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Super Bowl DTC Debut: Was It Good for You?

By **John Mack**

The brouhaha over the Super Bowl XXXVIII half-time show brought some unwelcome attention as well to direct-to-consumer (DTC) advertising. A Comedy Central skit after the game, for instance, included blurred video of Janet Jackson's breast, an ad featuring a flatulent horse, and the Cialis logo. Not an auspicious Super Bowl debut for DTC advertising!

Prior to the Super Bowl, Cialis ads, like those for Viagra and Levitra—all of which are indicated for erectile dysfunction (ED)—were of the “reminder” type in which no disclosure is required because no indication is mentioned. At the Super Bowl, however, Cialis became the first drug in this category to mention erectile dysfunction.

Survey

Before the game, it was widely expected that all three ED drugs would air competing ads. In preparation for the ad competition, Pharma Marketing Network

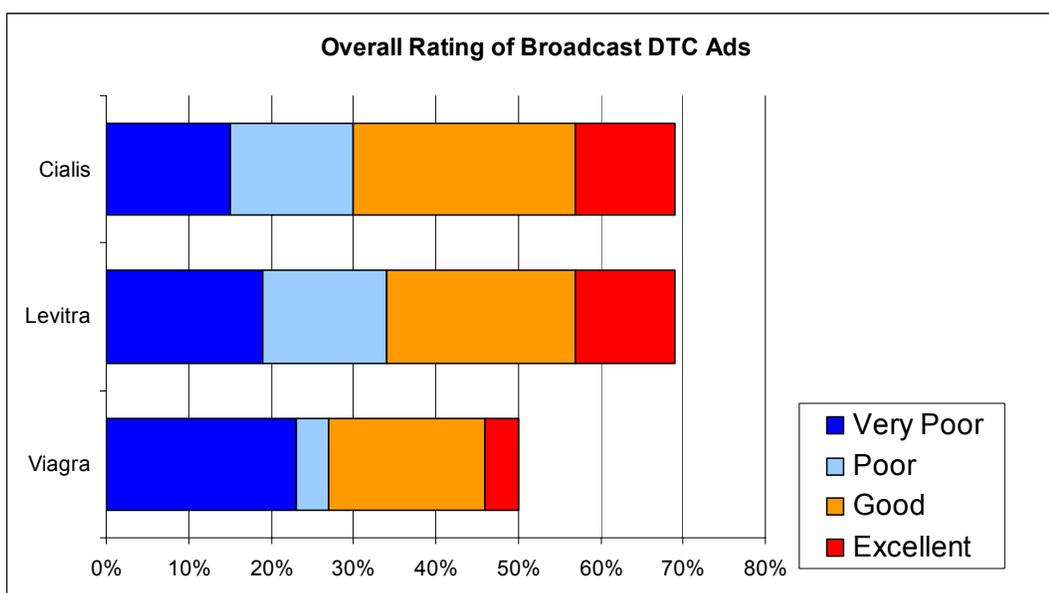
(www.pharma-mkting.com) hosted a survey that asked a few simple questions, namely:

1. In your opinion, how would you rate the DTC ads of each of these products as seen during the Super Bowl game or elsewhere on TV? As it turned out only Cialis and Levitra were “in the game.” Nevertheless, we asked respondents to include opinions and comments about Viagra as well.
2. In your opinion, is it wise for pharma companies to spend an average of \$2.3 million to advertise erectile dysfunction (ED) drugs during the Super Bowl?
3. Make a prediction: Six months from now, what will be the market share (in terms of percent of total \$ sales in the U.S.) for each of these ED drugs?

Most respondents to the survey were pharmaceutical marketing/advertising professionals and members of the PHARMA-MKTING online discussion forum (<http://www.pharma-mkting.com/PMNetwork-forum.html>).

Rating the Ads

Respondents to this simple, non-scientific, survey gave the highest ratings to the Cialis ads, ahead of Levitra. Viagra, which did not run ads during the Super Bowl, scored significantly lower with more respond-



ents saying the ads were VERY POOR and fewer saying they were EXCELLENT (see FIGURE below).

