

# Split-Second Recognition: What Makes Outdoor Advertising Work?

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CBS Outdoor used a tachistoscope to determine how long it takes to recognize the brand/product advertised in 187 outdoor posters in the Netherlands. Additionally, CBS Outdoor measured the creative appeal of these advertisements. Using 80 content and format variables, an explanatory model was developed to measure creative appeal and brand/product recognition.

Some preliminary findings:

- Clear branding and the inclusion of new-product information enhance product recognition.
- Large amounts of text and pictures of people delay product recognition.
- Lengthy, large headlines, information cues, humor, and images of women delay brand recognition.
- Short headlines, a somewhat longer body text, and a product shot enhance the creative appeal of posters.
- Specifying a brand name in the headline or providing price information reduces appeal.

## PURPOSE OF THE RESEARCH

The question this study seeks to answer is, "What aspects of the format and content of an outdoor advertising poster affect the speed of recognition of the brand and product advertised and enhance its appeal?"

Most often, exposure to outdoor advertising is a very brief experience. That timing mandates the need to communicate messages very quickly. Some outdoor posters are more successful than others. Indeed, there are large differences in the attraction of posters and in the speed with which the advertised product/brand is recognized.

The research reported here was designed to further increase the understanding of the operation of outdoor advertising and the ways in which

consumers process information from posters in a split second. This study also seeks to determine the factors that enhance the format and content features that affect brand/product communication in a short period of time.

To this end, we examined the relationship of 80 characteristics of outdoor advertising posters with the appeal of the poster and with the time it took to recognize the product/brand. Among the questions addressed include:

- Do visual elements reduce the amount of the time it takes to recognize the brand/product? Do they increase the poster's appeal?
- Does the amount of text matter?
- Is humor effective?
- What is the best placement of the logo?

The effectiveness of advertising posters can be defined in a number of ways. For the purposes of this study, we define effectiveness in terms of the (average) amount of time it takes a consumer to recognize the product/brand in the first fraction of a second of exposure. For most posters, the window is very short. But, because attractive outdoor advertising can be strong enough to cause the consumer to pause and take a second look, it also is important to examine what makes such work appealing.

For this study, we distinguished 80 features of outdoor posters that might affect brand/product recognition or creative appeal. These can be grouped into four types of format and content characteristics:

- brand identification
- poster content
- layout
- characteristics beyond the advertiser's control.

#### **PREVIOUS RESEARCH ON OUTDOOR ADVERTISING**

To date, there has been little scientific interest in outdoor advertising. Apart from national reach studies and individual effect studies (White, 2005), we found only four previous scientific studies in which characteristics of outdoor posters were linked to effectiveness. Hendon (1972) carried out a quantitative analysis of 27 aspects of form for 204 outdoor advertising posters; the results were then coupled with recognition scores. D. W. Gutman, in 1972, used a tachistoscope to test product recognition and message playback of four outdoor posters. In the *Journal of Advertising Research* in 1993, N. Donthu, J. Cherian, and M. Bhargava related campaign weight, choice of location, aspects of form, and respondent characteristics to recall for 10 outdoor advertising posters. In a larger study a year later, Bhar-

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gava, Donthu, and Caron (1994) correlated the relationship of features in 282 outdoor advertising posters with recall, controlling for campaign targets and respondent type.

With the rise in use (and cost) of outdoor advertising in recent years, there has been an increase in research interest (McEvoy, 2001). But outdoor advertising remains an underresearched medium (Donthu, Cherian, and Bhargava, 1993; Whitehill King and Tinkham, 1989; Woodside, 1990). Because of the paucity of research on outdoor advertising, we also have turned to research on print and television advertising to derive some of the format and contact variables that could determine appeal and the speed of brand/product recognition.

#### **CONTENT OF THE POSTER**

##### **Image and text**

The power of visual elements in magazine advertisements frequently has been demonstrated (Edell and Staelin, 1983; Moriarty, 1987; Taylor and Thompson, 1982). Images are simple to process and easy to remember, which could result in faster recognition (Edell and Staelin, 1983; Moriarty, 1987). On average, magazine adver-

tisements receive 1 or 2 seconds of attention. Visual elements are the primary appeal—90 percent of magazine readers first look at the graphic element; of that group, 65 percent process the graphic intent. Text follows imagery; for the readers who wove from image to words, only 2 percent of the written content is processed (Franzen, 1994).

