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No one does a better job of uncovering and explaining the hidden reasons of brand choice. Brands which used his superior insights have won numerous effectiveness and innovation awards. For more information and exiting case studies see www.mayerdegroot.com

Advertising Recall Measurement: Only Lies and Deceptions?

Management Summary

Admittedly, the promises of institutes on advertising pretests are quite similar. This suggests high interchange ability and therefore many responsible for market research take above all the costs of tests into consideration. – However, if pretests selected are not reliable then often millions of Euros or British Pounds are at risk. - We are convinced that an advertising pretest is only as good as its ability to predict future market realities.

Many advertising pretests are carried out by large tracking institutes. Therefore validations should be relatively easy for them. However, so far they haven't yet provided any evidence that they are able to predict recall or sales and image effect caused by specific advertisements reliably. We believe they would, if they could. The Admap Conference 2004 came to the following conclusion: *"There is still "No evidence in the public domain that it [pretesting] is predictive."*

Even worse considerable research has proven that most advertising pre-test methods are NOT able to live up to expectations. We have summarised and proven this for all widespread methods in several publications (Mayer de Groot et al. 2000/2001/2002/2004/2010) – by the way, without receiving any real protest in this matter. – An analysis can hardly come off worst. One should think that an outcry of outrage would sound through the land. This however wasn't the case instead we partly even received confirmation (e.g. Rodenhausen 6/2000 pp. 68).

Other prominent researchers have come to the same conclusion:

„We are faced with a wide spread validation vacuum.“ „Even so called leading agencies and research companies have lost any orientation if it comes to concepts and methods to predict advertising effectiveness.“ (Dr. Schroiff, Vice President and Head of International Market Research, Henkel KGaA)

Tim Broadbent (10/2004 p. 150), BrandCon, argues that *"pretesting is not predictive, largely unhelpful and mostly misused. Nothing has changed in the last 40 years."*

On the other hand we will provided in this publication numerous validations that innovative communication pretests such as the Ad \$ales Effect pretest are able to predict advertising recall reliable.

Advertising Recall Measurement: Only Lies and Deceptions?

It is widely accepted that advertising recall is an important prerequisite for advertising effects. However considerable research evidence has proven that no direct correlation of recall to sales exists. (Koeppler, pp. 69; Gibson and Percy, Rossiter, 1992, p.11 and the references provided there)

Most advertising pre-tests claim – of course - to be able to reliably predict the attention effect (or “recall”) caused by an advertisement. However, experience shows that most pretests are not able to live up to expectations or their promises. In most cases, tracking studies produce completely different recall values compared with those initially predicted in almost all advertising pretests. Huge and random differences have been observed in numerous publications between forecasted recall values and those measured in real market settings.

We will discuss the ability to measure or predict recall of the most widely used pretest groups based on numerous research case studies. In doing so it is not our goal to prove anybody wrong but to show and provide new and more reliable ways to measure advertising recall before media investments.

In the following chapters we will discuss always first the internal validity and then separately the external validity. A method is considered valid when its data are unbiased and actually measure what is intended to be measured. Basically speaking, there are two types of validation:

1. The internal validation of the research approach in itself. (Are the measurement criteria and research design free of systematic errors? Can they thus identify the “real” differences in advertising effectiveness?)
2. The external validation. (Can the method achieve a sufficiently good correlation between pre-test results and real market values?)

1. The so called „Portfolio-Recall-Tests“

Pretests of this category are offered under various names (such as „Folder-“ and “Reel-Recall-Tests”) and they are often conducted as multi-client-studies. They can be characterized by

- indirect recruitment (test product categories are not mentioned.)
- in a folder an uneven number of ads is shown (e.g. 11). The ad in the middle position is the test ad (e.g. ad in position 6 of 11 ads). The same is true for TV (so called “Reel“-Test) or radio.
- Spontaneous and prompted recall is measured relatively shortly after exposure.

When I started to work for Mars Petfood initially at Scholz & Friends on the agency side more than 40 advertising pretests of this category had been conducted. In nearly every case a recall of more than 85% had been predicted for various cat and dog food brands advertisements. – Even in experiments with increased TV spot environments of 20 TV commercials the predicted recall level remained nearly on the same high level.

The problem: Tracking studies with more than 1.000 cat, dog or bird owners produced completely different recall values compared with those initially predicted by “Portfolio-Recall-Tests” of different institutes. Mars never achieved in pet food any promising correlation – despite high budgets invested, high share of voice at that time and longer advertising campaigns, which ran usually over several years. The differences between pre- and post measurement were always huge and no common multiplier could be calculated to adjust that difference. - The same finding was true in Mars confectionary; however differences were usually somewhat smaller.

