



## Are the Sciences Too Far Ahead of Advertisers?

*The following editorial by C. B. Larrabee in the periodical Printers' Ink for 22 October brings questions that have long troubled scientists to the attention of the general publishing and advertising fraternities. The use of scientific-sounding but scientifically meaningless or misleading language, distortions of scientific thought and experimental results, false analogies both direct and implied—in short, the misuse of science and scientific evidence—can be found in many fields. It is good to see concrete evidence that others are also concerned with the problem.*

*Incidentally, advertising designed to appear in periodicals serving scientists is generally accurate—more informational than promotional. The readers—the potential buyers—help to control the quality of the advertising.*

**A**RE scientists getting ahead of advertising's ability to use their findings wisely?

As few and tentative as are the studies in the field of psychological research, they already have pointed the ways to more skillful manipulation of the consumer mind. The results, therefore, can be as dangerous as they are significant.

For many years advertising has had its unscrupulous fringe. At one time they [unscrupulous advertisers] operated without hindrance. They sold such socially dangerous products as supposed cancer cures and other nostrums. When legislation caught up with them they transferred their activities to other fields.

They began to use the fake testimonial, the pseudo-scientific copy appeal, and all the other petty tricks of the advertising shyster. They have been particularly adept at juggling statistics and backing phony research. . . .

The fact that these people wear the clothes of respectability and wield multi-million-dollar appropriations makes them no less shysters and therefore no less dangerous.

It would be easier not to worry about them. It would be comforting to feel that they will grow up to their responsibilities. But they have never shown that they understand their obligation to society. There is no

reason to believe that a scientific refining and sharpening of their tools will suddenly awaken them to their social responsibilities.

The very real possibility that the techniques of social research and psychology will be used by those ill-fitted to use them presents to advertising one of the greatest challenges in its long history.

Advertising has always suffered from those who were so fascinated by the game that they forgot its social implications. As production more and more catches up with capacity to consume, the demand for hard selling will put new premiums on the work of those who understand how to manipulate the human mind.

Somebody once said war is too important to be entrusted to the generals. Is it possible that advertising might become too scientific to be entrusted to advertisers?

Leaders in advertising should see that scientific techniques are not so abused by a few unscrupulous advertisers that their great potential benefits are denied those who can use them wisely and soundly.

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