The magazine findings suggest a comparable visual dominance in outdoor advertising posters. More specifically, the size of the graphic images appears to contribute to a correct association with brand (Rossiter, 1981) and to correlate positively with product recognition (Franzen, 1994). Earlier research (Hendon, 1972) demonstrated a positive relationship between the percentage of the poster given over to visual elements and recall/recognition for outdoor advertising posters as well.

It is reasonable to expect, therefore, that increasing the size of the visual elements will raise the effectiveness of outdoor advertising posters. In their study of outdoor advertising, however, Bhargava, Donthu, and Caron (1994) were unable to demonstrate a relationship between the extent of image use and recall. As a possible explanation, they offer the fact that

the percentage of visual elements was more or less the same in all of the posters they examined.

#### Visual elements

In various studies of both print and outdoor advertising, a positive relationship has been demonstrated between the use of photographs and recall/recognition (Donthu, Cherian, and Bhargava, 1993; Holbrook and Lehmann, 1980). People have a marked capacity for remembering concrete information such as photographs. Moreover, the appeal of realistic (and pleasant) imagery is often high, and realistic images are often considered to be plausible and convincing (Messaris, 1997).

The use of realistic images, therefore, could be expected to increase the effectiveness of outdoor advertising. Additionally, it would seem that photographs are more arresting than illustrations. Bhargava, Donthu, and Caron (1994), however, did report a negative recall effect with the use of photographs in outdoor advertising posters (in part because of the mediating effect of humor).

#### Amount and size of text

Because of the fleeting nature of consumer contact with outdoor advertising, text must be simple, short, and clear (Gardner and Luchtenberg, 2000). According to Gibson and Sanger (2001), short clear copy is, in fact, a critical determinant for the success or failure of a poster. Many studies of both print and outdoor advertising have shown the amount of text correlates negatively with attention, recognition, recall, and the appeal of advertising (Bhargava, Donthu, and Caron, 1994; Donthu, Cherian, and Bhargava, 1993; Gardner and Luchtenberg, 2000; Hendon, 1972; Rositer, 1981). Research on advertising in the print media (Twedt, 1952) indicates that text should be easy to read, reducing the effort required of the recipient of the

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advertising message. Bhargava, Donthu, and Caron (1994), however, found no relationship between the size of the text and recall in their research on outdoor advertising.

It is reasonable to expect, therefore, that the appeal of an outdoor advertisement will decrease as the amount of text increases. Furthermore, the size of the text—expressed in average letter size—should correlate positively with the effectiveness and appeal of outdoor advertising posters.

#### Number of elements

As the number of elements in a poster increases, an outdoor advertisement runs the risk of becoming more complex, confusing, and unfocused. Alternatively, fewer elements in a poster generally create a more effective advertising environment. At JCDcaux, a leading international outdoor media owner, the mantra is simple: "The poster is finished when you can't find a single element to remove." In research on both print (Franzen, 1994) and outdoor advertising (Hendon, 1972), the number of visual elements was found to have a negative correlation with recall and recognition.

#### Use of human characters

When a figure on a poster appears to make eye contact with a passerby, the passerby may feel directly addressed (Mes-

saris, 1997). The use of close-ups can also increase the feeling of engagement with the advertising message. On this basis we expect the use of photographs of people can have a positive effect on brand interest and appeal in outdoor advertising.

A majority of the gender-specific studies on the influence of the figures in advertisements indicate that female figures are more effective than male figures (Stewart and Furse, 1986; Stewart and Koslow, 1989). In their research on prize-winning television commercials, however, A. Gagnard and J. R. Morris reported in the *Journalism Quarterly* in 1988 that male figures can have a more positive effect than female figures.

Although cartoon characters may be perceived as charming, loveable, and amusing, research on TV commercials showed that, among adults, cartoon and comic book figures had a negative effect on attention and recall (Franzen, 1994).

#### Product information

The information in an outdoor advertising poster includes all the objective information (both verbal and visual) relating to the concrete and physical characteristics of the advertised product (Edell and Staelin, 1983).

