In the past 10 years there has been increasing concern about the escalating cost of advertising, particularly television advertising. While other areas of business have been made more accountable, it has been a challenge to justify advertising expenditures. The usefulness of advertising has not been questioned, but the volume of advertising has. Firms are under increasing pressure to justify their marketing and advertising expenditures. Linking advertising and downstream sales is an area fraught with challenges and remains largely an unsolved problem in the marketing field. Instead, researchers and practitioners have created other measures of advertising success, such as Millward Brown’s awareness index and RSC’s advertising persuasion measure. Another key factor in helping explain ad recall is likeability. Measures such as these are all intended to help assess the effectiveness of advertising. The purpose of East’s book is to report the most recent measures of advertising effectiveness and to give an unbiased assessment of how these measures perform. In addition, the book provides a nice blend of advertising practice and consumer behaviour theory.

The book is relatively short, being only 115 pages, split into six chapters. Each chapter begins with a paragraph introducing the keywords for the chapter and concludes with a helpful summary of the concepts and findings. The first chapter is entitled ‘What is Effective Advertising?’ and sets the stage by defining what the author means by an effective advertisement. He shows that focusing on just sales response is too narrow, with alternative effectiveness criteria being reduced price sensitivity and reduction in cost.

The second chapter deals with fundamental media planning issues such as frequency and timing of ads, plus the shape of the advertising response function. In this chapter the controversial work of John Philip Jones is introduced. East methodically pinpoints the problems with Jones’ work without appearing over-critical. He also discusses some recent practitioner work by Andy Roberts and does a much better job than Roberts’ original work in explaining the methodological enhancement that this Taylor Nelson study made over the Jones studies. The chapter titillates us with a new justification for heavy advertising frequency that we observe with television. Roberts’ work found that people whose ad exposure was concentrated into a short period, typically a day, had a bigger increase in purchasing rates than people receiving the same number of ads over a longer period such as 28 days. A media planning implication of this for supermarket goods is to advertise heavily on Wednesday evening, as the majority of weekly shopping trips are made on Thursday through Saturday.

The third chapter deals with three related, but different long-term advertising effects, namely, wearout, carryover and decay. East does a particularly good job of merging in consumer behaviour theory to explain some of the observed patterns of these longer-term effects. Part of this explanation lies in word of mouth and diffusion effects, plus an understanding of the difference between heavy and light buyers/viewers.

The fourth chapter continues the theme of blending concepts from psychology into modern advertising practice. The importance and relevance of attitude to the ad and brand are discussed, plus the link to purchase behaviour. One large area that should have received more attention here is the work done by Millward Brown to link advertising awareness to sales. For example, this is covered in detail in the well-known advertising textbook by Rossiter and Percy. The chapter concludes with an explanation of the elaboration likelihood model, but does not illustrate how this model can be used to improve advertising effectiveness.

The fifth chapter addressed the ‘display’ part of the book title by examining the effect of point of sale advertising. Some of the multiplicative effects of advertising plus
price discounts are shown. The final chapter gives an overview of the state of online advertising. While the initial emphasis with banner ads was on click through and downstream sales, East correctly points out the importance of brand building and mere exposure with internet advertising.

While the book is clearly a nice synthesis of advertising effectiveness research, it does have some shortcomings. Firstly, the majority of the book uses examples from packages goods, with key business sectors that advertise heavily, such as financial services, airlines and telecommunications, barely mentioned. This may not be the fault of the author so much as the discipline itself, which is replete with studies of packages goods. Secondly, there is a tendency to draw from a narrow range of studies, particularly the work of Ehrenberg, Roberts and Broadbent, which additionally gives the book a UK bias. Still, neither of these shortcomings outweigh the positive contribution of the book.

In summary, this is a brief, but insightful update on advertising effectiveness. East has successfully pulled together many loose ends and disparate research studies in the area of advertising effectiveness and has come up with a book that is easy to read but not trivial in its treatment of the topic. The attempt to look at the ‘big picture’ of advertising is also welcome and successfully handled. There is something in this book for someone who knows very little about advertising and for someone with a broader knowledge, but who has not been able to put it all together. I strongly recommend you read this book.

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