

FROM CREATIVITY..TO EFFECTIVENESS!

A study into the influence of creative strength on the return of media use

In recent months we have heard a lot about the importance of continuing to invest in media during a crisis. At the same time, many marketers are also forced to give extra accountability for every advertising expenditure during a crisis. It is now more important than ever to get the most out of every GRP or impression purchased, and leave a lasting impression in the minds of consumers. Previously, by testing more than [100 different commercials](#), we have seen that responding to the current Corona situation tends to go more wrong than well. It is and remains important to ensure that advertising stands out, that it conveys the message correctly and that it leaves a lasting impression for a brand. In order to influence consumer behaviour at all, advertising needs to be remembered for a longer period of time - and the chances of this can be increased if the advertising is seen as entertaining, stands out among the other commercials in a commercial break and / or responds well to needs and consumer wishes.

Various [academic studies](#) underline that there is also a clear positive influence of the use of good creatives on these efforts. But at the same time, relatively little is known about the magnitude of these relations - even though it is (especially now) important for marketers to understand to what extent the effectiveness of advertising increases if they optimise their creatives. Only then can it be estimated whether these improvements are actually worth the creative investments required.

The above prompted DVJ Insights to conduct an empirical study on the effectiveness of advertising - and the role that the quality of creatives play in it. With this study we wanted to better understand how big the impact of creation is and what "GRP profits" can be achieved by using better creatives.

SET-UP STUDY: DATABASE COMPOSITION

For this (meta) study we used a database of 74 Dutch TV commercials, broadcasted between 2016 and 2020. With the results of this study, we would ideally gather a general and broad picture of the effectiveness of advertising, and the role of creative strength. To outline, we have compiled the database in such a way that commercials of a significant number of brands (18) and product types (4 main

categories: electronics, fast moving consumer goods, financial services and catering) are included. This guarantees the generalisability of the results to other markets.

We have the following information for each of the commercials:

- the total number of **GRPs** deployed per commercial (per week)
- the percentage of consumers who indicate that they have seen the commercial with certainty (**recognition**), after having been presented in an online questionnaire (per week)
- overall consumer evaluation scores for the commercial on five creative aspects (**likeability, relevance, brand fit, distinctiveness and understanding**), after being presented in an online questionnaire

CATEGORY	#SPOTS	AVERAGE SPOT LENGTH (SEC.)	AVERAGE TOTAL MEDIA PRESSURE (GRPS)
ELECTRONICS	14	30.0	423
FAST MOVING CONSUMER GOODS	27	22.2	407
FINANCIAL SERVICES	15	28.6	676
CATERING	18	21.7	308

Table I: Descriptive statistics of analysed TV commercials per category

Table I shows how the commercials and their associated media pressure are divided over the four categories. Because we also know for each of these commercials the extent to which they have been recognised from week to week over their duration, we have a measure of the extent to which each commercial has acquired a place in the long-term memory of consumers - a first necessary step towards influencing knowledge, attitudes and (ultimately) purchasing behaviour.

SET-UP OF THE STUDY: THEORETIC MODEL

The main issue we sought to answer in this study is to understand the influence of creative strength on the effectiveness of media deployment. In order to properly map this relation, it is necessary to include various variables in the analysis - including main variables such as media pressure, recognition and creative strength, but also control variables such as product category and commercial length.

