



The use of forced vs. natural exposure in copy testing

White Paper – Methodology

Dr. Debra Trampe
Lucas Hulsebos

www.dvj-insights.com | info@dvj-insights.com | +31 (0)88 2345 700
DVJ Insights | Herculesplein 36 | 3584 AA Utrecht | The Netherlands

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Background

We all know how important the strength of an ad is in creating an effect. Unfortunately, in reality, most ads are unable to generate substantial impact. According to Byron Sharp, 80% of all TV advertising money is wasted.¹ The biggest reason for the lack of impact is that consumers hardly notice ads and when they do, they do not link the ad to the correct brand.

According to DVJ Insights, the enormous amounts of wastage of advertising money is the result of forcing test viewers in research to watch the complete commercial. When an ad is developed, the advertising agency presents the new ideas to the client's marketing team. These are professionals who are already committed to the brand and the campaign. They watch the ad from start to finish with dedication and concentration. However, this is hardly the way normal consumers treat the commercial in real life. After the marketing team has evaluated the commercial, sometimes the commercial is subjected to market research. If the research is qualitative in nature, the respondent is forced to watch the ad from start to finish, in isolation, and with an introduction from the interviewer. Even in quantitative market research, in most cases respondents are forced to view the commercial from start to finish, after which respondents evaluate the commercial.

In order to make pretesting more realistic, DVJ Insights has developed a different approach that takes into account the natural way in which consumers deal with commercials. The willingness to watch or listen is at the center of our copy testing, since Bill Bernbach stated "If advertising goes unnoticed, everything else is academic". Because we take the respondents' willingness to completely view or listen to the ad into account, our copy testing model is substantially better at predicting in-market success than traditional pre-testing solutions.

Advertising avoidance is the default

Consumers tend to try to avoid advertising whenever they can. Advertising does not have positive connotations for most consumers. Academic literature dating back as far as 1973 claims that there is a public dislike of advertising.¹ Other early studies focused on what exactly causes irritation in advertising.² A recent report by Research International³ found that 22% of Swedes actively try to avoid advertising in all traditional media. Regarding the internet, there were 198 million active adblock users around the world in 2015.⁴

Forced vs. natural exposure

The trend towards advertising avoidance conflicts with the forced exposure paradigm so common in copy testing. But how exactly do results from a copy testing study using the forced exposure approach differ from the results from copy testing in a more naturalistic setting? In order to address this question, we empirically compared a forced exposure setting to a more natural exposure setting. We first performed multiple copy tests using forced exposure, and compared this with a copy test where respondents viewed the advertisement in a naturalistic setting: they were able to skip the advertisement at any time. Results are presented in Figure 1.

The key finding is that the differences between forced and natural exposure depend on the metric: forced exposure produces more positive brand and message evaluations than natural exposure, but the two viewing conditions do not differ in their impact on ad recognition. This means that if you rely on the outcomes of a test in a forced setting, you might overestimate the in-market impact of your

campaign. If we examine the general pattern in this particular study, we

found a second important insight: the difference in outcomes were huge, meaning that some ads were more or less the same in both conditions where other ads showed significant differences. This means that forced exposure does not lead to constant overestimations.

Based upon these findings we can conclude that using a forced exposure in copy testing does lead to misleading results and should never be used.

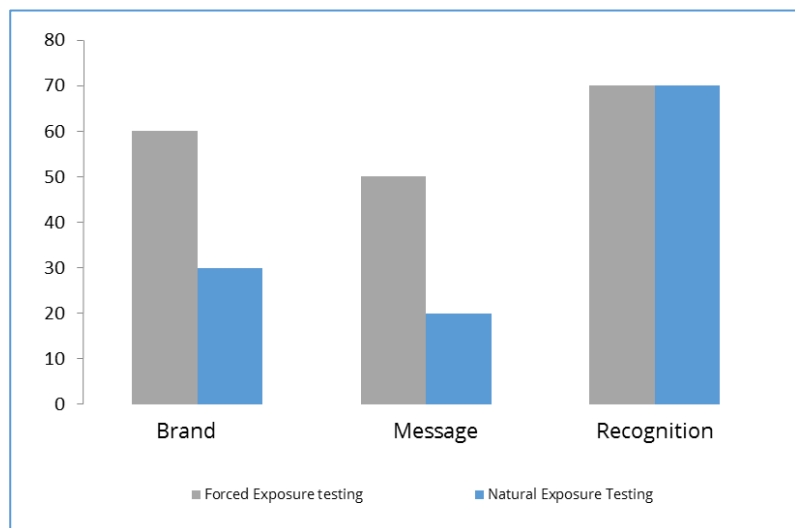


Figure 1. Effects of forced vs. natural exposure on several metrics

Copy testing should occur under natural conditions

In order to create valid outcomes, advertising copy testing should mirror real life consumer behavior as closely as possible. Considering that consumers typically try to avoid advertising, advertising copy testing should incorporate this fact. Hence, DVJ Insights has developed an approach to copy testing in which respondents are allowed to interact with advertisements the way they would in real life. Respondents in our copy tests watch a regular block of commercials, page through a magazine or browse through a series of websites, without being aware of what exactly the test ad is, just as in real life. Also, they are able to terminate their exposure to an ad whenever they want, just as in real life. We register the exact moment when respondents quit their exposure to the commercial, which serves as an indication of attention to the ad. Measuring the extent to which respondents pay attention to an ad is impossible in forced exposure situations. But it should be a critical ingredient in copy tests because in real life, attention for an ad is the first step to generating impact.

And even more importantly, DVJ Insights measures brand impact and message recall based upon this natural behavior. Therefore, results are valid predictors of in-market success.

Conclusion

Copy testing that makes use of forced exposure seriously compromises on its quality. This is because in real life, consumers attempt to avoid advertising. When copy tests force respondents to completely view the advertisement, there is a substantial discrepancy between the study and the real world. This discrepancy may lead to limited, biased or even plain wrong insights. Hence, in our copy testing, DVJ Insights uses natural exposure: respondents are free to quit their exposure to the commercial at any time. This simulation of reality produces valuable metrics: the willingness to engage with the commercial and the ad's subsequent impact. These metrics gives marketers valuable insights into the appeal their commercial has for the target group.

References

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About the company

DVJ Insights is a quality-based research and consultancy agency with a global footprint. we help our clients understanding how to realize growth by identifying relevant drivers, optimizing communication, improving the customer experience and introduce winning products and solutions in organizations.

We believe that research is all about listening. listening to our clients to make sure the research is embedded in the organization and answers the right questions, and listening to consumers by giving them the opportunity to express their feelings and share their stories.

We add value by leveraging the experience and expertise of our seasoned research and consultancy team, and staying true to our innovative mass qualitative philosophy.

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