but his outlandish methods were not appreciated at the agency (p. 72). Not only did this challenge common advertising practice of the time, but it also flew in the face of JWT's proven-to-be-lucrative best practices (p. 72). One such practice was pitching to new clients—the current practice involved relatively “blind”, or unresearched, pitches, but Resor argued that they could not rightly offer up the best solutions without facts about the client; pertinent business and audience information could lead to a completely different set of recommendations ("A Pioneer," 1961). Once president, Resor quietly yet determinedly set out to more effectively integrate research into advertising best practices.

In December 1920, Resor took a tangible step in the direction of legitimizing advertising by hiring John B. Watson (JWT News Bulletin," 1921). Watson had most recently served as a professor of psychology and the director of the Psychological Laboratory at John Hopkins University, but was dismissed after a hasty divorce resulting from a relationship with his graduate student and future wife Rosalie Raynor. Along with Resor, Watson hoped to identify the “laws” of human behavior in relation to advertising and use this information to form messaging that would consistently elicit desired responses from mass audiences (Kreshel, 1990). Though Watson's employment at JWT was a product of connections and of desperation due to his marital drama, both Watson and Resor saw huge potential for applications of behaviorism and psychology in the business world (Cohen, 1979, p. 169). Resor wanted to create a “university of advertising” by hiring from the nation's greatest colleges (Kreshel, 1990, p. 52),

and Watson sought to define a systematic approach to explaining and affecting consumer motivation in order to provide advertising clients with concrete evidence of campaign viability.

Upon hiring Watson, Resor wanted to introduce him to the industry in the most direct way—by having Watson go door-to-door as a market research interviewer for rubber boots (“Psychologists in Marketing,” 1961, p. 1). Soon after, Watson traveled from grocery store to grocery store to convince owners to stock more Yuban Coffee, a client of JWT (Cohen, 1979, p. 173). He said of his beginnings at JWT, “I felt a distinct need. I knew little about the great advertising god, the consumer.... It took me a little more than a year to find myself in the agency. I began to learn that it can be just as thrilling to watch the growth of a sales curve of a new product as to watch the learning curve of animals and men” (“Psychologists in Marketing,” 1961, p. 2). Watson was very “humble” (Cohen, 1979, p. 173) throughout his training and felt it was an ideal transition from academia (Cohen, 1979). He continued learning about the business by spending time in each department of the agency.

One example of how science was commonly used in relation to advertising during this time period could be heard via a radio broadcast by Watson in 1923. In a ten-minute discussion, Watson gave an overview of glands in the human body, leading up to a conclusion about what kind of toothpaste should be used to best address the function of salivary glands. The introduction named Pebeco Tooth Paste—a JWT client—as the sponsor, and Watson almost directly quotes a Pebeco advertisement during his brief lecture (Watson, 1923). This example is in line with Curti’s explanation of this time period. Though the toothpaste ad did not focus on the selling of a desire, it did use psychological principles to attempt to covertly manipulate listeners’ behaviors.

Around the same time, Watson and JWT published an article on whether booklets containing long-term beneficial information received via the mail were kept and referenced as intended (Watson, 1922). Though the agency had overwhelmingly positive results, it is important to note the use of audience behavior testing, which again reinforces Curti's explanation of the ever-increasing importance of consumer data.

**Brand loyalty.** During his time at JWT, one of Watson's most notable experiments involved witnessing the power of brand loyalty before the term had even been coined. The experiment involved subjects identifying cigarette brands, including their individual favorite. The subjects tested horribly, and Watson was taken aback. He expected that each subject had been conditioned to his or her choice brand and would be able to identify its subtle nuances in flavor, but instead he exposed the true power of a brand to "arouse feelings and emotions" in a consumer. Additional evidence was found after concluding that though a month was long enough to break down a preference for one brand, it was *not* long enough to form a habit for a new brand based on use alone (Watson, 1922). Both findings supported the idea that contrary to purchasing a particular product for its features, many consumers purchased based on the "atmosphere" (Cohen, 1979, p. 178) surrounding a brand. Through a behaviorist lens, this implied that the previously conditioned psychological traits directed consumers to purchase a particular brand and introduced the idea that the message about a product or brand could be manipulated to interact appropriately with these predetermined psychological traits.