In a 1977 article in the *Journal of Research*, A. Resnik and B. L. Stern introduced a method for measuring the informative

content of an advertising message that since has been used in more than 60 studies (Abernethy and Franke, 1996). The message is simple: A large amount of information creates a message complex that can generate confusion (Stern, Krugman, and Resnik, 1981), especially in as transitory a medium as outdoor advertising. A less-is-more principle remains a reasonable assumption: the fewer informative elements used, the more appealing and effective the poster.

#### **New-product information**

In previous research, new-product information in advertising was demonstrated to have a negative effect on recall (Stewart and Furse, 1986; Stewart and Koslow, 1989). Countering that theory is the postulate that people pay more attention to new information and also retain the information they learn about the specific product or service (Haley and Baldinger, 1991; Whitehill King and Tinkham, 1989)—a contention that new-product or brand information may enhance the recognition of an advertising message as well as the advertisement's attitude and appeal (Franzen, 1994). And new-product information may arouse consumer curiosity and increase interest in the brand.

#### **Humor**

Humor can have a positive influence on advertising effectiveness (Gagnard and Morris, 1988; Stewart and Furse, 1986; among others). A positive relation between humor and recall has been demonstrated for outdoor advertising (Bhargava, Donthu, and Caron, 1994). But humor may distract from brand identification and coupling; there also is the risk that the humor will be remembered, but not the brand.

The effects of humor are unclear and disputable (Weinberger and Gulas, 1992). Furthermore, its effectiveness depends on

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the product being advertised (Stewart and Furse, 1986).

#### **Brand identification**

Brand identification can be achieved using a product shot, a logo, or a brand name. In an analysis of television commercials, the use of brand-identification elements had a positive correlation with attention and recall: Brand coupling increased by about 55 percent when a brand logo was prominently and clearly displayed (Franzen, 1994). Strong product identification also has a positive effect on the influence on choice (Stewart and Furse, 1986; Stewart and Koslow, 1989). Research on advertising in print media similarly has shown that the number and size of product shots can have a positive influence on recall (Twedt, 1952).

In research by W. D. Hendon (1972), the recognition and recall of outdoor advertising were positively influenced by the size of the product shot and the logo. In *Admap*, S. Gibson and A. Sanger argued in 2001 that a successful outdoor advertising poster must have a strong branding component. In the Netherlands, opinions based on practical experience support this view (JCDecaux, 2003). A JCDecaux study recommended that a product shot needs to occupy at least one-third of the available space on an outdoor advertisement if

it is to generate a high level of recognition (JCDecaux, 2003).

We expect, therefore, that the number of brand-identification objects and the size of the various brand-identification objects will have a positive effect on the speed of product/brand recognition: the more often brand-specific points of reference (i.e., product shots, logos, and brand names) are used and the more prominently they are displayed, the faster the product/brand will be recognized in outdoor media. To balance that, however, we also might expect that too much branding may detract from a poster's appeal.

#### **COLOR AND LAYOUT**

##### **Color**

Colors can evoke images, ideas, and feelings. In creating advertisements, the choice of color usually is based on intuition and anecdotal evidence (Gorn, Chattopadhyah, Yi, and Dahl, 1997). Opinions vary about the effect of colors (Smits, 1967; Walters and Svebak, 1982). For outdoor posters, in an environment where the color red already has a clear signal function in traffic lights, we could argue that this color might have a negative influence; on the other hand, its stopping power might work to attract and hold the attention of passersby. Likewise, the color blue is associated with blue skies and good weather; in

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outdoor advertising, it might elicit positive feelings that could positively affect a poster's effectiveness.

The use of a number of colors in an advertisement can produce a positive advertising effect (Du Plessis, 2001; Grønhaug, Kvitastein, and Grønmo, 1991), but too many colors may create clutter that leads to consumer confusion.

#### **Layout**

How various design elements relate to one another strongly influences how an advertisement is read and interpreted. The manner in which people view a poster helps determine whether the advertisement makes an immediate connection to them (Franzen, 1994). In Western culture, the conventional scanning route is from upper left to lower right (Gardner and Luchtenberg, 2000; Scott, 1994). In a 1972 article in the *Journal of Advertising Research*, J. Gutman reported that placing information in the top of the poster stimulated brand identification.

