Word Superiority Effect? Exploring the Visual Execution of Messages in Advertising

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ABSTRACT

This research examines how the visual execution of messages in advertising influences message recall frequency. Drawing upon dual-coding theory and the picture superiority effect, the study compares messages conveyed through images, words and dual-mode executions (words and images combined). Over 10 waves, a total of 2,426 consumers were exposed to 40 television advertisements. A message recall question generated 97,040 open-ended responses that were thematically coded into 958 messages. Each message was coded based on how it was visually executed (image, word or dual-mode). Message recall frequency was estimated using Generalised Estimating Equations (GEE) with negative binomial models. Results show that dual-mode execution produces the highest recall, outperforming both image-only and word-only message execution. However, while both word and image execution of messages increase message recall frequency, messages conveyed through words produce substantially stronger effects than image execution. This indicates a boundary condition of the picture superiority effect and has implications for how to effectively execute messages in advertising.

Keywords: Messages, Advertising, Picture Superiority Effect