**Messaging.** Another of Watson's early contributions was a presentation to insurance salesmen regarding industry-wide messaging strategy for both advertising and recruitment. "Intensive" (Watson, 1921, p. 25) insurance selling had been happening for more than forty years, and insurance had existed for more than a hundred, but there was still a negative

connotation with the field. Watson reviewed the numbers, calling attention to the facts of high turnover and success of a few top-performing salesmen (Watson, 1921). He posed a variety of solutions, including educational messaging that would shift the focus off mortality, create value around the “scraps of paper” (Watson, 1921, p. 13) people got in return for signing a policy, build up confidence about the industry and train salesmen to use more well-received initial approaches. He also gave specific examples of industries (steam laundries and grocery-store milk) that similarly turned the tide on their perception using strategic messaging and what is now commonly referred to as culture change (Watson, 1921).

Watson also had an impact on the agency's creative work. Based on the outcome of the cigarette experiment, Watson frequently used messaging to illustrate what Cohen called “*the image of products*,” meaning the brand's image or personality (Cohen, 1979, p. 179). One campaign for Maxwell House involved appealing “to the snob in the consumer” by depicting “splendid historical scenes” complete with Maxwell House coffee. Watson played on the conditioned desires of wealth and prestige inherent in the majority of Americans and counted on their predictable reaction of purchasing Maxwell's product to attempt to achieve this ideal—“Sip Maxwell coffee, slip into the dream” (Cohen, 1979, p. 185).

In 1931, Watson directly referenced his research in behaviorism by contributing to a campaign for Scott Paper Company, a toilet paper producer. The headline for the advertisement was shown above surgeons looking at a patient and read, “And the trouble began with harsh toilet tissue,” going on to explain that the operation was necessary because of rectal trouble caused by poor-quality toilet paper. This copy played on the fear response that Watson identified as an innate human emotion and appealed to the “hypochondriac culture” of the early- to mid-

century (Cohen, 1979, p. 188) and applied the hard sales tactic that was common during The Depression.

The behaviorist principles that informed new messaging strategies were not focused on traditional psychology that “conceived of the mind in terms of separate faculties and instincts” (Cohen, 1979, p. 193) and focused on “how the mind thinks” (p. 193). Rather, the new emphasis on behaviorist psychology had “an image of the mind as a functioning, adaptive unit” (p. 193) focused on “how the total organism behaves or acts” (p. 193).

The message was the factor controlled by the advertiser, and when a consumer was exposed to it the result is some reaction or behavior (whether desirable or not), for example, the purchasing of the product or the memorization/recall of a brand name.

Previous methods focused on crafting a message to *alter or affect the consumer's thoughts or emotions* about a product or brand to achieve a desired reaction or behavior, but behaviorism understood the consumer to be, for the most part, a constant in the equation and was therefore uninterested in altering him or her. This approach “ignored questions of the rationality and irrationality of the mind and emphasized instead the malleability of human behavior” (Buckley, 1982, p. 213) by studying consumers to the point of being able to predict their mental and emotional state when presented with a message, thus *manipulating the message* to change the reaction or behavior. This ideology was only applicable because of what Watson called “the lack of individuality in the emerging mass society,” (Buckley, 1989, p. 138) meaning that “the universality of human response” made behaviorism relevant to mass messaging (p. 138). In the previously mentioned creative execution for Maxwell House coffee, Watson assumed the consumer's desires of wealth and prestige as a constant, and defined the desired behavior response as purchasing Maxwell House products. Given these two factors, he manipulated the

message to cater to a consumer's preconceived, culturally conditioned desires in order to sell more coffee of a particular brand.

**Human resources.** Years after his presentation to the insurance industry, Watson delivered a series of addresses at The Association of National Advertisers Annual Convention in 1927. Three articles were derived from his last speech titled "Thinking as Viewed by the Behaviorist," "Personality and the Choice of Personnel: The Behaviorist Looks at Personality" and "Personality and the Choice of Personnel: Can Psychology Help in the Selection of Personnel?" The first article was explained well by its title. Watson outlined that "thinking" was actually a motor skill derived from speaking, citing that when people are young, they say everything they think aloud but are then taught, or conditioned, by those around them that they should retain some of these conversations internally (1927).

In the second article, Watson reiterated his experimentation with infants and the notion of "made-not born" (1927). He further explained that personality, like all things, was a product of conditioning and can be documented and altered like any other behavior, but also that personality was a product of internal workings of a person as well as external perceptions and judgments by outsiders (Watson, 1927).

