



The A/B Ruse:

A B



Consumer Taste Test Bias Unmasked

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*Do you believe the results of those comparison tests
where people choose between A and B?
You won't after you read this.*

By Alan L Tarr

Author of *The 7 Deadly Sins Of Marketing* and
Win The Marketing Game And Stop Wasting Money

"In A Blind, Head-To-Head Taste Test, People Chose Tweedledee Two To One Over Tweedledum."

Proving what? The advertising copy seems to say this '*proves*' Tweedledee is better than Tweedledum. Therefore you ought to buy Tweedledee. These comparison tests are inflicted on us by brands and their slippery marketing consultants so they can both sway Tweedledum users to consider buying Tweedledee and confirm to Tweedledee lovers that they made the right choice all along.

Can't argue with a scientific test, right? Not so fast. Let's take a look at the typical consumer test...Pepsi vs Coke, Prego vs Ragu, Rocco's Gelato vs Fred's Gelato and so forth... from the perspective of an honest brand strategist and copywriter who detests sneaks, cheats and liars.

The Methodology

In a double-blind test, one product is labeled "A" and the other is labeled "B". Neither the consumer nor the tester knows which product is which. Sounds fair, no? No. Meet the *A/B Ruse*.

It's the oldest trick in the book, a carnival game, a first-class deception, a marketing strategy used by charlatans. Here's the bottom line: "A" ALWAYS WINS! Not only does "A" always win, but the percentages remain remarkably consistent. About

70% - 30% give or take a couple of points (as long as you test at least 200 subjects).

Why? Simple. In our culture “A” has a better connotation than “B”. “A” is first class, highest quality. “B” is the also ran. If you get a B on your math test instead of an A, do you feel elated? You want to be included on the A-List. Second-rate films are referred to as “B” movies. Do you want to be part of the “A Team” or the “B Team”? In people’s minds “A” is always superior to “B”.

This has been proven over and over again by “testing” identical products with the A and B labels. The same soda in each cup, the same pasta sauce in each bowl, the same cookie on each plate... "A" always wins. When teaching a Consumer Economics and Marketing course, we did a taste test with orange juice. First we labeled one juice "A", and it won. Then we tested a second group of subjects where we labeled the winning juice "B", and it lost. By almost the exact same margin.

Now I want to assure you, the A/B Ruse can be inflicted upon consumers of many things, not just food and drink. I’ve heard of “blind” tests comparing headache remedies, golf balls, and even seat cushions.

Here’s How To Do It The Right Way

If you truly want to do a scientific test, label the products 36GTD121 and 36SRN276. Now you have a great chance of coming up with a valid result. But why would companies spend good money on a test that isn’t totally rigged in their favor? They wouldn’t.

So, if you’re involved in marketing and you’re seeking a way to differentiate your product from that of your competitor, resist the temptation to “fake it” by reverting to the old A/B Ruse. It’s a game you don’t want to play.

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