We expect that placing brand/product information in the top (first seen) or middle (eye level) half of the poster will result in faster recognition.

#### **CHARACTERISTICS THAT CANNOT BE MANIPULATED**

Characteristics that cannot be varied by the advertiser and that, in principle, fall outside the process of creating an outdoor

advertising campaign may affect the efficacy of an advertisement. Recognition may be dependent on the type of product being advertised (Grønhaug, Kvitastein, and Grønmo, 1991; Rossiter and Percy, 1991). Brand familiarity may also have an effect on the speed of recognition (Gutman, 1972).

The use of outdoor advertising has greatly increased in the Netherlands since the early 1990s. In that time, advertisers have gained experience and insight into what works and what does not. It is likely, then, that recognition scores have improved over time. On the other hand, recall and recognition scores for other Dutch media have been declining for some time (Du Plessis, 2001; Franzen, 1994).

#### **METHODOLOGY**

This article reports how a number of variables can affect the effectiveness and creative appeal of outdoor advertising posters. In this section, we briefly discuss the research methodology, specifically describing the units of analysis and the means used to measure brand and product recognition, and creative appeal. We then describe the implementation of the content analysis and the statistical analyses carried out to provide an answer to the central research question.

To properly evaluate how well an advertisement works, we have included product type, brand-name familiarity, and the

campaign year in the explanatory models that follow.

#### **Measurement of dependent variables**

For the purposes of this research, the effectiveness of an outdoor advertisement poster is equated with the speed of recognition of the advertising message: the longer it takes for the brand or product to be recognized, the less effective the poster is.

The speed of recognition was measured using a test procedure known as the Maximiser. CBS Outdoor has used this method to test the effectiveness of outdoor posters in the Netherlands from 1992 to 2004 (initially carried out by Inter/View, later conducted by Intomart GfK). In a sample of 80 respondents, a tachistoscope (a slide projector equipped with a mechanical shutter system that allows for very short projections of an image) measured the time it takes for a product/brand on an outdoor poster to be recognized. The first tachistoscope was originally described in 1859, and it was also used during World War II in the training of fighter pilots to help identify aircraft silhouettes (Wikipedia, 2008).

An early example of a tachistoscope test of outdoor advertisements can be found in J. Gutman's 1972 *Journal of Advertising Research* article. Other contributors to the history of tachistoscope in measuring out-of-home advertisements include G. A. Lancaster and R. A. Thomas in the *Journal of Advertising Research* in 1977, who tested the accurate reproduction of short exposure time as well as the authors of *Eye Movements and Psychological Functions: International View* (Fisher, Karsh, Breitenbach, and Barnette, 1983), who used the device to measure how long it takes adolescents to identify and comprehend warnings on tobacco packaging. At ESOMAR in 1995, P. Dover, R. Kopp, and R. Croft presented findings of

how a tachistoscope measured the speed and degrees of impact of corporate images in real-life situations and Kapferer (1995) used a tachistoscope for research on brand confusion. In the Maximiser research, a tachistoscope projected a real-size image of a poster in flashes ranging from 0.04 seconds to a full second. (Since 2004, the tachistoscope test in the Maximiser has been replaced by a similar test using online research.)

The creative appeal of posters was measured by showing respondents a poster and then asking them how much they would like to see it again.

### Stimuli

The unit of analysis in this study is the Europanel, the collective name for outdoor advertising posters with standard dimensions (175 cm high  $\times$  118.5 cm wide) in use throughout Europe. Since 1987, Europanels could be found in the Netherlands in a variety of display environments—behind glass and lighted; in bus and tram shelters; and in free-standing standards placed near train stations, shopping centers, gas stations, and other locations.

### Identification of independent variables

In content analysis, the explanatory variables were systematically and objectively measured for each of 187 posters. All variables were defined and described in a comprehensive codebook. Using this guide, each poster was coded for all the explanatory variables by one of the authors. These codes were validated by comparing them to the codes of a group of 10 communication science students from the University of Amsterdam.

Nine variables with average intercoder reliability lower than 0.65 (Cohen's Kappa) were removed from the analysis and are not included in this article. As expected, this affected variables with a more quali-

tative character. The average Kappa score for variables with sufficient reliability is 0.75 and scores vary from 0.67 to 1.00.

