

EFFECTIVENESS OF ADVERTISING CLUTTER: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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ABSTRACT

The advertising world has witnessed a constant upsurge in the advertising revenue and volume over last few decades. With the concept of globalization having caught pace in the era post 1991, and the changed market scenario, India too has witnessed a similar boom in the print, TV and web advertisement volume. This has resulted in problems like heavy advertising clutter in all the mediums, which has accompanied falling credibility and dipping effectiveness of advertisements. The advertising agencies, advertisers and media, all three have been on a spending spree to come out with a formula which can help them in deciding how they can have higher recall of ads and subsequently more effective ads even amidst such heavy clutter. *Tom Brown* and *Michael Rothschild*, two senior academicians and scholars, have found through a study that while the effectiveness of ads go down because of the clutter (as deduced by the aided recall method), unaided recall tests show even more depressing results. They also speculated that the effects of clutter on such recall may be near its maximum. Research also shows that clutter doesn't affect all the advertisements uniformly. Hence this research article focuses on measuring the effectiveness of ads amongst heavy advertising clutter. The objective will be to find out the degree of recall and to establish its relationship with the nature of advertisement, size of the advertisement, creative execution, and the appeal used, placement of the advertisement, and the color and layout used in the advertisement. For the purpose of the study, only newspaper advertisement will be considered. The researcher has used survey method, focus group recall test.

KEYWORDS: Advertising Effectiveness, Recall testing, Advertising Credibility, Advertising Effectiveness.

INTRODUCTION

The world of advertising has seen a galloping expansion in the Media & Entertainment (M&E) sector in India which is second to none. In fact it is ahead of China, Russia and Brazil in the race. This remarkable growth is further expected to

continue with even greater pace at a higher compounded annual growth rate (CAGR) of 16-17% in the years to come (**Source:** *KPMG Media Analysis*). This appears to be a great signal for the stakeholders of this industry as this growth rate

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guarantees greater returns and multiple benefits in years to come. This however cannot be taken at the face value ignoring the issues which are being faced by the advertising industry. A study conducted by the scholars of Queensland University of Technology titled 'Avoidance of Advertisements on Social Media' indicated that the advertising recall was minimum. The little that the respondents managed to recall was due to the moderation by the moderators who kind of provided the aid in recalling the advertisements. The respondents avoided the advertisements by simply ignoring the message conveyed by the advertisement.

John Moore who has been working as Senior VP-director of one of the most well known firms Interpublic Group's Mullen says that the constant interruption by the advertisements have made people so accustomed to them that they have started ignoring them. This phenomenon of people becoming so accustomed to the increasing volume and interruption of advertisements has been compared to somebody who has just shifted his residence near a railway line. The newly accommodated resident is perturbed initially and after that the disturbing sound of the moving trains is not registered by the people. Rather they do not notice anything unusual about it.

Claude C. Hopkins in the book '**Scientific Advertising**' laid great stress on the scientific way of moving about the process of advertising. The book has a small chapter completely dealing with the psychology of the consumers and the advertisement readers and viewers. Talking about the prominent phenomenon of the avoidance which is not limited to just a nation but has spread globally has some psychological reasons governing them. Also these psychologies are constantly evolving. This article thus aims to identify the current factors governing the effectiveness of an advertisement amidst the gush of gallons of advertisement volume.

OBJECTIVES & METHODOLOGY

OBJECTIVES

- 1) To identify the rate of recall of advertisements
- 2) To identify the appeal most suitable for recall
- 3) To identify the most potent combination of appeal and creative execution
- 4) To study the factors influencing the rate of recall amidst advertising clutter

METHODOLOGY

Unaided and aided recall methods are the methods to extract the information from memory of respondent either in individuality or in a group. The method is prominently used in qualitative marketing research.

Here the role of a moderator is very important as he has the responsibility of extracting information from the respondent.

The methodology used here has been unaided and aided recall. The respondents have been asked to recall the advertisements they have seen and in case they are not able to recall then the aided recall have been used.