Why does the recall measurement fail of „Portfolio-Recall-Tests“?

When we analysed the reasons, why the recall predictions of “Portfolio-Recall-Tests” are not reliable, the publications of J.C. Maloney (1961/1962) proved to be helpful. He observed in six advertising tests for beer that all measured „recall“ values were on a similar level and within statistical tolerances (within 8%), despite huge differences in the creative execution. – The same was true for the nine identical ads of different categories which made up the test environment in the folder. Again in each case the „recall“ results were within statistical tolerances.

Maloney came to the conclusion that the so called „Folder- or Reel-Recall“-Tests do not measure the real recall caused by an ad but the interest in the product category communicated.

We are in support of his conclusion. It can also explain why the recall predictions were always unrealistically high when e. g. advertisements for pet food and baby food were tested. Both categories enjoy the highest product involvement of more than 100 product or service categories we have tested in so far. In both cases the target groups have a beloved being which is limited in its communicative abilities and you do not want to make any mistake when feeding it.

Millward Brown (1991 p. 63) one of the leading advertising tracking institutes has also confirmed that the recall measurement approach of the “Portfolio-Recall-Tests” is not reliable – after hundreds of pre-tests with this method:

„We have been in a unique position in that our pre-testing conclusions have nearly always been „validated“ via subsequent tracking study data We used to pre-test commercials by showing them in a “clutter reel” of ten ads and then measuring recall of ad and brand, and we have norms for this for hundreds of commercials.

*However, in spite of constantly refining the procedure, **we never obtained a good correlation with real life memorisability** as measured on tracking studies.“*

Summary: Considerable research has proven that „Folder-/Reel-Recall-Test“ are not able to measure recall reliably, inspite of its appealing logic. This method group has been falsified in that respect already more than 50 years ago. – In spite of its name this method measures product category interest, but not recall. – It is not able to separate advertising which is easy to remember from other communication which is difficult to recall.

What you can expect still fifty year after its falsification: Some advertising agencies which are only interested in their – but may be less in your – short term success tend to recommend portfolio-recall-tests in product categories with relatively high product interest.

And if such a method has been established as a so called “company standard pretest method” you will meet intensive resistance from their side to change that. Because from their point of view the advantage is clear: Even advertisement with lower creativity will achieve positive recall test results in product categories with higher involvement. – And also some research institutes still may offer it at a low price as a multi client study or advertising agencies as new business tool even for free.

But remember information you get out of such a test has no predictive value under real market conditions! It may sound cheap, but it is a waste of money. And the likelihood is high that your communications investments will not live up to expectations.

2. Recognition-Test

Numerous research studies have proven that the so called recognition method is unreliable. We would like to quote two early examples from the year 1961 which already falsified the method:

- W.R. Simmons (1961) found that respondents which had NOT read the magazine issue which communicated the test advertisement had nearly the same recognition values as those who had used that specific magazine issue.
- E. Marder and M. David (1961) measured (high) „recognition values“ for advertisements, which previously had NOT been published at all.

K. Koepler (1974 pp. 31) has analysed and discussed the recognition method intensively and quoted numerous other research evidence which prove beyond doubt that recognition test results are unreliable. For efficiency reasons we do not want to repeat his extensive analysis here, but share his summarized view:

„The conclusion of numerous research studies of the Recognition method is that absolutely uncertain what this method actually measures. - In the USA as well as in Europe the Recognition method is treated with a lot of scepticism.“

Considerable research evidence has proven some 50 years (!!!) ago, that both methods discussed so far are definitely NOT able to measure and predict the true recall reliably. However „Portfolio-Recall-Tests“ as well as „Recognition-Tests“ are still often used e.g. by agencies and publishing companies. The reason is in their own interest, because these methods more or less guarantee „positive research results.“

The famous advertising man David Ogilvy (1983 p. 9) has already stated: *„I sometimes wonder if there is a tacit conspiracy among clients, media and agencies to avoid putting advertising to such acids tests. Everyone included has a vested interest in prolonging the myth that all advertising increases sales to some degree: It doesn't.“*

Excuse to Copy-Tests of Media

Namely those departments which sell advertising space or time are still in favour of Recognition tests due to the „nicely high value“ usually achieved in these tests.

Somewhat recently we were asked again to provide a copy test proposal for a management magazine. In order to do so we got the questionnaire of the previous year. It was made up by 457 (!!!) questions which should be asked in a telephone interview of maximal 20 minutes. The intended respondents were higher management levels.

