One of advertising’s thorniest problems concerns the measurement of advertising effectiveness. Conventional theory locates this problem in a buyer response framework. Rossiter and Percy (1997) neatly summarize the traditional view: advertising effects are seen as a series of gates, namely exposure, processing, communications effects (including brand position) and action. To be effective, advertising must pass through each of the four gates (pp 14-20). In theory, measures of ad effects must estimate the strength of every gate; both attitudinal and behavioural. In practice, however, most advertisers bypass attitudinal gates preferring to measure action directly. Indeed, sales response is often cited as the most widely used measure of advertising effects. This discrepancy between theoretical best practice and what occurs in the field has been explained, at least in part, by the costly and time-consuming nature of attitudinal research. The challenge, for advertising theory, is to find simple means of monitoring the gates, acceptable to both academics and practitioners.

The Ultimate Secrets of Advertising deals with fundamental issues. It seeks to address the big questions. Does advertising work? How does it work? How can advertising be made more accountable? The answers to these questions provide the organizational framework for the book. In particular, the “gatekeeper model” is introduced – a serious and systematic attempt to bridge theory and practice. This model provides advertisers with a simple and expeditious means of monitoring advertising’s gates, and one that is conceptually and empirically sound. This is considered in the context of advertising effects in the short term, medium term and long term. Readers looking to this ambitiously titled book for detailed advice on how to formulate creative strategy or media strategy will be disappointed, but Jones stays true to his big questions.

Structure of the Book
The book spans ten chapters that are loosely organized into four sections. In the introductory chapter, the author’s gatekeeper model is outlined. Chapters two and three comprise the second section, an investigation of short-term advertising effects. Chapters four and five make up the third section, which covers medium-term advertising effects. Long-term advertising effects are investigated in the remaining chapters. Two appendices, including a lengthy discussion of tracking studies, round out the discussion to provide a balanced and comprehensive coverage of advertising effectiveness.

The Gatekeeper Model
The author’s “gatekeeper model,” outlined in the opening chapter is more aptly described as a set of decision rules to guide advertisers. Its novelty lies in the claimed ability to use sales outcomes as a means of identifying campaigns with potential thereby assisting managers to make “go/no go” decisions.

Short-Term Advertising Effects
The first gate that campaigns must pass is the delivery of demonstrable sales response within seven days of exposure. Jones uses his original STAS (short-term advertising strength) index to evaluate campaigns worthy of passing through this gate.

The STAS concept, developed by the author in 1995, has created considerable interest from advertising practitioners and theorists. STAS uses electronic single source data to capture purchases in households immediately following exposure to brand advertising. The index is calculated as a percentage of purchases among households exposed to advertising divided by the percentage of households not exposed to advertising. It should be noted that although the STAS index initially attracted criticism, it has since gained widespread credibility (Butterfield, 2002; Hansen and Olsen, 2002).
The book itself engages in a lively and passionate debate with early critics of STAS.

*The Ultimate Secrets of Advertising* expands Jones’ prior analysis of single source data to cover six countries and accounts for 340 brands. This provides a significant sample from which generalizations can reasonably be made. Successful brands – those with high market share – also have correspondingly high STAS scores. Accordingly, the STAS index is a robust measure of an advertising campaign’s innate strength.

The elegance of the STAS index is that it can be used to discriminate between strong and weak campaigns, within weeks of campaign launch. The STAS index provides a simple benchmark against which any campaign can be evaluated. Brands generating high STAS scores are successful and should be allowed to “pass through the gate.” Brands with a mid range STAS should be investigated further. In the event that STAS falls below a given level, the campaign “should not be allowed to pass through the gate.” The practical value of STAS is clear. Given that advertisers have access to single source survey data, it is a relatively easy task to calculate STAS and pinpoint campaigns with potential.

**Medium-Term Advertising Effects**

In competitive markets, not only must advertisers evaluate a campaign’s merits, but they must also consider how to keep the brand in the consumer’s vision. Methods for measuring a campaign’s ongoing currency in the medium term are the subject the third section.