### Selection of explanatory variables

In addition to the intercoder reliability standard discussed above, explanatory variables were deleted on the basis of an analysis of their frequency distribution (26 variables that occurred in less than 5 percent of the posters were removed from the data set), 15 variables were removed due to multicollinearity (by correlations higher than  $r = 0.80$ , variables were paired and one of the two explanatory variables was removed), and 2 variables were deleted due to their lack of variance. On the basis of these tests, 52 variables were removed from the data set. Finally, 80 explanatory variables remained.

### Regression

Using these 80 content and format variables, three linear regression models were estimated to explain the creative appeal and the two effectiveness measures: product recognition and brand recognition. Stepwise regression analysis was used to generate an explanatory model for both independent variables, with control for the influence of product sort, brand familiarity, and measurement year. The three regression models presented include only variables with a regression coefficient differing significantly from zero ( $p < 0.05$ ).

## RESULTS<sup>a</sup>

### Product recognition

The 20 steps in the explanatory model (see Table 1) explain 64 percent of the variance (adjusted  $R^2$ ). A higher score on product

recognition means that, on average, the product is more quickly recognized.

The strongest factor explaining the speed of product recognition is the amount of information cues on the poster ( $\beta = -0.38$ ). The less information contained in a poster, the faster product recognition occurs. There is one positive exception to this rule: the presence of new-product information produces a strong positive contribution to the speed with which a product is recognized. Information on the components or ingredients of a product and pictures of people (especially ones that appear to make eye contact) slow down product recognition. The number of words on posters and the number of letters in its headline also reduce the speed of product recognition.

With regard to brand identification factors, placing the product name in the copy text and headline was found to have a positive effect on the product recognition. Product shots reduce the time it takes to recognize the product, unless these are placed in the bottom right corner of the poster (apparently, the part of the poster that is scanned last).

With regard to layout, photographs enable quicker product recognition than illustrations. In general, products are more quickly recognized on posters in which blue—rather than red—is the dominant color. Overall, the more colors used on a poster, the harder it is to recognize the product. For text, a large font size and black print enhances product recognition, and white print slows it down.

Finally, with respect to characteristics that cannot be manipulated, it was found that product recognition is relatively slow for the abstract product type "other products" (banks, financial services, etc.) and for electronic goods that, we assume, were visually difficult to recognize. Products of familiar brands proved to be recognized relatively quickly.

<sup>a</sup>The results for product recognition and brand recognition were previously published in Klerkx and van Meurs (2004).

**TABLE 1**

Regression Model Product Recognition ( $n = 176$ ,  
 $R^2 = 68$  percent, adjusted  $R^2 = 64$  percent)

Variables	B	SE B	$\beta$
<i>Content of the poster</i>			
Number of information cues	-0.09	0.02	-0.38**
Information cue: new-product information	0.19	0.05	0.32**
Information cue: components	-0.10	0.04	-0.15**
Total number of words	-0.01	0.00	-0.26**
Number of letters in headline	0.00	0.00	-0.17**
Presence of a person	-0.12	0.04	-0.20**
Eye contact	-0.11	0.05	-0.13*
<i>Brand identification</i>			
Inclusion of brand name in copy text	0.22	0.04	0.37**
Inclusion of brand name in headline	0.16	0.03	0.27**
Position product shot lower right	-0.14	0.03	-0.22**
<i>Color and layout</i>			
Visual method (illustration/photo)	0.16	0.03	0.27**
Color poster blue	0.18	0.04	0.27**
Color text black	0.12	0.04	0.21**
Color text white	-0.11	0.04	-0.19**
Number of colors	-0.03	0.01	-0.13**
Color poster red	-0.09	0.05	-0.10*
Letter size text	-0.20	0.04	-0.23**
<i>Characteristics that cannot be manipulated</i>			
Product other	-0.23	0.05	-0.27**
Product electronics	-0.24	0.06	-0.24**
Brand familiarity	0.02	0.01	0.11*

Note: B = unstandardized coefficient; SE B = standard error B.

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$

### Brand recognition

The regression model for brand contains 20 variables that together account for 57 percent (adjusted  $R^2$ ) of the variance in brand recognition (see Table 2).