We carried out some test interviews to analyse the real interview duration. Even in cases with optimal filter question selection and quick answers the interview length was at least 30 minutes. Therefore in reality one had to expect that most telephone interviews with senior managers could not be finished and that interviewer were likely to cheat and fill in the rest.

Also the kind of question asked proved to be „interesting“. The following questions were asked while the respondent had the test magazine in front of him:

- Please look at page 2 with the ad of (brand name)
- Which of the following elements of the advertisement have you read or seen when you have looked at this ad?
 - The headline „XYZ“?
 - The brand logo on top of the page?
 - The product picture on the right hand side?
 - etc.

Questions of this kind of course achieve values above 90%. But do such kinds of results actually help someone? They do not really support the advertising sales department or the agencies, because the values are unrealistically high. Therefore experienced researchers and marketing managers ignore them or throw them away without looking at them. Sorry this is just a bad investment of the research budget of the media companies.

Advertisers are of course interested to get serious test results and indications how they should optimize their communication if necessary. – And even in cases when advertisers should stop a suboptimal execution in the short term in order to optimize it that will be better in the long run for both sides. Because the likelihood is high that an advertisement campaign which does not produce a positive return on investment in mid term will be stopped for ever and media used are likely to be changed. – Those who put their own interest above those of their (potentially new) clients should not expect to be able to achieve the position of a serious business partner.

On the other hand serious Media-Copy-Tests have proven to be a significant help in selling additional advertising space and improved the image of media companies. We have carried out such tests several times per year for DEUTSCHER FACHVERLAG, namely the LEBENSMITTEL ZEITUNG the leading grocery magazine in Germany.

3. Physical Approaches to predict recall

Physical and semi-physical methods have been proposed to measure reactions of respondent's body to advertising stimuli. These are sometimes interpreted as indications for the attention value of an ad, its ability to gain interest, etc. Well known examples are EDG (skin resistance measurement), EEG (brain activity) and EMG (muscle tone measurement).

These kinds of methods have been around for quite a while. They can be characterized by their experimental situation in test studios, their direct measurement approach which prevents rational resistance or influence on test results. However most often it remains unclear what actually is measured. How do you interpret if the heart beats faster, the respondent starts to sweat, shows eye reaction: Is that an indication for good or bad advertising? Therefore it is usually difficult to achieve a reliable interpretation.

Often respondents are asked in addition to verbalise their reaction and these may sound plausible. However it remains uncertain which mental processes are mentioned and if they can be expressed adequately. The risk should not be underestimated that some body reactions are rationalized in an artificial way which would have in a natural situation processed mentally differently. This is namely true for emotions. Therefore it should not be too surprising that these methods are rarely used nowadays despite their long history.

4. Advertising Pretests with TV-Programme Environment in a Teststudio

In this often used research design respondents are invited with the officially claimed objective to test TV-Programmes which include advertising breaks. Approximately 20 minutes after the advertising exposure the recall is measured. The theoretical premise was at that time when this test design was developed that it took 20 minutes to transfer information from short to long term memory. The assumption was that this approach could predict long term advertising memory. – Brain research has found that this assumption is not true.

Practical experience however has proven that this test approach is NOT able to predict advertising recall reliably. Some of our clients which previously used this research design for some time have found no correlation of its predicted recall values and those subsequently measured in tracking studies (in two cases this was true in more than 50 and more than 60 tests).

Brand	Ad plus Recall	Recall in Tracking	Advertising Budget/year
A	58 %	20 %	€ 9.000.000
B	55 %	20 %	€ 10.800.000
C	35 %	18 %	€ 13.800.000
D	15 %	5 %	€ 17.000.000

The table above shows four „validations“ which were presented in a new business presentation. The likelihood is high that these were the best „correlations“ of pre- and post test results achieved by this institute, which carries out also a lot of tracking surveys. A comparison shows large differences between forecasted and real market values. They differ by about 200 or 300 percent despite substantial advertising investments. A common multiplier is not identifiable which would adjust the predicted to the real recall level – as in more than 150 cases of our clients. And even if someone would claim to use category specific benchmarks these can not solve the basic problem that no correlation (“rule”) can be detected to real market values. (See also our general critic of benchmarks: Haimerl, Mayer de Groot 5/2000 pp. 16)

You should keep in mind that this method group („advertising pre-tests with TV-programme environment) is not able to measure or predict recall reliably. Henkel KGaA has published the following statement: *„Advantage [one research brand name in this pre-test category] seems to measure short term memory. However our experience shows that only a weak correlation exists between short and long term memory.“* (Dr. Klaus Morwind, Geschäftsführer (Marketing Top Executive) Henkel KGaA, 1998, p. 61). Most likely this observation is also true for other alternatives of this widely used pre-test method.

