

Submission to the Lords Science and Technology Committee on Behaviour Change.

October 2010.

About the Advertising Association

The Advertising Association is the only body representing all sides of the advertising and promotional marketing industries, worth £14.5 billion in 2009. Its membership represents advertisers, agencies, media and support services in the UK. Further information about the organisation is available at: <http://www.adassoc.org.uk/>

Introduction.

1. This paper will address the advertising industry's engagement with the issue of behaviour change and set out some of our thinking and our current work in this area.
2. Much of the output of our £14.5 billion¹ industry is concerned with behaviour change. If we don't understand how consumers behave, we are unlikely to be able to communicate with them effectively and efficiently. So, understanding how people make behavioural decisions - about the food they consume, the clothes they wear, the politicians they elect and the brands they value - is central to the success of the advertising industry.
3. The Advertising Association (AA) and its members are actively engaged in this issue:
 - The Institute of Practitioners in Advertising has published a series of important pamphlets on behavioural economics, which can be found at <http://www.ipa.co.uk/Content/Behavioural-Economics-Site-IPA-Publications> - more information on the IPA's specialist Behavioural Economics Think Tank (BETT) can be found in the footnotes².
 - The Advertising Association has established the seminal business4life coalition, comprised of around 40 companies within the food and drink, fitness, advertising, retail and media sectors, which is partnering with the Department of Health's Change4Life movement in order to affect behaviour change as it relates to diet and exercise.
 - The AA's exploration of "peer acceptance" and its behaviour change implications for obesity and alcohol abuse are an area of increasing importance for the Advertising Association and its members.

Part One: Peer Acceptance and a new understanding of obesity.

4. The Committee requests information on ***"the latest developments in the evidence-base in relation to changing eating and physical activity behaviour."***
5. Our work in the area of diet and physical activity has been a significant part of the Advertising Association's operations since the establishment of the Food Advertising Unit in 1993. The most recent developments in our research,

¹ WARC/AA figures for 2009 show advertising spend was £14,506 million.

² Behaviour Economics Think Tank (BETT) <http://www.ipa.co.uk/Content/IPA-Behavioural-Economics-Think-Tank-member-biographies>

serendipitously, are in the areas of social networking and peer acceptance, both of which are directly relevant to the committee's request:

What is Peer Acceptance?

6. "Peer acceptance is about people continuing to follow modes of behaviour because other people within their social group are behaving in the same way. People feel less pressure to change their actions and habits if their friends are not also doing so."

Earl Howe refers to the work of the AA and Volterra, House of Lords, January 2010.

7. Peer acceptance is a sociological term relating to the psychology of peer group attitudes. In other words, people feel less pressure to change their behaviour when other people within their community exhibit the same behaviour to them. It is not connected with the intrinsic merits or 'demerits' of any particular behaviour. In the context of this paper, it refers purely to the phenomenon of people continuing in modes of behaviour because the fact that other people do so makes it more acceptable.

Background

8. In July of 2007, a significant U.S. study, which used a detailed database on individuals compiled over a period of 30 years, was published in the authoritative New England Journal of Medicine. This study found some significant new "social networking" factors in the causes of obesity. Key findings and conclusions were:
 - A person's chances of becoming obese increased by 57% if he or she had a friend who became obese in a given interval.
 - Network phenomena appear to be relevant to the biologic and behavioral trait of obesity, and obesity appears to spread through social ties. These findings have implications for clinical and public health interventions.
9. In the latter half of 2009, these remarkable insights prompted the AA's Food Advertising Unit³ to commission a small-scale study that might establish whether similar trends were also apparent in the U.K. In the UK the issue of childhood obesity had been similarly high-profile and the existing evidence base (the *Foresight* report⁴ and NHS surveys, largely) had covered some 108 factors without fully identifying or quantifying the contribution of "social factors" to the problem of obesity.
10. Our report, *Understanding and Predicting Childhood Obesity* can be found here: <http://www.adassoc.org.uk/aa/index.cfm/fau/obesity-study1/>

Our work with Volterra

- Built and expanded upon the findings of the *Foresight* report in determining the causes of obesity and their relative importance.