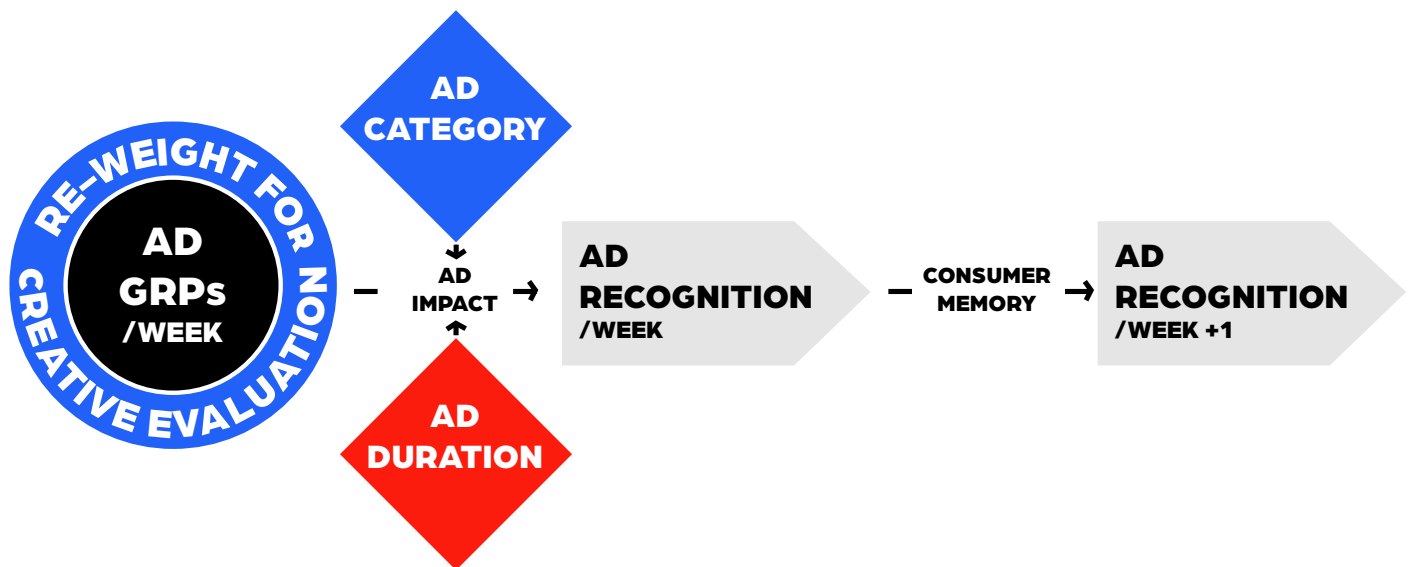


Figure I: Schematic representation of the model regarding the relation of GRP deployment and recognition (at a weekly level)

Figure I shows schematically how we approached the analysis in a model-based manner. Our principles are as follows:

1. The starting point of the model is, logically, the actual number of GRPs deployed (in each week) for a TV commercial.
2. Before this media pressure is linked to recognition figures, however, the GRP figures are first “weighed” in the model based on creative strength. If the commercial scores above average in terms of evaluation, the number of GRPs will be weighed up - the underlying idea is that with a good creative every GRP used will be worth more. The opposite (a weighting down) then applies to a commercial that is valued below average. The **extent** to which GRPs are weighed up or down, and the **relative influence** of the different creative aspects within the weighting, are parameters that are estimated in the (regression) analysis.
3. Only **after** weighing up will the **weighted** GRP pressure per week be related to the extent to which the commercial is recognised in the same week.

In order to map out the effects of GRP deployment and creative strength as accurately as possible, the model also checks for a number of other principles from existing theories with regards to how media works:

- a. The strength of the relationship between GRP deployment and recognition can vary between **categories** - due to differences in the degree of **involvement** that consumers feel with a category, their degree of attention for (advertising) stimuli within the category also differs.
- b. The strength of the relation between GRP deployment and recognition may depend on the **length** of the commercial deployed - **various authors** state that a longer-lasting commercial is better recognised with the same commitment to GRPs, due to a greater availability of ‘memory brackets’ that consumers can use to store the commercial in their mind.
- c. Because consumers are able to remember a commercial for a longer period of time (or at least part of it) - even if it was shown less often or even no longer at all - the model allows for the recognition of a TV commercial in a certain week to not only be influenced by the current GRP effort, but also by the degree of recognition in previous weeks.

EFFECTIVENESS IN FUNCTION OF CATEGORY AND COMMERCIAL LENGTH

Before discussing the implications for the extent to which creative strength influences the effectiveness of media use, we will first briefly discuss the effects of the control variables included in the model. We do this by calculating based on the analysis results to which recognition score the broadcasting of an average commercial, during 4 weeks with 100 GRPs per week, would lead to different combinations of categories and commercial lengths.

Table 2 shows the results of these calculations (also called simulations), and first of all shows that the longer a commercial lasts, the stronger the degree of recognition that will follow from the use of a given number of GRPs is. These differences are particularly significant between commercials of short (e.g. 10 seconds) to medium (e.g. 30 seconds) duration - while at longer length these differences begin to flatten.

For marketers, this already implies that although extending a commercial can have more effect (in terms of recognition in any case), it does not seem worthwhile to let the commercial be longer than 30 seconds. In addition, only very good creative commercials are able to capture the attention of consumers for more than 30 seconds.