Why do Advertising Pretests with TV-Programme Environment fail?

It is interesting to observe that one supplier of this category of pretests has provided the cause why this pretest group fails despite its initially theoretically appealing foundation. MGM Mediagruppe München (MGM Mediagroup Munich) has offered together with a market research institute the so called test „ad pro“. The study design of „ad pro“ is more or less similar to the so called „ad plus“ pretest. Differences exist that deliberate changes of the TV environment are made. On the title page of „ad pro the TV programme and advertising effect“ brochure it is claimed:

„We know that the efficiency of a TV commercial is influenced significantly by its programme environment. Test with ad pro, in which environment you should broadcast your commercial.“ Habermeier of MGM (1997 pp. 8) has published the following ad pro research findings: *„The advertising creative execution has the most intensive impact on the advertising effect: all indicators are influenced ... The second factor analysed, **the programme environment, has a significant influence on the advertising effect on all dimensions measured ...**“*

Considerable research evidence of others (Burke (1975, 1976, 1980), Clancy & Kwestin (1971), Lord & Burnkrant (1988), Murphy et al. (1979), Park & McClung (1986), Soldow & Principe (1981)) as well as our own research (Mayer de Groot 1992, Kleij (1996), von Dassel et al. (2001), Reese et al. 7/2004, Lübbe et al. 3/2004 and 2005, Weber et al. 2006, Mayer de Groot, Fritzen 2008) has proven that the programme environment, has a significant influence on the advertising recall. An identical advertising commercial can achieve significantly different recall results as well as advertising effect levels in different program environment. (That is one of the major reasons why we carry out Media-Placement-Research).

This influence of the TV program environment on the advertising effects seems to be the major reason why the recall prediction of this pre-test category is unreliable as more than 150 studies have proven. And it is not possible to come up with a so called „standardized programme environment“, because different individuals and target groups choose and use particular programs with different frequency and involvement, and different programs are mostly watched by different people. (Barwise & Ehrenberg, 1990 pp. 25)

In addition Mayer and Schuhmann (1991) have proven that the particular position in an advertising break as well as the attractiveness of other commercials in the same advertising break can influence recall results significantly.

It can be summarised that this method group („advertising pretests with TV-programme environment) is not able to measure or predict recall reliably as considerable research evidence has proven.

Reliable Recall Predictions of the Advertising Sales Effect Test

The Advertising Sales Effect Test has been developed and improved for more than 25 years in continuous interactions of pretests and tracking studies. We have found a new and reliable way to measure recall and evaluate the advertising execution on standardized items.

All seven dimensions (“A\$ET-criteria”) are measured, which have proven worldwide to be generally relevant for evaluation of advertising executions. (Additions can be made in order to meet better market, company or advertising execution specific requirements). The values obtained can be compared with experience values, thus providing a better interpretation. Criteria measured are:

1. Attention effect/recall
2. Uniqueness of the advertising execution (“me-too” approach)
3. Attractiveness of the advertising execution
4. Information content
5. Irritation caused by the ad
6. Brand / category fit (fits brand/product category well)
7. Personal identification with target group

Internal validity of the method

Examining the internal validity involves determining the measurement validity. The results generated by test methods should express what one wants to measure – e.g. recall. However it should not express something similar, related, least of all something which has absolutely nothing to do with the recall of the advertisement in question. - This may seem to be stating the obvious. Nevertheless, many advertising pretest methods fail when it comes to this essential requirement as we have already proven.

The seven A\$ET criteria listed above were not created by chance but originally came from pioneering studies. In these groundbreaking studies, almost 600 statements were collected from all over the world, which were used to evaluate advertising executions. The aim was to reduce this large number to as few factors as possible. Use was made of the following:

- several independent samples,
- different sets of assessment criteria,
- different rating scales
- several factor analyses

Numerous factor analyses have always produced practically the same relevant dimensions. In this context, it is interesting to note that almost the same factor solution were achieved 10 and 20 years later. Both, the comprehensiveness of the basic studies and the stability of these factor results over two decades back up the internal validity of our criteria for evaluating advertising executions. We continually check and up date our statement list using factor-analysis.

Research design used to evaluate advertising executions

In the Ad Sales Effect pretest, all standardized ad effects criteria are measured on a six point scale. At least two statements are used for each factor to ensure high measurement reliability.

The respondents can be recruited openly, using directly the product category name because numerous validations have proven that test results are not influenced by direct recruitment.

The test advertisement is usually exposed without any environment, because the measured attention or recall values of the tested advertising execution are influenced significantly by its (programme) environment, as we have already discussed.

