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Roger M. Heeler,

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COMMENT

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ON THE AWARENESS EFFECTS OF MERE DISTRIBUTION

ROGER M.HEELER
York University

Awareness forecasting models, such as those discussed in Mahajan, Muller, and Sharma (1984), will be incomplete until they take account of the awareness effects of mere distribution. Distribution acts as both a main effect and as an interactive partner with advertising (and promotion) in the generation of awareness. Advertising in turn leads to distribution (Heeler et al. 1973).

For frequently shopped grocery items, the subject of most of the models, shelf visibility alone will generate awareness and trial. In turn this will generate some further awareness through word of mouth and through interaction with advertising and promotion. Evidence for this effect was recently observed in the breakfast cereal market in Canada. Generic and private labels have gained 4% of the market without advertising. A manufacturer of cereals also recently conducted a natural experiment. Two new brands were launched nationally virtually simultaneously. Advertising support for one brand, C (control), was even through the regions. The other brand, A, received advertising support in all regions except one, region Q. Three months after launch, aided awareness for C was 55% nationally excluding Q, and 56% in Q. By contrast, awareness for A was 60% nationally excluding Q, and 18% in Q. Control brand C shows that there was essentially no difference between region Q and the rest of the nation for response to normal advertising. Brand A shows that lack of advertising in Q reduced awareness by two thirds but did not eliminate awareness. The obtained figure of 18% is corroborated by Olson's (1981) finding of a mean awareness level of 22% for zero GRP. The awareness results for the cereal brand were mirrored in trial at twelve months. For brand C there was no difference between national and region Q levels. For brand A region Q trial was 9.6% versus 11.3% nationally, agreeing with Horsky and Simon's (1983) observation that launch advertising's main effect is to accelerate trial.¹

¹ This paper was received in May 1985 and has been with the author for 2 revisions.

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