		CATEGORY				
		ELECTRONICS	FAST MOVING CONSUMER GOODS	FINANCIAL SERVICES	CATERING	AVERAGE RECOGNITION
DURATION	10 SECONDS	33%	20%	27%	27%	27%
	20 SECONDS	38%	24%	32%	32%	32%
	30 SECONDS	40%	25%	34%	34%	33%
	40 SECONDS	41%	25%	34%	34%	34%
	50 SECONDS	41%	26%	35%	35%	34%
	60 SECONDS	42%	26%	36%	35%	35%
	AVERAGE RECOGNITION	39%	24%	33%	33%	32%

Table 2: Differences in simulated recognition scores between commercial lengths and categories (based on a 4-weekly campaign with 100 GRPs per week)

We also see strong differences in returns between categories - for a high-involvement category (such as electronics), a total of 400 GRPs (on average) leads to a more than 60% higher recognition score than for a low-involvement category (such as fast moving consumer goods). The reason for this difference is mainly explained by a difference in clutter. More commercials are broadcasted in the FMCG industry and it is even more difficult to stand out in the category. The moment a lot of competitors advertise simultaneously, the return from each GRP decreases.

ADVERTISING RETURN: WHICH ASSESSMENT DIMENSIONS ARE DECISIVE?

Now that we have mapped the influence of the control variables, attention can be shifted to the role of creative strength in determining media effectiveness. We re-analyse these by using simulations: our starting point is again a TV commercial (in this case a 30-second one) that is broadcasted with 100 GRPs per week for 4 weeks. Our starting point is that this commercial scores at an average level on all creative dimensions (50th percentile / "benchmark"), but then we manipulate the scores on one evaluation dimension (by varying them between a low (30th percentile / "bottom 30") and high (80th percentile / "top 20") level). Afterwards, we look at the effects of these manipulations (and the hereby changed creative weighting applied to the 400 GRPs) on the expected recognition scores, reporting the average effect across categories.

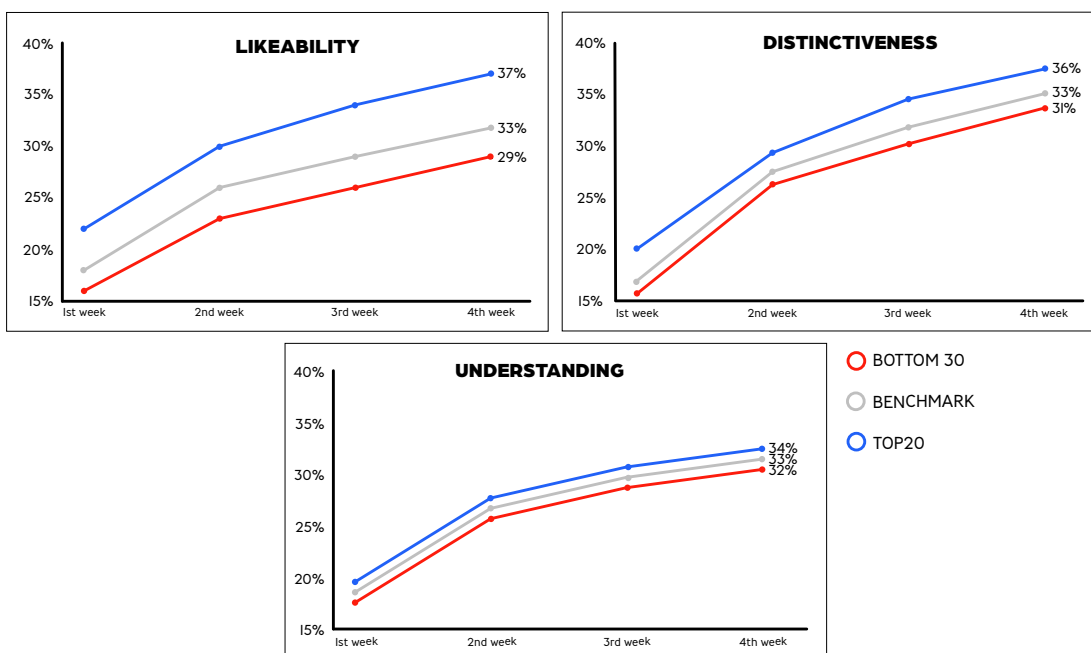


Figure 2: Differences in simulated recognition scores in function of creative strength (likeability, distinctiveness and understanding, based on a 4-weekly campaign with 100 GRPs per week)

Figure 2 shows the results of these simulations for the three dimensions that have a direct influence on the yield obtained from each GRP. The following stands out:

1. The greatest effect is found for **likeability**: if a TV commercial scores at the Top 20 level on this dimension, on average the same number of GRPs will eventually achieve an 8 percentage points higher recognition score (37%) than it would be if the TV commercial would have scored badly (Bottom 30 level) in this area (29%). Not surprisingly (given the [large number of studies](#) that previously found a link between the “liking” and effectiveness of advertisements), it appears that it is mainly important that a commercial is liked, to be well remembered by consumers.
2. Also, for **distinctiveness** and **understanding**, the higher a TV commercial scores on one of these dimensions, the better the commercial is recognised with the same number of GRPs. The

uplift between the bottom 30 and top 20 levels is smaller here: 5 percentage points (31% versus 36%) for distinctiveness, and 2 percentage points (32% versus 34%) for understanding.