Both articles set the stage for the third, which was a tangible application of behaviorism to hiring practices. Previously, a heavy emphasis was placed on testing general intelligence (e.g. Binet-Simon test) as a viable means of selecting personnel. Watson admitted that while these might be helpful when selecting lower levels of employees, the only further assistance they offered was to help "separate the sheep from the goats, [but] they will not tell us much about the flock of sheep left from which to make our individual selections" (1927, p. 10). Watson noted that there was "no ready-made tool, the exclusive use of which will enable it to select and

promote its personnel with any degree of surety,” (p. 12) and recommended a consultative approach utilizing psychologists and observation, particularly in a training school setting (p. 12).

**Industry change.** Behaviorism's influence on advertising at JWT also indirectly manifested in the way that Resor thought about and spoke of the industry. After hiring Watson in 1920, Resor began to identify an advertiser's role as “guid[ing] human decision” and altered the industry's perception of consumers by viewing them as machines in need of “the right stimulus” (Cohen, 1979, p. 171) to produce “the right reaction” (p. 171). Resor rose to a powerful place in advertising and was considered one of its leading men, yielding a wide audience to the tenets of behaviorism (Buckley, 1989).

As a result of Watson's scientific approach, JWT began to conduct motivational studies, including scientific research in advertising copy and the use of consumer panels to gain consumers' perspectives on products and competitors. Testimonial advertising had been used before Watson's arrival, but proliferated based on his research and the idea that people are interested in people, as seen in a campaign for Pond's Cold and Vanishing Creams in which famous women such as Queen Marie of Romania endorsed products (Cohen, 1979, p. 184). Resor once explained to critics that these noteworthy testimonials were directed at the masses of females who followed public personas and read tabloids (“Psychologists in Marketing,” 1961, p. 2)—these individuals played directly off consumers' interests.

The aforementioned focus on applying scientific principles to messaging blossomed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century in tandem with the rise of mass media. Prior advertising efforts were largely fragmented, but messaging on such a large scale offered new opportunities for mechanizing a successful process, and behaviorism satisfied these interests by providing a scientific approach and promising controllable outcomes.

This method was later identified as “motivation” research, which led JWT to the conclusion that “deep-seated motives resulting from past or present environments will not necessarily result in the desired action unless there is activation or education to change concepts” (Johnson, 1956). Even Watson witnessed this principle while researching in his early days at Macy’s: he recognized that item placement on a counter affected which items sold well (Cohen, 1979). Thus, JWT began to focus on activation research, analyzing what causes people to make a particular decision or choose a certain brand at their time of purchase.

**Other contributions.** The account management aspect of Watson’s position lasted throughout his career at J. Walter Thompson. Watson was an excellent public speaker and therefore an effective face for the company. By 1930, he was amassing thousands of miles of travel to visit European clients, serving as their account executive and main liaison to the agency (“Staff Meeting,” 1930). Watson rose to vice president status in 1924 and served on JWT’s Board of Directors until 1933 when he left the agency to work at the William Etsy Company (Kreshel, 1990). Watson had high hopes that advertising would eventually become the “exact science” (as it grew to be decades later), but admittedly based a large number of his advertising recommendations on less-than-scientific intuition (Kreshel, 1990).

### **Behaviorism’s Impact: Then**

It has been said that though Watson might have contributed to the advertising field, it was less with tangible science and more as a symbol of the beginning of the partnership between science and advertising. Many of the applications of behaviorism that Watson attempted to enact were based on ideas previously conceived by Resor (Kreshel, 1990). This study does not seek to refute that, but expand on it.

As Peggy Kreshel explained, Watson assisted with popularizing and legitimizing psychology as a respected realm of science, especially after its recent break with philosophy. Though this led to “maturation of the discipline” (Kreshel, 1990, p. 55) and incredible growth in terms of application, many psychologists thought of Watson as a businessman, not a scientist (Kreshel, 1990). After moving to the public realm, Watson never managed to further any of his scientific theories through advertising. But the evidence presented above indicates that he, along with Resor, used previous ideas to elicit specific, desired responses to educate clients and initiate change in multiple industries that continues to develop today. These initiatives and behavioristic principles are arguably even more applicable in the current communication environment.