³ The Food Advertising Unit is a centre for information, communication and research on the issue of food and soft drink advertising to children. More information on the FAU can be found at <http://www.adassoc.org.uk/aa/index.cfm/fau/>

⁴ A copy of *Tackling Obesities: The Foresight Report* can be found here: <http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageId=8267926>

- Established initial credibility for “peer acceptance” as an important factor behind the rise in child obesity in the UK.

Current Work

11. Our initial work on peer acceptance helped establish the concept as an area of real interest for those looking to understand the driving factors being obesity. To build on this evidence base, the
12. FAU and Volterra began work on a substantial report exploring how childhood obesity and peer acceptance interact, and how knowledge of these interactions can help government and our industry generate more productive behaviour.
13. In a recent *Financial Times* article, Volterra Chief Executive and leading economist Paul Ormerod described our work and its potential to improve policy making:

“...a series of experiments of small nudges, harnessed to the power of networks genuinely to change behaviour, offers a potentially much more effective way of tackling seemingly intractable problems.”⁵

14. To best understand which actions will most successfully alter behaviour, our forthcoming report will contain:
 - Detailed qualitative information gleaned from 10 small scale focus groups (comprised of children aged between 11 and 15 and carried out by Dr. Barbie Clarke⁶).
 - Using the results of a questionnaire sent to 1000 families (accessed via mothers but interviewing 11 to 15 year olds) Volterra will apply a form of agent-based modelling to establish the relationship between different elements of peer group behaviour. For example, we hope to be able to quantify if having an obese mother has a greater or lesser impact on childhood obesity than having peers who do not play sport.
15. This work will be double-blind peer reviewed, and should represent the most significant contribution to the debate on peer acceptance and obesity to date. We believe that by combining our industry’s understanding of the principles which underpin behavioural economics with our emerging grasp of the importance of peer networks we will be able to propose innovative new ways of changing behaviour for the better.
16. We will be presenting this work to government, NGOs and other stakeholders – and will contact the Lords Science and Technology Committee once our report is complete on 18th November 2010.
17. The second development in the evidence base occurs in the establishment of business4life, a coalition of 36 companies in the food and drink, media, retail and fitness industries. business4life was established by the Advertising Association to work in partnership with the Department of Health (DH) in support of its Change4Life campaign. Change4Life, a public health programme launched in January 2009, aims to reduce obesity by encouraging people to

⁵ *Financial Times* 15th September 2010. Full text available here:

<http://www.paulormerod.com/pdf/A%20network%20is%20as%20good%20as%20a%20nudge%20for%20a%20Big%20Society.pdf>

⁶ Dr Clark is the director of research body Family, Kids and Youth, which studies on children’s use of technology, media, communication, diet and activities. More information on Family, Kids and Youth can found here: <http://www.kidsandyouth.com/aboutus.php>

“eat well, move more and live longer”.

18. The evidence base itself will be best informed by DH’s and the COI’s significant and robust measurement work in this area. A team from the Advertising Association, headed by our Director of Research Karen Fraser, have very recently met with DH/COI research teams in order to develop further the valuation and evaluation of the Change4Life campaign and the associated (and unassociated) “healthy activity” work that is being undertaken.
19. As Government expenditure cuts are felt, and as business4life efforts gather pace, it is anticipated that, working with our major coalition members, we will be able to complement the evidence base and develop already-encouraging trends that the Change4Life campaign has generated. The role of business4life is better explored, of course, in Part Two of this paper.

Part Two: The agents of behaviour change.

