

# The lies you've been told

 By [Chris Brewer](#) 26 Oct 2015

This will probably be the last piece I write on research during this series (unless I'm motivated during the week). It concerns "misinformation" and there's a lot of it around...

Looking back on my past scribblings, I hope I've shown that research is not a science. Certainly, it's extremely useful, but it's only a simple tool and, like all tools, it has its limitations.

But it would be remiss of me if I didn't point out there are very many clever people who think otherwise - in other words, they really do believe it IS a science.

The fact that I think they're wrong is certainly not going to cause any of them to lose sleep. The reason I'm sure they're wrong is because of their obsession with making a "science" out of a simple clerical function, which is best called "tracking". They've become confused.

Some researchers suggest that "penetration" of a market can be assessed by how much a TV commercial is "liked" by viewers.

There's nothing too much wrong with this suggestion, except that by increased "penetration", they imply increased "effectiveness" - which is so blatantly incorrect that it hardly requires argument.

There is one research system that measures how much viewers like a TV commercial. They ask 200 consumers to rate commercials with marks out of 10 or 100. Then they compile all these results together in a chart.

This, in itself, is a harmless exercise (it is the way that award-winning ads are judged, after all). But what is alarming are the conclusions drawn, such as "if consumers like a commercial they are more inclined to look at it and remember it, which will make the media budget up to 30% more effective."

## These are horrendous assumptions

The fundamental reason for advertising is to sell more product. There's nothing wrong with consumers "liking" a commercial, but this has little to do with selling more product.

Advertising should seldom be created to entertain. The words of Claude C Hopkins are worth remembering: "Never seek to amuse. People do not buy from clowns."



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To clarify the point, let's say an advertisement has copy that says something along the lines of this:

Do you suffer from piles?  
If so, then try ABC ointment.  
Tests prove it successful  
in 9 out of 10 cases.  
ONLY AT PHARMACIES

Now, no-one is actually going to LIKE this advertisement and it's unlikely to rate more than 1 out of 10. But lot of people who DO have piles are likely to try it because, as an advertisement, it satisfies all the requirements for effective communication.

It identifies the Target Market Group (TMG) immediately, then tells them it's been tested and proven to work and it's only available in pharmacies, which adds to its credibility.

THAT's what advertising is about - not by how many people smile when they see it.

One more final note on misinformation:

You will often be faced with a variety of "media models" which, in the main, are contorted mathematical attempts to prove one thing or another. Mostly, they are rubbish.

I was thrilled to read what Steven Schnaars said in his "[Megamistakes](#)" book:

"There is absolutely no evidence that complicated mathematical models provide more accurate forecasts than simpler models that incorporate intuitively pleasing rules of thumb."

So use all research with caution. It can be extremely helpful and suggest many things but it must never be allowed to dictate what you do with your product.

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## ABOUT CHRIS BREWER

Having joined the ad industry in London, Chris Brewer spent most of his career in media analysis and planning - but has performed just about every advertising task from Creative to Research. He's an honorary lifetime member of the Advertising Media Association and regularly advises agencies and clients regarding their media plan costs and strategies. He is also often asked to talk at industry functions. Email: [chris@brewers.co.za](mailto:chris@brewers.co.za). Twitter: [@brewersapps](https://twitter.com/brewersapps). Read his blog: [www.brewersdroop.co.za](http://www.brewersdroop.co.za)  
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