



# Do TV Ads “Wear Out”?

Broadly speaking, the response generated by a TV ad doesn't change much over time. True “wearout” of a TV ad is rare, and many TV ads could have a longer useful life than advertisers realize. The one real exception to this rule has to do with ads that focus on product news. 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. Saturation of media weight over a short space of time can also create the impression of ad wearout; however, in such cases it may be the media buying strategy, rather than the effectiveness of the specific execution, that needs to be reviewed.

Advertisers often ask us how many GRPs they can put behind an ad before it “stops working.” They also wonder if past copy can be rerun or if it has no remaining value. These are important financial issues for them. Producing TV ads is expensive and requires a long lead time. Airtime may need to be booked months before actual airing, and an assessment of the number of ads required needs to be made early.

## How might TV ads wear out?

Conceivably, an ad might wear out in its ability to accomplish any one of the basic advertising tasks. An ad could wear out in terms of:

- Generating engagement, i.e., making people aware that the brand has advertised
- Creating an attitudinal or empathic response among viewers
- Communicating messages or impressions
- Producing a brand response, including sales

## Engagement

Millward Brown measures Engagement through the Awareness Index, a metric that describes a brand's ability

to make people aware that the brand has advertised. Our evidence suggests that in this respect, TV ads very rarely wear out. We analyzed 450 ads that aired in two or more bursts and observed that the Awareness Index (AI) changed in only 6 percent of cases. (And in the cases where the AI changed, the direction was evenly split: AIs went up in 3 percent of cases and down in 3 percent of cases.)

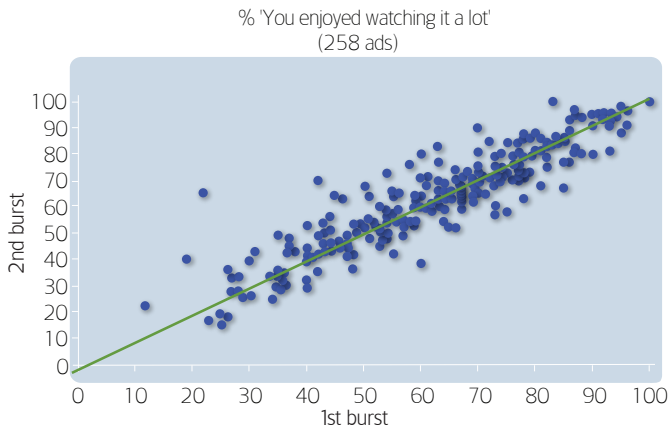
Ads that are good at generating branded awareness tend to remain so over time. However, factors external to the ad itself can occasionally seem to cause wearout in this respect. One such factor could be the ad's content — for example, if a featured celebrity falls out of favor with the public. But another more common cause of apparent wearout is heavy media spending over a short period of time. When this occurs, multiple exposures will net more repeat viewings than new ones, limiting any incremental increase in advertising awareness.

## Attitudes/empathy

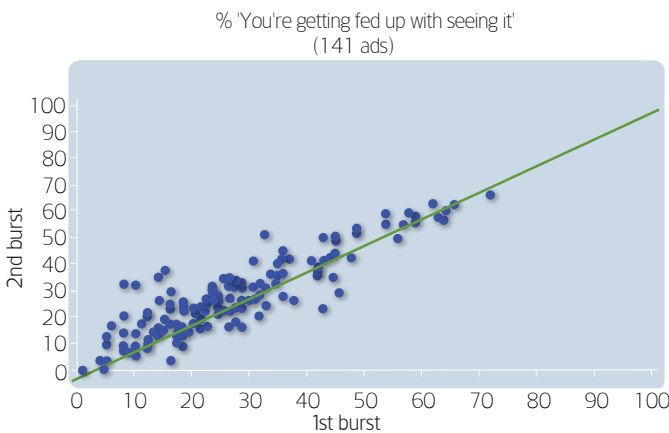
Most of the time, attitudes toward an ad hold steady over bursts. The two charts below, generated from data in

our tracking database, illustrate this. For both the positive statement “You enjoyed watching [the ad] a lot” and the negative statement “You’re getting fed up with seeing it,” there is a strong correlation between the level of agreement on the first and second bursts of advertising.