### **Conclusion**

#### **Behaviorism's Impact: Now**

Watson's tangible contributions to advertising have been consistently defined as overstated (Kreshel, 1990), but this study argues that, though behaviorism might not have proven to directly affect the bottom line for JWT and its clients—possibly due to a lack of concrete, measurable recommendations and/or follow-through—it in the very least set the stage for major shifts across multiple industries for years to come. As Kerry Buckley (1982) stated, Watson's ideas were part of a “progressive dream” (p. 217) for an era when “science was to become a new religion and the scientific method was to create a binding faith for its practitioners,” (p. 217) and this dream has finally become a reality in numerous ways.

**Branding.** The cigarette study performed by Watson, while not having explicitly direct outcomes, provided some of the first documented evidence that brand image matters to consumers, and can occasionally outweigh actual product preference. Now prestigious

companies such as Interbrand and Forbes track brands by amalgamating financial and customer terms, measuring brand value in dollars (“Interbrands,” 2013).

Aside from having measurable value, brands have now become fully personified, specifically targeting people based on matched ideals and traits. As noted in Interbrand’s description of the current number-one brand Apple, its early advertising campaign “Think Different” is embodied all the way down to the core goal of the engineers developing new products. Perhaps a more comparable example to Watson’s cigarette research is that of number-three brand Coca-Cola. As an inexpensive product, people are capable of switching brands quickly with less consideration. However, people like Coke fan Jason, quoted on Interbrand’s site, identify very strongly with Coca-Cola itself: “Coca-Cola always makes me think of my childhood—endless summers and backyard parties” (“Interbrands,” 2013).

**Culture change and human resources.** Watson’s three-part article targeting human resources ended with him admitting there was no scalable solution to the issue. However, now hiring for culture fit is very common. Companies have started internal initiatives and consultant companies such as Kenexa, an IBM Company offer outsourced solutions. Kenexa’s Employment Branding team uses the Kenexa Cultural Insight survey combined with qualitative data to get at the root of a company's culture, not only helping it to define its employment brand (an extension of the previous section), but to also define its current and aspirational culture. This research is used to span messaging across multiple media and is integrated into recruitment strategies. In 2013, IBM—number 4 on Interbrand’s list and employer of over 450,000 people globally—officially acquired Kenexa, an international company of about 3,000 employees. This acquisition marked the beginning of an IBM initiative called “Smarter Workforce,” which uses behavioral science to target what makes people, and therefore their organizations, thrive.

**Public relations.** Watson's proposed solutions for the insurance industry sought to change perception of the field. Though public relations did not become prominent until a few decades later (Curti, 1967), Watson's presentation identified public relations methods as viable solutions for influencing mass opinion. Now, there are well over 150,000 public relations and communications practitioners globally (PRSA, n.d.).

**Messaging.** Lastly, the shift in how advertising messaging was framed created long-term change for the industry. Curti's (1967) third and final time span covered was 1930-1950, a time when messaging became more about satisfying instead of developing consumer wants. However, the two noted shifts were toward thinking about human nature as flexible (and, thus, fluid), and, near the latter part of the time period, accepting the applicability of behavioral sciences. Though it is outside the scope of this study to cover the gap in time since Curti's review, it analyzes the most recent communication shifts to determine behaviorism's modern-day relevance.

**Networked communications.** Digital technologies of the past 20 years have contributed greatly to communication platforms by creating "positive feedback," (Davidow, 2011, p. 24) used in the sense of engineering where change begets change and accelerates it (p. 24). Through this constant development, ever-expanding networks have grown and shifted communication to a "many-to-many" format, meaning numerous individuals can now contribute to the conversation due to the increased accessibility of communication portals and unlimited networks that subsequently develop. The communication network is now dynamic, "active," (Marwick & Boyd, 2010, p. 16) and offers "a clear way to communicate with the speaker" (p. 16). In regard to advertising, this shift had significant ramifications on the messaging equation. The consumer still receives a message, but now both the consumer *and* the message are affected by the surrounding network, which consists of many varied thoughts and emotions. Before the network,

the medium of a message played a relatively minor part in terms of stimulating a reaction/behavior. Now the interwoven nature of networked media connects consumers not only to the messenger but also to each other (p. 16).

The question is whether behaviorism can still be applied to advertising as an effective tool in message construction. The behaviorist would continue to focus on manipulating the message to cater to the consumer's predetermined psychological traits, but the new network factor in the equation serves as an amplifier of both message and consumer—the network is constantly affecting both. A message is no longer sent and directly received; it can be manipulated by others in the network before and after an individual's exposure. The consumer is also affected by the network, being constantly surrounded by communication within it. In addition, the network also poses a challenge because it is an indefinable variable that has no structured boundaries and is in constant flux (see Figure 1).