As with product recognition, in the explanatory model for brand recognition,

the strongest effect is found in the content characteristics—specifically, the negative influence of the number of information cues ( $\beta = -0.45$ ). Information cues slow down the brand recognition, especially information about product ingredients or technical specifications. Brand recogni-

tion is further slowed by information on ingredients or product components, long headlines, the use of humor, and images of women. On the other hand, the display of new-product information and one information cue (but not more) was found to speed up the brand recognition.

It was not surprising to find that brand identification had an effect on brand recognition. Logos enhance the speed of recognition, unless they are placed in the bottom right corner of the poster. Including the brand name in the copy text and especially in the headline (preferably in a large font) also has a positive influence on brand recognition.

Regarding layout, photographs were found to be more favorable than drawings for quick brand recognition. Large headlines were found to slow down brand recognition, possibly because of their distraction from the brand. The use of a black font proved to enhance brand recognition.

As for characteristics that cannot be manipulated, we can see that well-known brand names and fashion labels are recognized quickly. Since 1992, the average time it takes to recognize brands on outdoor posters has been decreasing. This may be the result of better creative execution of outdoor posters (controlling for all effects in the model), but it may also indicate an increasing capacity among consumers to recognize visuals in a split second, as the numbers of frames per second in television drama, music video clips, and television commercials have increased as well in the last decade.

### Creative appeal

The model for creative appeal accounts for 49 percent of the variance (see Table 3).

The shorter its headlines, the more posters were found to be appealing, although headlines spread over several lines also were found to be attractive. In contrast, some long body copy can appeal to

**TABLE 2**

Regression Model Brand Recognition ( $n = 174$ ,  $R^2 = 62$  percent, adjusted  $R^2 = 57$  percent)

Variables	B	SE B	$\beta$
<i>Content of the poster</i>			
Number of information cues	-0.11	0.03	-0.45**
Information cue: new-product information	0.23	0.05	0.38**
Presence of one information cue	0.13	0.05	0.22**
Information cue: product components	-0.09	0.04	-0.14 *
Number of letters headline	-0.01	0.00	-0.39**
Humor	-0.19	0.03	-0.33**
Main person is woman	-0.16	0.04	-0.24**
<i>Brand identification</i>			
Position brand name (above)	0.23	0.04	0.40**
Brand name included in copy text	0.17	0.04	0.29**
Position logo lower right	-0.14	0.04	-0.26**
Brand name included in headline	0.14	0.03	0.24**
Position logo above	0.17	0.06	0.23**
Size of brand name	0.03	0.01	0.22**
<i>Color and layout</i>			
Visual method (illustration/photo)	0.18	0.03	0.31**
Size headline	-0.01	0.00	-0.25**
Number of lines headline	0.05	0.02	0.20**
Color text black	0.15	0.04	0.27**
<i>Characteristics that cannot be manipulated</i>			
Brand familiarity	0.07	0.01	0.35**
Year	0.03	0.01	0.28**
Product: clothing	0.14	0.06	0.14*

Note: B = unstandardized coefficient; SE B = standard error B.  
 \* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$

various audiences. Displaying a product shot was found to increase a poster's appeal. (Apparently, consumers appreciate clear branding.) But too much brand identification—the inclusion of the brand name in the headline, for instance—was found to detract from the appeal, as did price information.

With respect to layout, respondents expressed a preference for a predominantly blue poster with images of people displayed against a realistic background.

Posters for personal-care products were found to be more appealing than those for automobiles and "other products" (banks, financial services, etc.). Perhaps

the nudity depicted in posters advertising personal-care products enhanced their attractiveness, but the use of nudity was not separately included in this study.

Generally, the appeal of outdoor advertising posters was found to be declining over the years. That led to the unanswered question: are consumers growing more critical of outdoor advertising?

**RECOMMENDATIONS**

Based on our research findings, we can give the following recommendations for advertisers who want to improve the brand/product recognition or the attractiveness of their posters.

Product recognition:

- Specify the product name in the headline and/or copy text.
- Include a product shot (but not in the bottom right corner of the poster).
- Use a photograph of the product—not with a person, especially not one making eye contact with the viewer.
- Do not use an illustration when you can use a photograph.
- Reduce the amount of information—feature short headline; do not put too many words on the poster.
- Minimize color clutter.
- Use blue as the dominant color of the poster; avoid red as the dominant color.
- Highlight new-product information ("New!").
- Use a black font and avoid a white font.