20. The Committee asks ***‘who are the most effective agents for the delivery of behaviour interventions to tackle obesity?’***
21. The Committee will be well aware that this is a complex and sensitive arena in which to work: at this point in the life of our partnership with DH, we believe we can provide some answers to the question above, though we are not yet ready to quantify the impact of individual elements – for example “mothers” on the one hand and GPs on the other. We can provide, however, some general statements from our experience that may aid the committee’s deliberations.
22. i) Advertising, in its broadest sense, has a key role to play. As the IPA points out in its submission to the committee the “public” and broadscale nature of its impact can and does bring not just attention to the issue at hand, but – proven in countless case histories – attitude and behaviour change. In the case of social issues in particular, advertising’s role has been of considerable value in driving behaviour change because of its ability publicly to change the values of a type of behaviour, be that excessive alcohol consumption, drink-driving, or, in time, obesity. The COI’s publication *How Public Service Advertising Works* is instructive on this issue.
23. ii) Connected to i, “society” is therefore an effective “agent for the delivery of behaviour intervention.” The DH Change4Life campaign can demonstrate considerable successes. That work, however, can be enhanced by its target audience understanding that it is not just Government that wants them to shed weight, which might be expected, but broader society, their friends, and their social network. Messages that are confined to dietary and exercise advice will play their role, but those that understand the power of societal influence, carefully delivered, can enhance impact and behaviour change dramatically.
24. iii) Brands. People trust brands because brands have earned their trust, and brands are part of their everyday lives and social exchanges. The Advertising Association’s business4life coalition, comprising hundreds of brands, is delivering programmes aimed at behaviour change which will help reduce obesity levels in the UK.
25. By partnering the private sector with the public, b4l is becoming an effective agent for the delivery of messages and programmes which facilitate improved lifestyle choices. This is business in the Big Society.

Business4Life Activities

26. As a formal partner to the Department of Health's Change4Life campaign, b4L members have delivered a range of activities which focus on promoting behaviour change by engaging with consumers directly. Examples of some of this activity, not always C4L related, but always health related, are below:
- The Fitness Industry Association (FIA) delivered free dance classes across England as part of the Let's Dance/Change4Life campaign. Fellow Change4Life partner ITV promoted coverage of the campaign via its regional network.
 - Mars and Unilever have supported Change4Life through its workplace health programme, aimed at helping employees become fitter and healthier.
 - ITV has produced and aired three primetime Saturday night shows called 'The Feelgood Factor' to help families live more healthily. ITV were also the driver of and a key partner in Walk4life - part of the Change4Life movement that has been set up to encourage families and adults to eat well, move more and live longer.
 - Sky launched its campaign Skyride in June 2009 to get one million more people cycling regularly by 2013. Throughout the summers of 2009 and 2010 they held Skyride City Events to get people back on the saddle and created hundreds of weekly Skyride Local guided rides to keep people on their bikes.
27. There is an important synergy to this partnership. DH has provided the resource and skills that developed the very successful Change4Life campaign. b4L supports this campaign, and will extend it through the ability to bring these messages home to real life and real brand choices, and through its understanding of the power of social influence, as outlined earlier in this paper. The whole must be or become greater than the sum of the government and business parts.
28. As stated in the Change4Life *One Year On* report⁷, the contribution of business has had a significant impact in ensuring the campaign's key messages are communicated successfully to consumers.

Conclusion

29. Advertising has for many years been engaged in the understanding of behaviour change and communicating accordingly. For various reasons – the IPA's work, the AA's own practical engagement with the Change4Life campaign, and our qualitative and quantitative explorations of social networking, this topic is high on our agenda.
30. Our exploration of how the factor of peer acceptance interacts with other drivers of obesity will shed new light on why some people are or remain overweight, with important implications for public health policy.
31. business4life represents a new way of tackling obesity and improving health. By utilising the power of brands, and the expertise of the food and drink, retail, media, advertising and fitness sectors, we significantly amplify and extend the

⁷ *Change4Life: One Year On* can be found here:
http://www.dh.gov.uk/en/Publicationsandstatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/DH_112529

Change4Life message. Partnering with business in this way will increase the efficacy of the Change4Life campaign.

32. As the Government explores the most effective ways of instigating behavioural change among citizens, we trust that the input of the advertising industry, represented by the AA, can continue to play a key part in the development of effective Government policies.