Respondents rated the Cialis ads slightly higher than the Levitra ads (3.04 vs. 2.92 out of a maximum of 5.00). Harry Sweeney, CEO at Dorland Global Health Communications, quoted a *USA Today* poll in the 16th Annual Ad Meter for Super Bowl ads—in which Levitra got a 5.99 rating and Cialis got a 5.29. (The two polls use different rating systems.) “Both drug ads were well below the 6.83 average for 60 commercials,” said Sweeney, “but I think that that’s just because the category probably always is going to be less well rated than beer and cola commercials.”

The Cialis ads did get a fair share of criticism from respondents in the PMN poll. Time and again, respondents suggested that the ads suffered from the disclosure requirements and fair balance. “Cialis had way too much side effect information,” one person said, “by the time they warned about 4 hour erections I was laughing at it.”

The bathtub scene seemed to confuse some people. “The whole bathtub thing was weird to me,” one respondent said. “It would have been more effective if they were both in the same tub.” Others liked it. “I love the two people in the bathtubs...cute and targeted more for couples,” said another respondent. “I’m tired of seeing washed up ball players, coaches, and politicians...”

Some other comments:

- “Cialis was the only one that said the condition and didn’t alienate women.”
- “Two people sitting in tubs overlooking a serene landscape is more appealing than Levitra throwing a football through a tire—why not include missiles firing!”
- “Levitra’s ‘through the tire’ imagery has outstayed its welcome. It is a hackneyed innuendo that should be retired.”
- “Levitra was awesome, upbeat and hard.”

Was This a Good Venue for ED Ads?

Considering that an average Super Bowl ad cost about \$2.3 million, one has to ask if this was money well spent. The overwhelming majority (62%) of respondents answered “Yes” to this question as opposed to 35% who said “No.”

As Sweeney put it: “There’s a lot of populist political appeal in bashing DTC ads because so many people generally don’t like advertising and they have a special dislike for prescription drug ads. But marketers use a different yardstick, measuring each tool for its effectiveness and efficiency as part of an overall marketing mix. US\$2.3 million cost/multimillion worldwide audience = fractions of a cent per

exposure. If you’ve got your message right, that’s a winner by any measure.”

Some other comments:

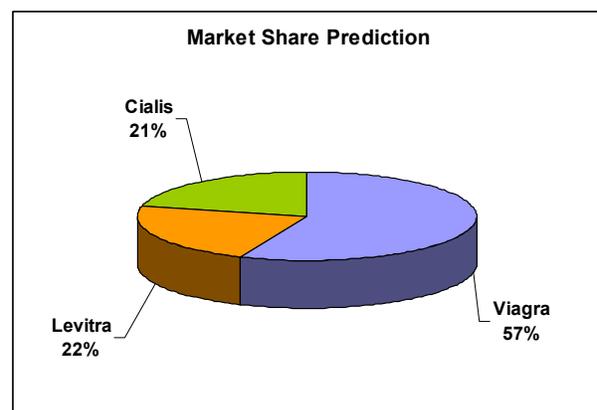
- “Rule #1: advertise where your market is.”
- “It is the DTC opportunity of the year in the US; strong male demographic; and for some unknown reason the NFL has become the home of ED advertising.”
- “I guess the real question is: Can ROI be measured from these ads? Will they cause a shift in share?”
- “I would not advertise ED drugs during the Super Bowl. ED is a sensitive subject that makes men uncomfortable during social events... most people do not watch the Super Bowl alone.”

Good, Clean Family Fun?

Regarding the last point, it should be noted that the Super Bowl has become a sort of national holiday and family event. All the flap—no pun intended—about the exposure of Janet Jackson’s breast attests to this fact. As ED ads become more suggestive, will they cross the line that is being newly drawn? One respondent noted: “Just like the Janet Jackson fiasco, someone has to explain to 8 year-olds what erectile dysfunction is. These ads should not be run during prime time. It was inappropriate for CBS to run them!”

Looking Beyond the Super Bowl

Six months from now, what will be the market share (in terms of percent of total \$ sales in the U.S.) for each of these ED drugs? The consensus among respondents to the Pharma Marketing Network survey is that Cialis and Levitra will both gain substantial market share within 6 months.



The survey is still open. Visit <http://www.pharma-marketing.com/surveys/surveys-hp.htm> for links to this and other surveys currently being hosted by Pharma Marketing Network.

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