AGE GROUP OF THE RESPONDENTS

18 to 24 years

SAMPLING TECHNIQUE

Purposive Sampling

Four groups A, B, C & D were formed. The newspapers (irrespective of their language) were classified on the basis of the advertising to content ratio. The researcher came up with four classifications:

- a) 10%-15% Ad
- b) 15%-25% Ad
- c) 25%-40% Ad
- d) 40% and above Ad

TABULATION & ANALYSIS

Table 1.Unaided Recall (Same Day)

Group A (10-15% Ad Clutter)		Group B (15-25% Ad Clutter)		Group C (25-40% Ad Clutter)		Group D (40% and Above)	
Respondent 1	3	Respondent 1	3	Respondent 1	3	Respondent 1	3
Respondent 2	2	Respondent 2	4	Respondent 2	1	Respondent 2	2
Respondent 3	4	Respondent 3	4	Respondent 3	3	Respondent 3	1
Respondent 4	4	Respondent 4	3	Respondent 4	3	Respondent 4	1
Respondent 5	4	Respondent 5	1	Respondent 5	1	Respondent 5	3
Respondent 6	3	Respondent 6	3	Respondent 6	2	Respondent 6	3
Respondent 7	5	Respondent 7	5	Respondent 7	2	Respondent 7	4
Respondent 8	4	Respondent 8	2	Respondent 8	3	Respondent 8	2
Respondent 9	3	Respondent 9	2	Respondent 9	2	Respondent 9	1

Table 1 describes the unaided recall of the advertisements. The respondents were present in 4 groups. The four groups were shown different newspapers by the moderators. The percentage of advertisements with respect to the content was 10%-15%, 15%-25%, 25%-40%, and above 40% respectively. The time given to the

respondents was 5 minutes. The respondents were not informed about the objective of showing the newspapers as the researcher believed that it could have influenced the data.

The average ad recall in Group A is 4, Group B is 3, Group C is 2, and Group D is 2.2.

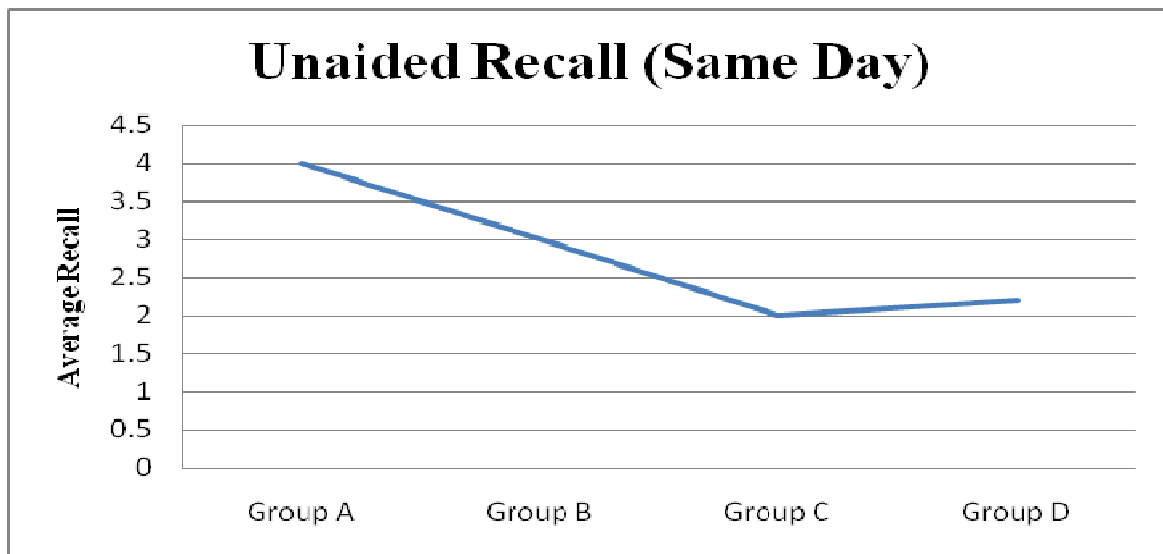


Figure 1.Unaided Recall (Same Day)

Figure 1 indicates that the rate of recall goes down with the increase in the advertising clutter. There are studies indicating peoples' growing dissatisfaction with the increase in advertising volumes. Studies also indicate the positive attitude towards advertisements being replaced by negative ones. Knowledge Networks, British Columbia's Public Broadcaster, in 2004, found that half of the viewers of the primetime

television switched stations when flooded with gallons of commercial messages. Some leave the room while the rest shift their attention elsewhere. A UK survey in 2000 found the majority of the people to be neutral towards advertising while 12% actively disliked print advertisements. This was the case 15 years ago and the new millennium has witnessed

tremendous growth in the media options with print media being no exception.

