Chapter 3
WEAROUT, CARRYOVER EFFECTS AND DECAY OF ADVERTISING

Ads wear out (i.e. cease to influence receivers) after a number of exposures and must then be replaced. To explain wearout we need a model that describes response to repeated exposures. The model presented in this Chapter specifies primary responses to advertising that may be either thoughtful or automatic, and carryover effects that induce further sales if there has been a sales effect at the primary stage. Carryover effects are persisting changes that occur in a number of ways: change in thinking (framing), purchase reinforcement (purchase is easier if it has been done before), impacts on the distribution system, and the influence of purchasers on other potential buyers.

When ads do have an effect, this effect decays over time. Research on the decay pattern now suggests that there are two components in this process, short-term and long-term.

Consumer segments respond differently to TV advertising. Light viewers respond more than heavy viewers. Evidence is also reported on the response to ads of consumer segments with different weights of purchase and different loyalties to the advertised brand.

Wearout

Wearout depends on a number of conditions. Here, we focus on the observed loss of effectiveness of advertising with repeated exposure. There is limited research in this field and, until recently, few dissented from Krugman’s (1972) position. This was that ads would temporarily lose their effectiveness after a number of exposures but that, after a rest, the ads could be aired again and much of their effectiveness would then be restored. Only after several cycles of this sort would it be necessary to replace the ads. Figure 3.1 shows how this could work if there is no loss of sales between bursts.

A rather different emphasis comes from Jones and Blair (1996), and Blair and Rabuck (1998). They treat wearout as a consequence of the frequency effect and see little scope for recovery when the ad is rested. This would make the life of an ad relatively short. Sales gains from successive airings of the ad would come mainly from those who had not seen the ad before and this
penetration growth would fall off quite quickly. To support their account, Jones and Blair present the sales evidence shown in Figure 3.2. This suggests that each successive burst has markedly less effect and, after three bursts, the brand is losing sales to the competition. However, to interpret Figure 3.2 we need to know how sales fall off between bursts; if any gains mostly decay between bursts, it could be argued that the advertising is continuing to work. The ‘no recovery’ argument is supported by Walling and Owen (2000), who again find that wearout is a simple function of exposure and that advertising did not recover when it was rested for a month.

Blair and Rabuck (1998) draw attention to an issue of commercial importance on which the evidence is mixed. A study of advertising designed to stimulate the milk consumption of children by the National Dairy Council (Baker 1995) indicated that copy should be replaced after 2000 TVRs, i.e. an average of 20 exposures for each TV household. Franzen (1994) suggested that 60 percent of effectiveness had gone after 1250 TVRs. Scott and Solomon (1998) report 13 studies with claims of wearout occurring after 2 to 18 exposures (average about 8). Naik (1999) assessed wearout as the duration of time required for the impact of the advertising copy to decline by half; this was three months in the case of a Levi Strauss product. These claims do not show much agreement. Also, any regular television viewer or radio listener can note that some ads are heavily repeated, producing exposures well in