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Response—On Establishing a Dialogue in Television Viewing Research

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In their concluding section, the authors state: "As an extension to the proposed model, the relative attractiveness of programs might be used to revise the audience estimates. One preliminary method of doing this might be to use the residuals from equation (2)."

In my view, this suggestion is a step in the right direction. If taken, its results could lead to an understanding of the source(s) of those residuals and, in turn, to an improved re-specification of the model.

Turning finally to the implications of the research, the authors have already drawn a number of apparently valid and useful conclusions. As a result, I will add only briefly to their list.

Assuming further development of the authors' model along the lines suggested both in their paper and by my earlier comments, a rich variety of potentially useful applications emerge. First, of course, is creation of more competitive (and marketable) programming schedules by the networks themselves. As the *current* model suggests for example, there is real incentive to place the strongest programs earliest in the evening. Perhaps, also, game theoretic enhancements to the basic model could be developed to maximize the capacity of one network to dominate its competition.

There is also potential value for an advertising agency, part of whose task it is to maximize exposure of its client's message for a specified budget level. In its current form, of course, the model could be used for this purpose. Importantly, however, since broadcast expenditure is typically committed many months in advance of air date and since these decisions must embrace program availabilities that in many cases are inchoate at that point in time, the *real* potential value to an agency and its clients still resides in understanding the current model's residuals. Only then can practical media selections be made with requisite confidence.

To summarize, I regard this work as an exciting and useful contribution. To suggest that potential for further improvement exists should in no way be viewed as an equivocation on this judgment.

RESPONSE

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ON ESTABLISHING A DIALOGUE IN TELEVISION VIEWING RESEARCH

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We appreciate the interest shown in our work by Lewis Pringle, as well as the useful perspective provided from his role of advertising executive. We find his comments to be supportive as well as constructive, and we hope that the ensuing dialogue will not only interest readers but also stimulate further research cooperation among academics and industry people. In guiding these efforts, it may be helpful to comment on some of the points mentioned by Pringle regarding our model and its extensions.

The assumption that program choice can be decomposed into two steps is supported by reasons of parsimony and by the implications of the research of Gensch and Shaman. A model which dealt with both steps simultaneously would be more complicated, and it is unclear whether the increase in explanation would justify the additional complexity. Such an extension could be explored in future research.

Pringle suggests a simpler alternative choice formulation as a replacement for the Luce formulation. For individual predictions this would entail no loss in predictive ability, but when predicting audience aggregation (e.g. ratings) the predictions would be dramatically different. For example, for a particular segment by prior program combination the existing formulation would apportion the audience across all the viewing options according to the Luce Axiom. Under the proposed alternative, all of the audience would flock to one program. Since this seems questionable, and since viewing preferences may be stochastic, reformulation such as that suggested by Pringle would only produce acceptable predictions for single trials at the individual level. For aggregations to multiple trials and to segments, the Luce-type formulation is preferable.

Turning to the empirical results, Pringle finds them to be generally most reasonable, although two instances were surprising. He noted a “minor surprise” in the closeness of flow state coefficients B_{13} and B_{14} , in that he expected a greater negative impact to “continuation” vis-à-vis “start” than was empirically observed. These coefficients are not that far apart in absolute difference, but they are in the right direction (“continuation” is lower in utility than “start”) and may reflect a joint reluctance to change channels unless the program type is preferred.

More noteworthy from his comment is the relative domination of program type coefficients by those for flow states. Pringle suggests this may be due to lack of richness in specification of program type variables. As we noted in our paper, we agree that quality ratings of specific programs represent a source of additional richness as well as potential explanatory power for viewing behavior. However, the dominance of flow state coefficients is not likely to be altered by the inclusion of these measures, even though explanatory and predictive validity may increase. Given the high degree of explained variance by flow states, there is not much variance left to be explained by program type coefficients, regardless of specification.

The set of program type coefficients for different market segments did enhance the flow state parameters predictions, even though none of them were individually large. It follows that more specific measures of program quality might enhance the model's ability to explain what is already small error variance. The availability of program quality data, with which one might better explain and estimate the residuals of our model, continues to hold research promise. We would welcome the opportunity to include such data to extend our model. Industry sources would provide measures of show quality, preview ratings, star quotients, and the like, all of which could be useful for the sorts of applications we and Pringle discuss.

We also agree that a useful potential application of our model is to the planning of program schedules by networks. This might be extended by formulation as a mathematical programming problem (albeit a difficult one given the difficulties of the choice formulation) and might include such aspects as using game theory to model possible competitor response.

We appreciate the comments and suggestions thoughtfully provided by Lew Pringle. It is clear that fruitful cooperation between advertising agencies, networks and academic researchers might augment this dialogue and the literature that has developed on media choice by viewers and advertisers. Each group has resources that might combine to produce some interesting and useful research.