US Newspaper Advertising Bureau identified a decline in the peoples' ability to recall the advertisements. This was traced back in between

1960s and 1990s. The shocker was that the decline was visible even in those advertisements which they had been exposed to very recently. 20% could correctly recall a message in 1965 while this percentage dipped to only 6% by 1990s.

Table 2.Aided Recall (Same Day)

Group A (10-15% Ad Clutter)		Group B (15-25% Ad Clutter)		Group C (25-40% Ad Clutter)		Group D (40% and Above)	
Respondent 1	5	Respondent 1	4	Respondent 1	4	Respondent 1	7
Respondent 2	6	Respondent 2	3	Respondent 2	5	Respondent 2	4
Respondent 3	4	Respondent 3	5	Respondent 3	4	Respondent 3	4
Respondent 4	6	Respondent 4	6	Respondent 4	3	Respondent 4	5
Respondent 5	7	Respondent 5	6	Respondent 5	4	Respondent 5	3
Respondent 6	5	Respondent 6	7	Respondent 6	6	Respondent 6	4
Respondent 7	6	Respondent 7	6	Respondent 7	6	Respondent 7	4
Respondent 8	5	Respondent 8	5	Respondent 8	5	Respondent 8	2
Respondent 9	5	Respondent 9	4	Respondent 9	4	Respondent 9	1

Table 2 describes the aided recall of the advertisements.

Table 3.Unaided Recall (After One week)

Group A (10-15% Ad Clutter)		Group B (15-25% Ad Clutter)		Group C (25-40% Advertising Clutter)		Group D (40% and Above)	
Respondent 1	0	Respondent 1	1	Respondent 1	0	Respondent 1	0
Respondent 2	0	Respondent 2	1	Respondent 2	0	Respondent 2	0
Respondent 3	0	Respondent 3	0	Respondent 3	0	Respondent 3	1
Respondent 4	1	Respondent 4	0	Respondent 4	0	Respondent 4	1
Respondent 5	2	Respondent 5	0	Respondent 5	1	Respondent 5	2
Respondent 6	0	Respondent 6	0	Respondent 6	1	Respondent 6	0
Respondent 7	1	Respondent 7	0	Respondent 7	3	Respondent 7	0
Respondent 8	1	Respondent 8	1	Respondent 8	2	Respondent 8	0
Respondent 9	2	Respondent 9	2	Respondent 9	1	Respondent 9	0

The average ad recall in Group A is 5, Group B is 5, Group C is 5, and Group D is 4.

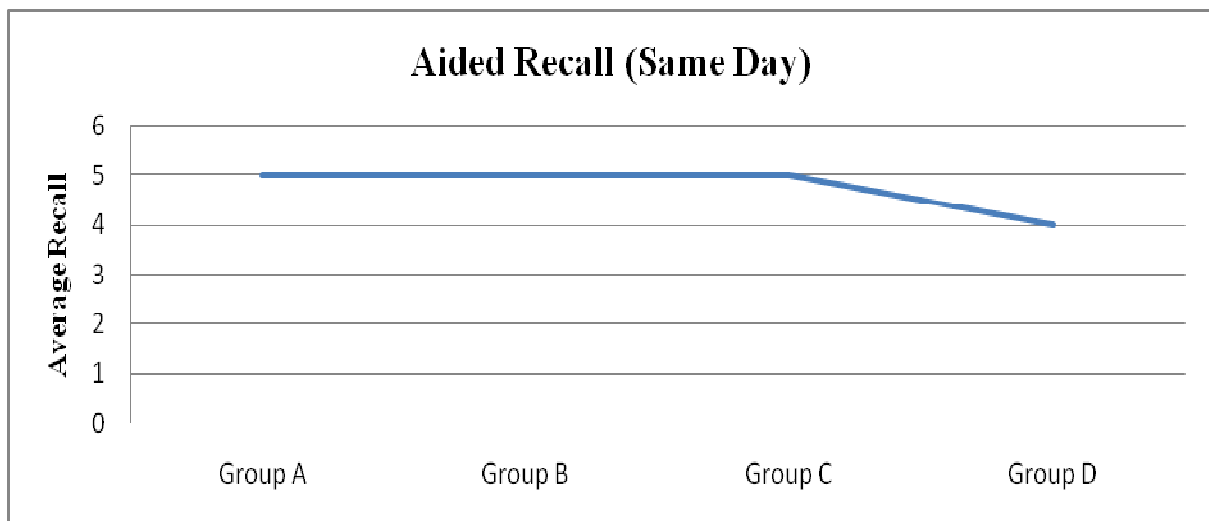


Figure 2.Aided Recall (Same Day)