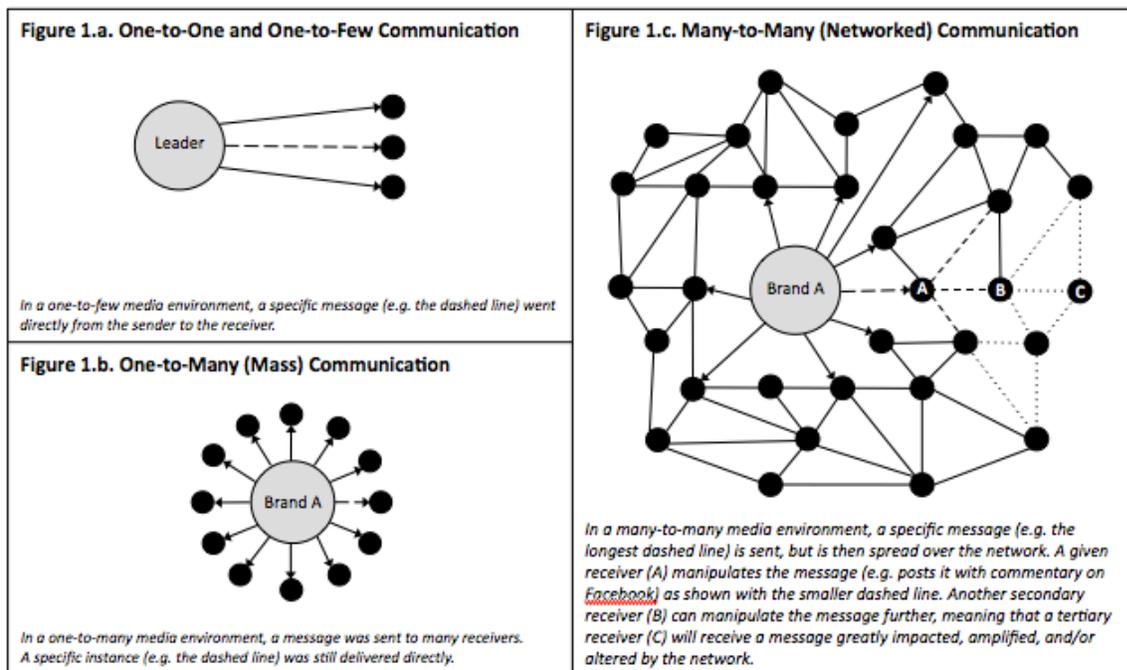


Figure 1

*Behavior measurement and analytics.* The network has also had a significant impact on advertising research methodology and data collection. In the era of mass media, advertisers learned about consumers' emotions and thoughts regarding a product or brand by doing primary research in the form of focus groups, but this method relied on the participants' recall and focused heavily on the conscious mind as opposed to actual behavior. Studies involving participant observation would more accurately align with behaviorist ideas because researchers actually witness and document interaction, but this continues to be largely unrealistic as it does not obtain an accurate sample and is not easily executed. Another inadequacy of this method is the effect the observer's presence has on the subject.

In today's digital society, advertisers are able to covertly observe consumer behavior and collect data through cookies and web analytics. Digital media offer uninhibited consumer data on a large and incredibly accurate scale—both significant improvements from the mass media age. In this way, behaviorist ideas are more prevalent in advertising methodology than ever. With virtually limitless data available, researchers rely on data to accurately depict consumer actions and manipulate future messaging based on this knowledge.

Now that this vast pool of information is available, advertisers in particular are focused on collecting and using it to increase exposure and inevitably profits. Success and failure are defined by numbers more than ever, and this aligns perfectly with behaviorism. Though the end result (behavior/reaction) has been made more accessible on a significantly larger scale, advertisers have a new challenge. Watson proposed that the “nature of human behavior was reducible to a set of unambiguous facts,” (Buckley, 1982, p. 208) but he never imagined the interconnected future or communication structure. Though a consumer's individual behavior may be “reducible to a set of unambiguous facts” (p. 208), it is now affected by the variable of

the network. This constant change requires a departure from standard scientific methods in which there is one variable to be manipulated while other factors remain constant. Advertisers must immerse themselves in the network—be present and interact on social platforms, have brand advocates, produce easily sharable content, to name a few examples—to have the best possible understanding of its impact on their messaging while accepting the fact that this decentralization of communication equates to an inevitable decrease in control.

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