3. Both the **relevance** of a commercial and the degree to which it is thought to **fit the brand** do not seem to affect the degree to which the commercial is remembered. Although the results do underline such a conclusion for **relevance**, a remark should be made for brand fit. Although this dimension in itself does not determine the return that is obtained from each GRP, a good **brand fit** does ensure that the relation between likeability, distinctiveness and understanding on the one hand, and the GRP return on the other, are strengthened. Table 3 illustrates this and shows that if a TV commercial is improved in terms of likeability, distinctiveness or understanding (from benchmark level to Top 20 level), the subsequent increase in recognition will be greater if the TV commercial also scored well on brand-fit.

UPLIFT IN RECOGNITION BY IMPROVEMENT OF BENCHMARK LEVEL TO TOP 20 LEVEL ON:				
		LIKEABILITY	DISTINCTIVENESS	UNDERSTANDING
	BOTTOM 30	Δ3.8%PT.	Δ1.9%PT.	Δ0.6%PT.
BRAND FIT	BENCHMARK	Δ4.7%PT.	Δ3.0%PT.	Δ1.0%PT.
	TOP 20	Δ5.9%PT.	Δ4.4%PT.	Δ1.5%PT.

Table 3: Uplift in recognition as a result of improvements on likeability, distinctiveness and understanding, at different levels of brand fit (based on a 4-weekly campaign with 100 GRPs per week)

A BROADER VIEW ON THE CONTRIBUTION OF CREATIVE STRENGTH

The “interactions” described above already show that the effects of improvements on specific creative dimensions can seldom be considered in isolation - all the more so because they are interrelated, and improving a creative on one dimension often goes hand in hand with improvements on others dimensions.

	LIKEABILITY	RELEVANCE	BRAND FIT	DISTINCTIVENESS
RELEVANCE	,449			
BRAND FIT	,532	,628		
DISTINCTIVENESS	,798	,366	,372	
UNDERSTANDING	,380	,625	,684	-,045

Table 4: Pearson correlations between creative dimension scores based on commercial database (bold correlations: significant below 99%)

This is reflected in Table 4, which shows that almost all creative dimensions display a positive and significant coherence. It is also interesting that this relation is strongest for the two dimensions that already have the strongest influence on GRP returns (likeability and distinctiveness).

Which is why, in order to give as complete of a picture as possible of how the effectiveness of media use is determined by the creative strength of the used creatives, we once again performed a simulation.

This simulation is similar to the previous one, with the difference that we now **simultaneously** manipulated the scores of the commercial on four evaluation dimensions (likeability, distinctiveness, understanding and brand fit), whilst we always left in the dimension for which we did not find both a main effect and an interaction effect at an average level (50th percentile / "benchmark").

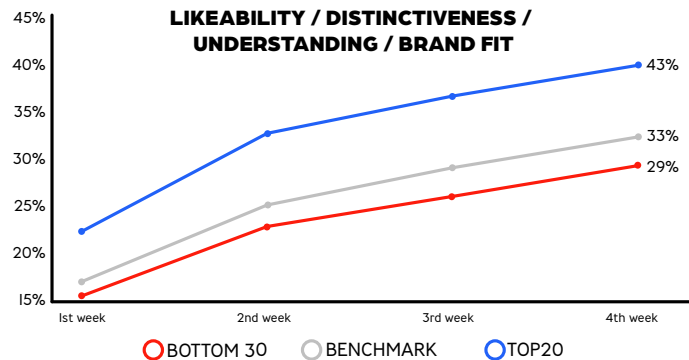


Figure 3: Differences in simulated recognition scores in function of creative strength (likeability + distinctiveness + understanding + brand fit, based on a 4-weekly campaign with 100 GRPs per week)

Figure 3 shows the results of this simulation, and shows that a TV commercial that scores at the top 20 level on likeability, distinctiveness, understanding and brand fit, with the same number of GRPs achieves a 14 percentage points higher (and therefore 50% higher!) recognition score (43%) than a TV commercial that lags behind on all these aspects at bottom 30 level (29%).

Reversing this result implies that for a creatively strong commercial fewer GRPs need to be used than for a creatively weak commercial to still achieve the same degree of recognition. Figure 4 shows this relation graphically, based on the simulation described above, calculating how many GRPs in total (based on a 4-week distribution) are needed to achieve different recognition scores. This happened for three scenarios: a TV commercial that scores poorly (bottom 30 level), average (benchmark level) or good (top 20 level) on likeability, distinctiveness, understanding and brand fit.