Figure 2 shows consistent average recall to some extent and then shows a decline in case of maximum advertising clutter. Although nothing much can be inferred from the figure and the table but it definitely shows in general declining recalling tendencies with the increase in advertising clutter. One more thing to be noted is

that the average advertising recall goes up in case of aided recall. This indicates a need for constant advertising but at the same time it should be advertising with care so that we are not making the readers immune and also making the brand register in their minds.

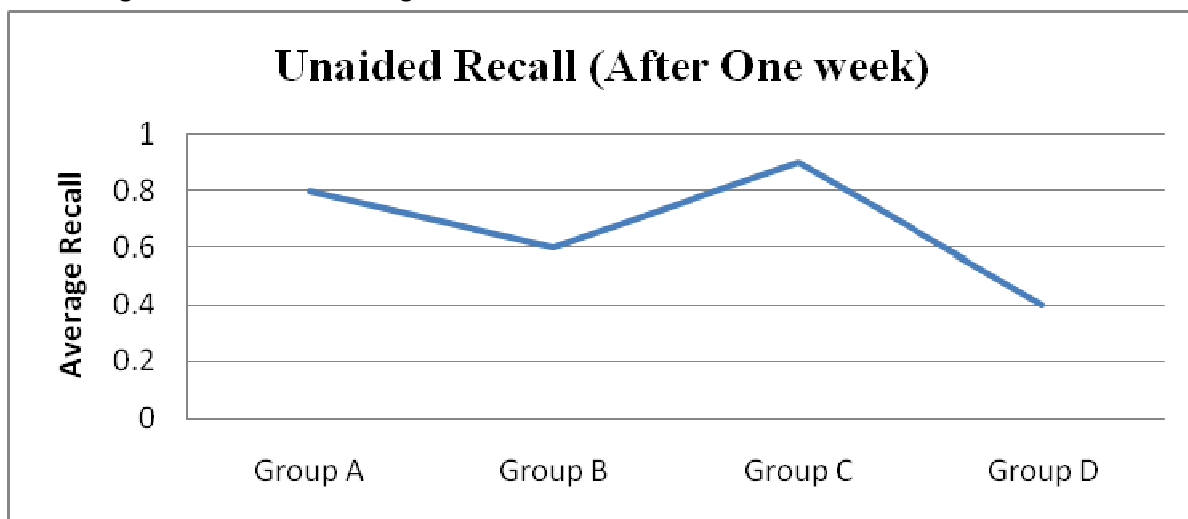


Figure 3. Unaided Recall (After One Week)

Figure 3 shows a trend different from the ones witnessed above. However the upward moving line doesn't indicate a vast difference as the difference is negligible and can be taken as an exception. Otherwise what we overall witness is again a declining recall rate with the increase in the advertising clutter. The average recall however seems to have dipped vastly.

Within a week, the recall among Group A has gone down by 80%, Group B by 80%, Group C by 55% and Group D by 82%.

Hence we can say that the recall goes down with time and declines even more with the increase in the advertising clutter.

Table 4. Aided Recall (After One Week)

Group A (10-15% Ad Clutter)		Group B (15-25% Ad Clutter)		Group C (25-40% Ad Clutter)		Group D (40% and Above)	
Respondent 1	2	Respondent 1	1	Respondent 1	0	Respondent 1	1
Respondent 2	1	Respondent 2	2	Respondent 2	0	Respondent 2	1
Respondent 3	0	Respondent 3	0	Respondent 3	0	Respondent 3	0
Respondent 4	1	Respondent 4	2	Respondent 4	1	Respondent 4	0
Respondent 5	1	Respondent 5	1	Respondent 5	2	Respondent 5	0
Respondent 6	0	Respondent 6	2	Respondent 6	2	Respondent 6	0
Respondent 7	0	Respondent 7	0	Respondent 7	1	Respondent 7	1
Respondent 8	1	Respondent 8	0	Respondent 8	1	Respondent 8	2
Respondent 9	2	Respondent 9	0	Respondent 9	2	Respondent 9	1

The data in Table 4 [Aided Recall (After One Week)] suggests that the recall numbers further

go down in comparison to the figures mentioned in Table 2 [Aided Recall (Same Day)] .