Brand recognition:

- Provide a clear branding in the headline and/or copy text in a large font.
- Place a logo in the upper half of the poster (and do not place the logo in the lower-right corner).
- Mention one information cue, but avoid too much information or too many product components.

**TABLE 3**

Regression Model Creative Appeal ( $n = 187$ ,  $R^2 = 53$  percent  
Adj.  $R^2 = 49$  percent)

Variables	B	SE B	$\beta$
<i>Content of the poster</i>			
Number of letters headline	-0.03	0.00	-0.43**
Total number of characters	0.53	0.11	0.30**
Realistic background	0.33	0.11	0.18**
Number of lines headline	0.11	0.05	0.16 *
Presence of a person	0.29	0.10	0.17**
Information cue: price/value	-0.31	0.12	-0.14*
<i>Brand identification</i>			
Product shot in visual	0.34	0.10	0.21**
Brand name in headline	-0.23	0.10	-0.14*
<i>Color and layout</i>			
Color poster blue	0.39	0.11	0.20**
<i>Characteristics that cannot be manipulated</i>			
Year	-0.11	0.02	-0.35**
Product: "others"	-0.53	0.15	-0.21**
Product: cars	-0.53	0.19	-0.17**
Product: personal care	0.33	0.15	0.12*

Note: B = unstandardized coefficient; SE B = standard error B.

\* $p < 0.05$ ; \*\* $p < 0.01$

- Highlight new-product information ("New!").
- Include a picture, but preferably not of a woman or an illustration.
- Refrain from distracting elements: keep the headline short in a small black font.
- Do not use humor.

#### Creative appeal:

- Keep the headline short and do not mention the brand name.
- Do not mention the price.
- Feature a clear branding product shot.
- Use a picture of people with a realistic background
- Use blue as the dominant color.

Our research also indicates some opposing effects of conflicting elements:

- Mentioning a brand in the headline speeds up the product/brand recognition, but reduces the creative appeal.
- Pictures of people enhance the creative appeal, but reduce the product recognition.
- Splitting up the headline over several lines reduces the product recognition, but speeds up the brand recognition and improves the creative appeal.
- In recent years, the brand recognition has improved, but the creative appeal of posters has declined.

#### GENERAL DISCUSSION

This study explores and takes stock of the characteristics of form and content that account for the operation of outdoor advertising posters. The three models generated in this research demonstrate the effects of a large number of variables on the effectiveness of a poster, measured as the speed of recognition of the advertising message (product/brand recognition) and its appeal.

Generally speaking, brand/product recognition can be improved by clear branding on the poster, leaving out other distracting content. Less is certainly more when it comes to outdoor advertising. Posters with a clear branding component are not necessarily less attractive; a product shot can even increase a poster's appeal.

Compared to earlier studies of outdoor advertising (Hendon, 1972) as well as print media (Holbrook and Lehmann, 1980) and television (Stewart and Furse, 1986), the power of the regression models for outdoor advertising posters is considerable. The explained variance in the measures is so high that, in a competitive market environment, the explanatory advertising variables could make the difference between success and failure for an outdoor advertising poster.

Nonetheless, the research results provide no guarantee for the success of an advertising campaign. There is no magic formula for the creation of an effective or appealing outdoor advertising poster. The making of advertising remains a creative process, which turns on originality and the right combination of elements.

Application of the suggestions that have come out of this research may increase the attraction of outdoor advertising posters and improve brand/product recognition, but outdoor advertising design is not the only factor that determines the effectiveness of an advertising campaign.

**Regarding layout, photographs were found to be more favorable than drawings for quick brand recognition. Large headlines were found to slow down brand recognition, possibly because of their distraction from the brand. The use of a black font proved to enhance brand recognition.**

This is an exploratory study in a relatively new field of research, with a number of clear limitations (for example, the fact the study took place in a controlled experimental environment). The research results, therefore, should only be seen as an indication of how consumers process outdoor advertising posters in real life within a split second, and how content and format are variables in this process. **JAR**

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