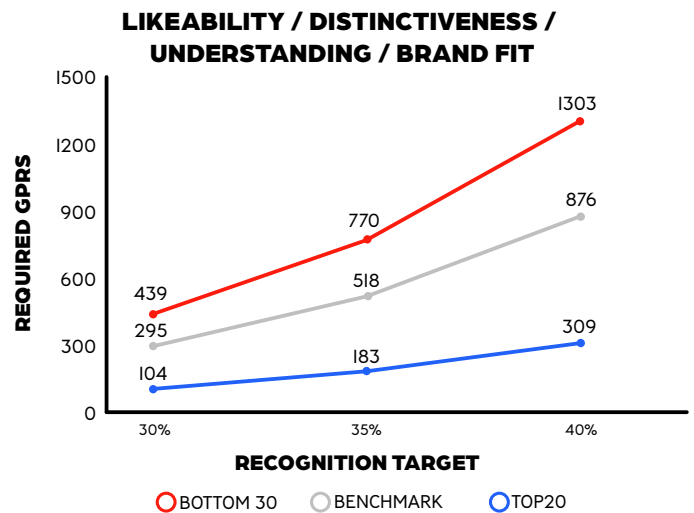


Figure 4: Differences in required GRP input in function of creative strength (likeability + distinctiveness + understanding + brand fit)

We can clearly see which savings can be achieved when a commercial is creatively strong - an improvement of a commercial from benchmark level to top 20 level on all creative dimensions, for example, means that at least 60% (!) fewer GRPs have to be spent. to have the same recognition effect.

CREATIVE OPTIMISATION: A VALUABLE INVESTMENT!

The results of this study show that the extent to which the use of advertising in the media leads to a lasting effect on the memory of consumers does indeed depend on the creative strength of these statements. Firstly, we see a connection with **distinctiveness** (a striking and distinctive commercial attracts more attention during a commercial break, and is therefore better remembered). We also see an even stronger link with the degree to which a commercial is considered to be fun (**likeability**).

Other factors that play a role are related to the ease with which the consumer can place the commercial in his or her existing memory structures - **understanding** and (via moderating effects) brand fit. At the same time, a striking result is that our analyses showed that **relevance** has no influence on the degree of recognition that results from the use of a commercial. However, it should be noted that this does not mean that the degree to which a commercial is relevant or not, does not play any role in determining its effectiveness. After all, [previous](#) research has also found that although relevance is not related to recognition, there are connections with longer-term effects - such as influencing consumers' attitudes.

The determining role that the creative dimensions play in the return that is used from each GRP, is considerable. For example, various simulations based on the analysis results showed that with a TV campaign (of average size in terms of media use), an almost 50% higher recognition score can be achieved if the commercial's creative strength scores at Top 20 level (compared to Bottom 30 level). Our analysis results therefore underline the importance of creative optimisation and the pursuit of the absolute top. After all, if the same effect can be achieved with less than half of the original media expenditure by improving overall creative strength from "average" to the Top 20 level, this is certainly a goal for marketers to pursue!

PRACTICAL TOOLS FOR MARKETERS

On the one hand, the analyses show that there is a very strong relationship between the assessment of advertising, and on the other hand the potential effect of the advertisement. But: how can these insights best be put into practice by marketers? We recommend taking the following steps:

1. Implement a new working method for every creative, in which the optimisation of their creative strength is at the forefront. We assume that an unoptimised creative will score about average (at benchmark level) - with the result that for an average campaign the recognition will lag 10 percentage points behind top creatives, and more than twice as many GRPs would be needed to make up for this backlog.
2. With the above in mind, determine the creative goals to be met in order to achieve the desired return from each GRP. The KPIs to which these objectives must relate, depend on the one hand on the creative aspects that determine the strongest return, and on the other hand on the goal of the campaign: brand building (likeability, distinctiveness) and / or brand activation (brand fit, understanding).
3. Integrate these goals into every creative briefing. However, this does not mean that creativity should be guided, but it does mean that the creative agency knows which creative aspects are important - and which are not. However, avoid using "tricks" to improve certain scores - creativity is a particularly complex art, and only with the right creativity can creatives be improved.
4. Test the creative, and **only** use the creative if the previously set creative objectives have actually been achieved. If this is not the case, it is important that the creative is (further) adjusted. It is important to involve the creative agency in the implementation once again - this is the only way to actually (further) improve the creative strength of creatives.