Table 5. Unaided and Aided Recall Decline Percentage

Unaided Recall decline percentage		Aided Recall decline percentage	
Group	Decline Percentage	Group	Decline Percentage
A	80%	A	80%
B	80%	B	80%
C	55%	C	80%
D	82%	D	75%

Table 6. Recall Rate among Colored & Black and White Ads

Group	Color	Black & White
A	91%	9%
B	87%	13%
C	92%	8%
D	80%	20%

Miriam Adawiah Dzulkifli and Muhammad Faiz Mustafar in their research titled *The Influence of Color on Memory Performance: A Review* published in *The Malaysian Journal of Medical Sciences* infer that color helps us in memorizing certain information by increasing our attention level. The role played by color in enhancing our attention level is inevitable. Color also has the potential to increase chances of environmental stimuli to be encoded, stored, and retrieved successfully. The choice of colors and the manipulative aspects can, however, influence the extent to which colors can influence human memory performance.

The data extracted clearly indicates the natural capability of colors to hold attention and seep in the minds of the readers to be extracted later.

In an article *Why Our Memories Work Better in Color*, written by a science reporter Tim Utton, published in dailymail.co.uk, Dr Karl Gegenfurtner, who is the co-author of the research conducted to find the relationship between memories and colors, said, 'It appears as if our memory system is tuned, presumably by evolution and/or during development, to the color structure found in the world.'

Table 7. Recall Rate & Advertising Appeals

Group	Rational Appeal	Emotional Appeal
A	52%	48%
B	56%	44%
C	45%	55%
D	40%	60%

*The major contributor to the emotional appeal was humor and fear appeal. These appeals allowed maximum recall. Fear appeal was included in many advertisements based on life insurance, car insurance and advertisements of Non Banking Financial Institutions. As always believed, humor appeal is said to have the highest recall.

"People do not buy from clowns" - Claude Hopkins (1923)

"Good copywriters have always resisted the temptation to entertain" - David Ogilvy (1963)

"I have a reason to believe that... humor can now sell" - David Ogilvy (1982)

From the journey of the statement of Claude Hopkins in 1923 to the wise words of David Ogilvy

in 1982, one thing which was evident was that humor sells and it sells the best.

- Humor attracts attention.
- Humor does not harm comprehension.
- Humor enhances liking.

(Source: The Impact of Humor in Advertising: A Review by Marc G. Weinberger & Charles S. Gulas)

Table 8. Recall Rate & Elements of Print Advertisement

	A (96)*	B (86)*	C (75)*	D (64)*
Headlines	74	78	64	52
Sub headlines	12	10	20	16
Visual Elements	89	79	74	64
Body Copy	21	27	10	21
Slogan	84	79	66	48

(Source: Marketing Communication Edited by Ludi Koekemoer)

*The total includes aided and unaided recall on the same day and a week later.