**Enjoyment**



**Getting fed up with seeing**

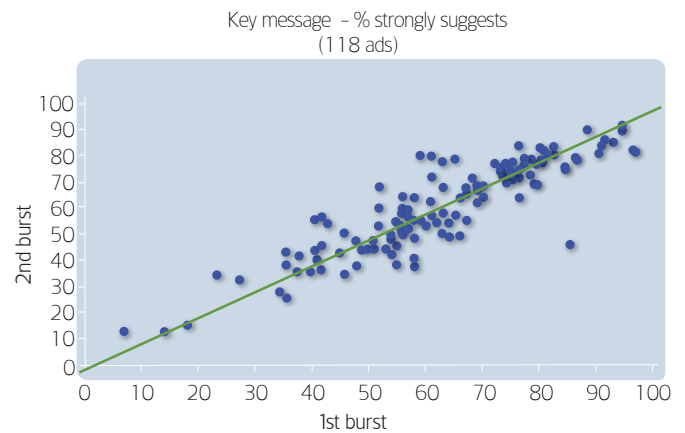


When we do see attitudinal wearout, it tends to occur when an ad that some viewers find irritating is aired with heavy spend. Alternatively, an ad can become less enjoyable if some aspect of it goes out of fashion. For example, we tracked an ad that featured a current pop song, which aired in three bursts over a two-year period. During the first burst, 71 percent reported enjoying the ad. But by the third burst, the enjoyment score had plunged to 56 percent, as the song had lost its appeal and freshness.

**Communication**

In terms of communication, the effectiveness of TV ads tends not to change over time. The messaging does not wear out, as shown in the chart below, where a key message registers consistently on two different bursts of advertising. This consistency is due to the fact that viewers don't tend to notice new things each time they see an ad. Rather, they focus on the parts of the ad that they initially found involving.

**Key message - % strongly suggests**



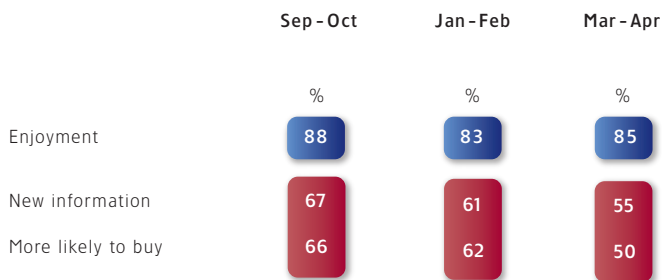
**Brand and Sales Response**

The area in which TV ads are most likely to wear out is in their ability to generate responses to brand measures and/or to motivate new purchases. This type of immediate response is measured through our persuasion questions, and wearout in this type of brand response is likely to occur in ads that depend on news. 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. Thus the “news” quickly ceases to be new, and there are no viewers left to be persuaded.

This is illustrated in the following example, where the level of news and persuasion decline over time, even though enjoyment of the ad holds steady.



News does wear out



Recognizing and Dealing with Wearout

As we have demonstrated, wearout sometimes occurs—or appears to occur—in engagement, when saturation of media weight over a short space of time creates the impression that the ad is no longer having impact. These cases, where spend produces increased frequency at the expense of coverage, shouldn't be regarded as wearout. Rather, the apparent decline in ad impact is an effect of diminishing returns. If the ad is aired again sometime later, its ability to generate branded impact will most likely be as strong as it was initially. It may be that the media strategy is intended to build heavy frequency, in which case this outcome is to be expected. But if this isn't the intention, the media strategy may need to be revisited.

While the attitudes produced by TV ads tend to remain consistent over time, some ads do have the potential to generate increasing levels of irritation on repeated viewing, and ads that reference current trends or events in popular culture may become less enjoyable over time. It is worthwhile to monitor these attitudes over time for long-playing ads.

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. In anticipating whether or not this is likely to occur, it is important to consider the ad's objectives and whether the message is intended to be perceived as new. An ad with a message that is new, relevant, and different may challenge consumers' buying habits when

they see the ad, thus increasing their consideration for the brand. This may lead to increased trial. An ad with a radically different creative style may accomplish the same effect. As we have said, wearout will generally occur only in the ad's ability to persuade, as measured by our Immediate Persuasion question. 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. But we can say that this wearout is likely to occur when the the ad's reach has been maximized. Once the ad has been noted by the bulk of its likely viewers, its news value will dissipate.

We can provide some general country-specific guidelines based on our knowledge of how advertising awareness builds in response to spend. By assuming average weekly spend (per country) for an average ad, and average effects from other conditions, the cumulative GRP spends in the table below will generate around 90 percent of the advertising awareness likely to be achieved.

Country	GRPs	Country	GRPs
Philippines	7000	Czech Rep	1350
Indonesia	3350	Denmark	1300
Vietnam	2400	Hungary	1300
Chile	2100	Ireland	1200
Portugal	2000	South Africa	1200
Turkey	2000	India	1150
Pakistan	1750	Malaysia	1150
Romania	1750	Sweden	1150
Brazil	1700	Russia	1100
Italy	1650	Australia	1050
Thailand	1500	China	1000
Mexico	1500	France	1000
Netherlands	1500	Japan	1000
Poland	1500	USA	1000
Spain	1450	Germany	900
Argentina	1350	UK	900



We should emphasize that this type of wearout relates only to ads dependent on news for their effectiveness. Also, these are generalized guidelines only. The actual effects of any wearout that occurs will vary by a whole host of factors relating to the ad, brand, category, and market. Each of these factors can have a meaningful impact on the rate at which the ad wears out as well as the effectiveness it retains after the "news" has faded.