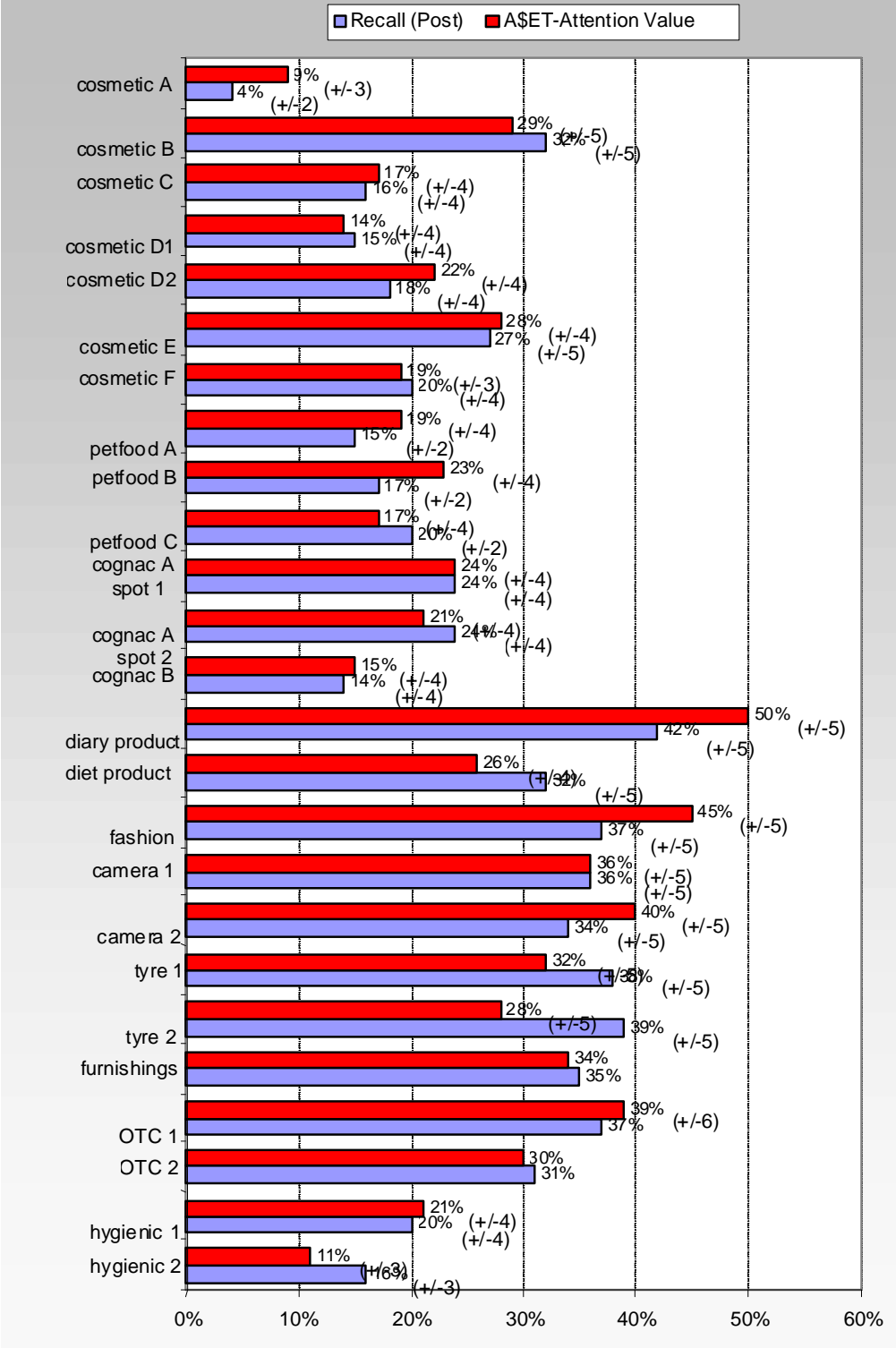
External validations

The good thing is that recall is nearly always measured in tracking surveys. Therefore recall provides the best quantitative basis yet for external validations amongst relevant ad execution criteria.

The predicted Advertising Sales Test attention values have achieved very high correlation with subsequent advertising tracking recall results after sufficient media spending, which were measured e.g. in advertising tracking studies (=validity). The table on the following page shows some of our recall validations in various product categories. High correlations were achieved for both small and large recall values. The same is also true of very well known brands in markets with high product involvement which is believed to be the most difficult task to achieve when it comes to recall predictions.

Statistical tolerances are shown in brackets.

Ad \$ales Effect Test Recall: High Correlation of pretest and tracking results



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