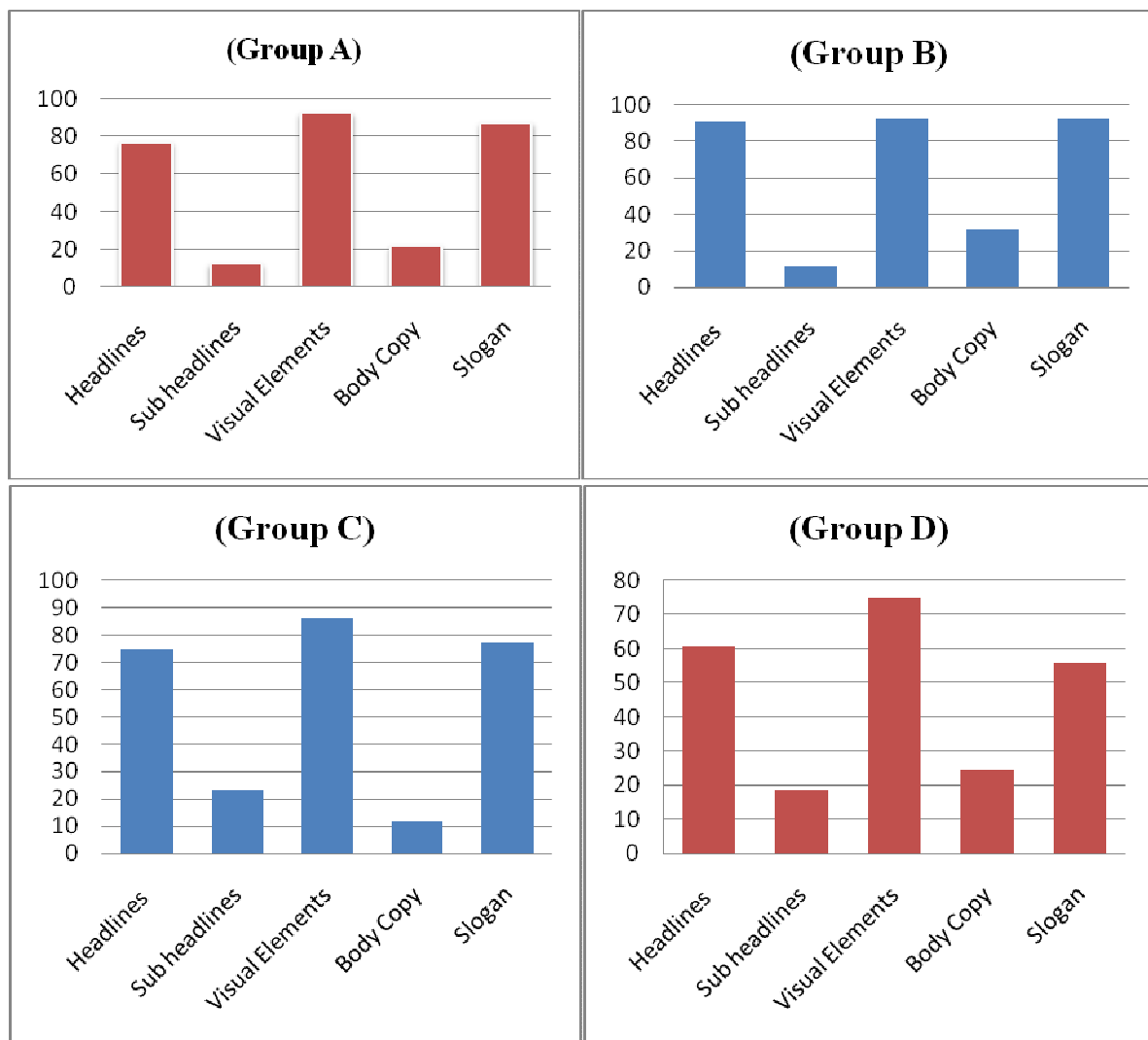


Figure 4. Recall Rate of Print Advertisement on the basis of different Elements

FINDINGS

1. The advertising recall has been comparatively better when taken on the same day. This justifies the cycle of memory and learning. The memory cycle in psychology talks about having the memory of anything concrete or abstract initially in the volatile memory and constant exposure leading to its movement from the temporary volatile memory to permanent memory. When the recall was done post one week, the results were dismal and the impressions of the print advertisements seemed to have waned. Since the respondents had no contact with the advertisements shown to them during the gap week, it contradicted with the principle of memory and retention which talks about consistent exposure for making the idea move from temporary to permanent memory.
2. Colors seem to affect the memory and recall of print advertisements. An advertiser with sound understanding of the color psychology and its impact and of the basic of psychology can still play better with colors to make its advertisement stand different from the rest.
3. There doesn't appear to be much difference in the recall on the basis of the type of appeal used. However, humor and fear appeal seemed to have edged all the other appeals in terms of its preference and readers' attitude towards it.
4. It was seen that the advertisements with lesser elements seemed to have higher recall. This however was not the case with all the elements. The advertisements recalled by the respondents mostly had visual elements, headlines and slogans. This indicated peoples' attitude towards subheadings and body copy. With the coming of product and

brand parity and peoples' changing behaviors, body copy and subheadings have been used less sparingly. This has kind of led to a new trend of solid punch lines with no body copy. During the study, it was also observed that certain advertisements had no visual element but a meaningfully creative headline was sufficient for being able to get recalled.

5. The colored advertisements seemed to have edged their black and white counterparts. This did not come out as any surprise as various theories and studies in psychology have established the role of color in better retention and learning. The study justified the same.

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