Editor's Desk

How Does Recall Work in Advertising?

GEOFFREY PRECOURT
Editor Emeritus
geoffrey.precourt@
    warc.com

If a target audience cannot remember a marketer's message, advertising largely becomes a waste of time, money, and resources. That's why recall measures—critical tools in marketing research—become every bit as important as the creation, placement, and viewing of a marketing message. In this issue of the *Journal of Advertising Research*, our special package, "How Recall Works in Advertising," offers insight into best research practices as well as fresh, useful counsel for marketing practitioners who need evidence of the efficacy of their messages.

The first paper in our series offers some quantitative evidence in support of a long-standing question for such marketers: What is the optimum amount of time for a television commercial? Does the length of a 60-second spot embed a message more effectively than a 30-second treatment? Or can a quick-hit 15-second treatment leave a more formidable impression?

In "**Spot Length and Unaided Recall in Television: Optimizing Media Planning Variables in Advertising Breaks**" (See page 274), authors Josefa D. Martín-Santana (Universidad de Las Palmas de Gran Canaria in the Spanish Canary Islands) and two co-authors from Madrid's Universidad Rey Juan Carlos—Pedro Reinares-Lara and Eva Reinares-Lara—analyze both the relationship between spot length and unaided recall in a real-world environment and the direct effect on recall of other advertising break-planning variables.

These variables included the position of the break in relation to the television program, the degree of advertising clutter in the break—indicating the break's duration—the spot's relative position in the break, and primacy and recency effects. The authors also examined whether, and to what extent, these variables moderate how spot length affects recall, as recall, ultimately, depends on the interaction of all planning variables.

"Television today faces competition from new forms of advertising media, as well as changing consumer habits. Nevertheless, because of its differential qualities with regard to other media, it still [has been] the leader in worldwide advertising investment," the authors write. "But if television is to remain the number-one advertising format, it must strengthen its ability to help advertisers achieve their aims.

"To this end," the authors continue, "advertisers, media planners, and television channels must use the medium creatively to grab audiences' attention and ensure recall of their campaigns…. One of the most important factors is choosing the right length for the message depending on its aim and potential effectiveness."

One top-line finding: "Longer spots—those lasting more than 20 seconds—generate more recall than would seem to correspond proportionally to the increase in length." This conclusion supports the argument that advertisers should buy longer spots to reduce the number of brands per advertising break. And "given the greater recall resulting from lower levels of advertising clutter in a block," advertisers should seek to negotiate insertion of their longer spots in shorter advertising blocks, the authors suggest.

Of course, the parameters of video have exploded in the past decade. "**Limited-Interruption Advertising** in **Digital-Video Content: An Analysis Compares the Effects of 'Midroll' versus 'Preroll' Spots and Clutter Advertising**" (Please see page 289) examines the placement of streaming messages in online content thanks to investigations by Jean Brechman (The College of New Jersey in Ewing Township, New Jersey), Steven Bellman (Ehrenberg-Bass Institute for Marketing Science at the University of South Australia/Adelaide), Jennifer A. Robinson (RMIT University in Melbourne, Australia), with MediaScience's Amy Rask and Duane Varan.

After testing a variety of placement models, the authors found that, for spots of the same 30-seond duration, "Limited-interruption advertising in digital video—with four midroll commercial breaks per hour—delivers greater advertising effectiveness, measured by branded advertising recall, than preroll advertising."

By comparison, "shorter (15-second) preroll advertisements were just as effective as midroll ads, most likely because their short duration prevents disengagement and advertising avoidance similar to the way shorter limited-interruption breaks do compared to longer commercial breaks."

But, in both instances, the authors reported, "Limited-interruption and preroll advertising are more effective than normal 'clutter' advertising"—offerings that typically offer six breaks, with five spots in each break.

In **"Comparing Brand Placements and Advertisements on Brand Recall and Recognition"** (Please see page 299), the research by authors Davit Davtyan and Isabella Cunningham (University of Texas/Austin) and Kristin Stewart (California State University/San Marcos) is grounded in the understanding that messaging need not be compartmentalized into interruptive blocks but, in fact, may be effectively integrated into actual programming.

"The current study," the authors write, "confirmed that brand placements in television sitcoms elicit lower levels of recall than—but similar levels of recognition to—a 30-second advertisement during a commercial break in the show."

Recognizing that "recall plays a major role in consumer choice," Davtyan,

Cunningham, and Stewart suggest that brand stewards "might enhance the persuasiveness of a message by employing synergistic strategies, such as using a brand placement in combination with a commercial."

"Combinations," they write, "can be used as a cost-effective alternative to buying two spots in a commercial break. Moreover, such multisource promotional strategies might result in enhanced elaboration on the messages." As evidence, they offer an examination of marketing in the FMCG (fast-moving consumer goods) category, in which "purchase decisions usually are made at stores where the brand name, logo, packaging, and other physical features of the products are physically present."

Likewise "for established brands well-known by consumers," the authors continue, "eliciting brand recognition might effectively activate the memory of the brand and drive future sales. In such cases, marketers should consider using brand-placement tactics, as brand placements appear to be as effective at enhancing recognition as more costly commercials."

From Ehrenberg-Bass Institute authors Kelly Vaughan, Virginia Beal, and Jenni Romaniuk, the last paper in our series, "**Can Brand Users Really Remember Advertising More Than Nonusers? Testing an Empirical Generalization across Six Advertising Awareness Measures**" (Please see page 311) takes a broader overview of recall effectiveness.

Research across six different measures, which extends cues to execution and media prompts, "shows the user bias in memory for advertising is not a measurement artifact. It is, in fact, a real

phenomenon, occurring under a wide range of conditions."

Specifically, the study demonstrates, "irrespective of whether the brand is present or absent in the advertising awareness question, brand users systematically remember advertising for that brand more than non brand users." And that finding, the authors believe, has implications for creative design, branding, and pretesting, "particularly with advertising that primarily aims to attract nonusers" as well as assessing global and cross-platform advertising.

According to Vaughan, Beal, and Romaniuk, "All advertising awareness measures are shown to be biased to users, and, therefore, aggregate-level metrics may inaccurately imply a campaign is less successful in countries where market shares are lower, since the user bases are much smaller. This could lead marketers to make unnecessary modifications to campaigns to compensate for perceived lower advertising awareness.

"Only by comparing brand users and nonusers separately can an advertiser determine whether this is because of the different effectiveness of the advertising itself, or the different composition of the advertising's audience," the researchers conclude.

Advertising without recall is advertising without impact. We trust that all of the above will have lasting utility to both marketing practitioners as well as to academics who constantly seek to provide greater insight into the larger subject of how advertising works.

As always, we welcome your comments and observations. **JAR**