

KNOWLEDGE AT HAND

| Television Advertising Wearout

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In advertising, the ultimate goal is to reach consumers with a message that both stands out while also resonating so deeply that the brand is recalled long after exposure (Lehnert, Till, & Carlson, 2013). Thousands of brands, new and old, compete daily for the attention of consumers through all forms of media. “How many times can I send the same message and still obtain a profitable return?” This is one of the most frequently asked questions in advertising planning and relates to the issue of wearout.

A major manufacturer reviewed thousands of econometric analyses, concluding there was no evidence of wear-out in *any* of the *campaigns* it had run around the world (Binet & Carter, 2012). It may be more accurate to think of the consumer’s response wearing out, rather than the ad itself!

Ultimately the judgement will be one that assesses the opportunity cost: Will a new ad, with a potentially refreshed (or new) message, be more effective than an existing ad, and will that increased effectiveness justify the cost of creating that ad?

We will be releasing a separate Knowledge at Hand focused on wearout and other media, e.g. Digital, Audio/Radio, Print.

BACKGROUND/OVERVIEW

Wearout is a relative term. One version defines it as the point where the mix of creative, media placement and spending *begin* to lose the ability to achieve a campaign’s communications objectives and generate a response or consumer interest.

The first exposure to a commercial/ad is the most “effective.” Repeated exposures ultimately lead to diminishing returns. Advertisers need to understand how exposure frequency influences consumer behavior (Lewis, 2015). Wearout is a function of frequency and exposure and time.

Wear in is a related issue, framed the other way - the point during which the commercial/ad begins to provide impact. Studies have found that ads which are

not persuasive do not increase sales and do not improve over time (Stewart, 1999).

There is also the argument that ads do not ever become “worthless” or “worn out.” Commercials will continue to contribute to sales by reminding people of the good things about the brand and the interesting and engaging aspects of the brand’s personality.

Why is there such a wide range of varying ad performance? Perhaps some ads are better at being noticed. Alternatively, some ads may be more prone to wear out simply because they fail to appeal to a general audience.

HOW TO DETERMINE WEAROUT/WEAR-IN

Pre-testing, post-testing, brand health tracking and sales decomposition/market mix modeling are among the measures used to evaluate a specific ad’s wearin/wearout. Ad recall and attitude towards the ad are variables of significant relevance. Among the representative measures of advertising effectiveness are: awareness; advertising likeability; brand attitude; purchase intention.

Can we predict the point at which an ad’s ability to persuade has worn out? Every case will be different; even within each country, the variability in the effectiveness of the advertising copy can be massive and media plans can vary enormously.

The level of TRPs it takes to reach wearout differs for every category and depends on the strength of the creative.

Powerful new ideas may look weak when initially tested against established campaigns. So ditching and replacing an established campaign is genuinely costly. Sometimes, it’s the right thing to do. But sometimes it’s not.

True “wearout” of a TV ad is rare, and many TV ads could have a longer useful life than advertisers realize (Millward Brown, 2012). In general, advertising *strategies* tend *not* to wear out.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- In general, advertising strategies tend not to wear out. It is the execution which tires and lends to irritation or “tune-out.”
- Strong competition can accelerate wearout, particularly if there is little differentiation in creative strategy.
- Ads that focus on product news are definitely susceptible to wearout. Such ads will become less effective over time, because the people who are

receptive to the message will be persuaded quickly, while those who are not receptive will not be won over by repeated viewings (Millward Brown, 2012).

- Recall can remain high, but persuasion can fall. However—and this is key—just because the news value has dissipated.
- Airing multiple ads (simultaneously) decreases the chances of breakthrough of individual ads.
- Ads with new and different messages will typically convert all the consumers they are capable of converting in a fairly short time. This happens because people who do not notice the message or don't find it relevant are not likely to notice it or find it more relevant with subsequent viewings.
- The main challenge facing a study of ad frequency is that advertisers intentionally target their ads to responsive subpopulations. As a result, the people that are thought to be more likely to be influenced by the ad are more likely to see a large number of impressions.

Research remains conflicted regarding the level of attention and exposure necessary in order to achieve the desired benefits of creative advertisements (Lehnert et al., 2013). When it comes to specifics, there appear to be no magic numbers. This issue has been studied across media for many years, but there is no simple rule of thumb.

SOURCES

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