Chapters four and five investigate the interactions between market growth and a range of additional variables including STAS, advertising intensity, promotional intensity and continuity. Data taken from ARS (Advertising Research System) are combined with several case studies of branded goods to provide the empirical support. Findings show that brands with average growth are not influenced by promotional intensity or advertising intensity when STAS is low. On the other hand, brands with strong creative, as estimated by the STAS index, benefit from increased investment in advertising. The centrality of the STAS index in predicting growth suggests that medium-term advertising effects represent the cumulative result of short-term effects.

Chapter five in this section addresses the issue of continuity. In it, Jones enters the recency versus effective frequency debate. The book is worth reading for this chapter alone. Amassing an array of both empirical data and secondary sources, Jones demolishes the long-held merits of flighted campaigns. Highlighting the amount of waste involved in traditional approaches to media planning, Jones offers a simple and compelling case for recency. The message is clear: for low involvement goods, a single weekly exposure is optimal.

**Long-Term Advertising Effects**

The final gate for campaigns is that they must be capable of building brands in the long term. The interaction between advertising and brand equity is the subject of the final section. This is the longest, most complex and arguably the most exploratory of the four sections because of its brand equity approach.

Long-term effects, defined as those effects measured over more than one year, are the most difficult to measure. According to the author, long-term effects take the form of brand enrichment, which in turn can be measured via the depth and breadth of a brand’s relationship with consumers. Six different measures are developed to investigate the interaction between advertising and both brand penetration and brand loyalty. A number of measures, such as share of requirements are unique to this book. Collectively, the data show that strong brands have benefited from the legacy of past advertising that in turn affords a modest buffer against competitive activity.

Jones’ insightful interpretations produce some surprising conclusions. For instance, strong brands consistently under-invest in advertising; an idea that leads to recommendations about the optimal advertising-to-market-share ratio. This type of ratio is just one of Jones’ many big ideas with immediate practical application. Advertisers can use this ratio to establish safe yet minimal levels of advertising investment.

**Contribution to the Literature**

This work is part of Jones’ ongoing, programmatic research into advertising effectiveness. It synthesizes a vast body of literature in fields as diverse as branding, consumer response models, competitive theory and customer loyalty while making a substantial original contribution to the study of advertising effectiveness. This book is arguably the most strategic of Jones’ contributions to date, offering theorists and practitioners many useful guidelines for allocating budgets in order to achieve desired competitive outcomes. It deserves to be taken seriously and should become essential reading for both advertising practitioners and scholars alike.
The case that advertising can produce demonstrable sales effects in the short term is compelling and is supported with a vast array of data tables and detailed analysis. The inclusion of long term advertising effects is a welcome addition to Jones’ now substantial contribution to advertising effectiveness and will no doubt stimulate further debate in the same way that his STAS score did in the mid 1990s. Much of the data used in the work is proprietary and has not been published previously. The sheer volume of quantitative information – 128 figures and tables in its 215 pages - does not make for light reading. However, Jones’ clarity of expression combined with his single-minded purpose more than compensates for the volume of quantitative information.

The book is a specialist study of advertising effectiveness in the context of low involvement purchases. The extent to which findings can be generalized to high involvement goods is not canvassed in this book, an oversight that some readers may find disappointing.

**Suitability for Target Audiences**

As a textbook, *Ultimate Secrets* is not an ideal choice for generalist advertising programs. The focus on low involvement goods, combined with the introduction of some controversial ideas, means this book needs to be read in the context of a wider body of literature. Alert readers will readily recognize that the gatekeeper model applies to fast moving consumer goods. Undergraduate students, so often in search of quick solutions with universal applications, may not always recognize the model’s limitations. For specialist postgraduate programs on advertising effectiveness, this book may be worth considering.

For advertising practitioners and academic audiences, the book is well worth reading. Practitioners will welcome the simple decision rules that can be applied immediately using data that is readily available to them. For scholars in advertising, media and general marketing, the book offers a radically different perspective to the problem of understanding and measuring advertising effectiveness. The clarity of its central argument combined with the weight of evidence make compelling reading.

**References**


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