When an ongoing campaign depends on challenging consumers by delivering news, it needs to be periodically refreshed with new arguments and/or new executions, for two reasons. First, the "news" needs to be kept new and relevant to those persuaded by the first presentation, and second, a new approach may persuade those who were previously unconvinced.

However—and this is key—just because the news value has dissipated, the ad is by no means worthless. It 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.

#### When to move on?

The majority of campaigns are successful without relying on a constant supply of news; instead, equity and clarity of positioning is built through consistency of messaging that is memorably associated with the brand (as measured through the Awareness Index). In these cases, ads can have a long shelf life. Repetition can help to build a brand in the long term, even if a short-term brand response is minimal. So before an ad or campaign is assumed to have worn out, long-term sales effects should be investigated.

But this doesn't necessarily mean that the same execution can be used ad infinitum. While it's true that many executions could be used longer than they are currently, there are a number of reasons for advertisers to move on with new ads. To ensure long-term success, brands need to project a sense of leadership. To create this sense of a brand leading the way, new ad executions are likely to be needed. In addition,

the competitive context needs to be kept under review; if a competitor changes campaign, this could negatively affect your sales, making it necessary to refresh your activity. It is also important to look at the broader picture, considering areas such as the continuing relevance of the strategy and positioning, changes in the target group, and where the brand is in its lifecycle.

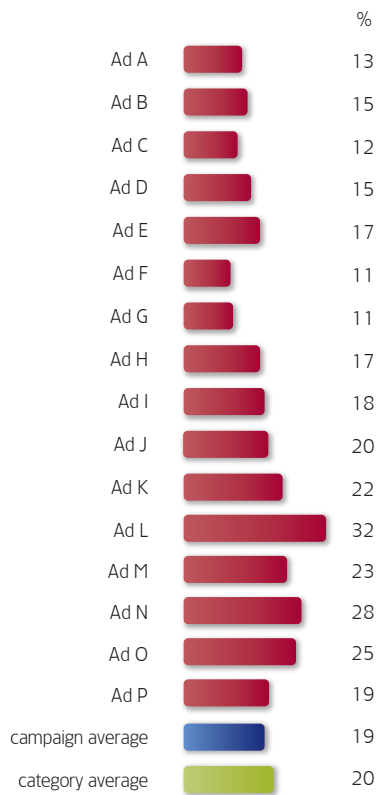
Ultimately the judgement will be one that assesses the opportunity cost: Will a new ad, with a potentially refreshed (or new) message, be more effective than an existing ad, and will that increased effectiveness justify the cost of creating that ad?

#### Campaign Wearout

Campaigns can wear out in the same ways that individual ads can. In the example illustrated by the chart below, a long-running campaign featured a particular celebrity with the potential to irritate. Irritation did grow over the course of the campaign; this was particularly evident in ad L, but even ad P, in which strenuous efforts were made to address the irritation issue, was still found to be considerably more irritating than the early ads in the campaign.



Irritation with campaign grows...



Another possible cause for campaign wearout is related to changes in society and attitudes over time. A good example from the UK is the PG Tips “Chimps” campaign, which was dropped after 40 years because attitudes toward performing animals had changed.

When assessing campaign wearout, some specific issues need to be taken into consideration. For example, an apparent issue could be due to specific executions rather than the campaign as a whole; a new ad may be performing less well in terms of brand integration or clarity of message, or the mix of ads in the campaign may have changed and become less effective.

In one example, wearout of branded impact seemed to be occurring over the campaign. Subsequent ads were becoming less efficient. We found two reasons for this. The weight of spend was increasing over time, resulting in a degree of media saturation. But there was also a lack of

product integration in the later ads that indicated that the structure of the individual ads needed to be refocused. Additionally, some campaigns that seem to be wearing out can be revived, perhaps by a product innovation, or a new slant to the scripts.

How does the use of PVRs affect wearout?

It’s possible that increased adoption of PVRs may cause wearout of TV ads to increase. This could happen if PVR viewing makes people more likely to fast-forward through ads they have seen before. However, currently there is little evidence that such behavior has a significant effect, and research by Millward Brown suggests that ads seen in fast-forward mode can be just as strong at sustaining ad awareness, provided they’ve been seen at regular speed previously. (See our POV “Who’s Still Afraid of the DVR?” )

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