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Measuring The Value Of Personalised Digital Creative

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IPSOS VIEWS

GAME CHANGERS

Ipsos

Ipsos and Nestlé partnered on a learning journey about personalised digital creative and its impact on attention and brand measures in different categories. This paper is a summary of the first stage of this journey using banner advertising for the food and coffee categories in the UK. It lays the groundwork for further experimentation with more sophisticated targeting and personalised creative materials.

In this first pilot programme we learned that personalisation to the individual does not guarantee attention, but can have some impact on the brand relationship with some types of target audiences. Creative interest remains key to generating attention vs. mirroring the individual and their values. We also learned that the higher the level of personalisation, the more granular the message delivery tends to be. Marketers should consider whether the job to do is to communicate a broad message and therefore personalise less, or a more complex message and personalise more.

INTRODUCTION

Personalisation of creative online will become more challenging as the capability to deliver it comes more under scrutiny. Marketers need to understand how to derive maximum value from personalised creative, and ultimately whether it's worth it – in terms of cost, type of audience and above all, achieving the creative objective.

There are several ways to look at personalisation, including tailoring of experiences and products on a one-to-one basis. For clarity, this paper will reflect solely on the personalisation of online advertising in a non-CRM/first party data context.

There is some unease over the blurring of the lines between relevance and surveillance when it comes to the capabilities required to deliver personalised creative. While new technologies enable marketers to reach more and more specific audiences, it is clear from growing regulation and consumer pushback that just because you can, doesn't always mean you should. Brands continually tread water on brand safety, doing the right thing by consumers and keeping on the right side of the law.

"In this context, brands are keen to understand whether investing in personalised creative is worthwhile and can deliver greater advertising effectiveness vs. more generic creative."

Evidence on the value of personalisation from the industry is mixed. While many claim positive benefits, there is also a body of evidence that refutes the efficacy of re-targeting. Results from a study published by the Marketing Sciences Institute in 2011[1] with work done in the travel category revealed that on average, there was no benefit to be gained from designing ads that reflected a consumer's specific interests. The only exception was when consumers were retargeted with specific information when they were looking for detailed information. Given the outcome for travel, it does beg the question on how categories with less defined online purchase journeys (e.g. grocery) should approach personalisation.

We do acknowledge that there will be a great deal of change coming over the next couple of years to the entire targeting and measurement ecosystem with the imminent decline of the third-party cookie. This means that different models of targeting may emerge that are (hopefully) more privacy compliant such as aggregate or impression level data. For example, device IDs could signify a more affluent or safety conscious consumer based on the make of phone or type of browser used. The broad implication being the ability to target in a more granular way will likely be more challenging.

PREMISE

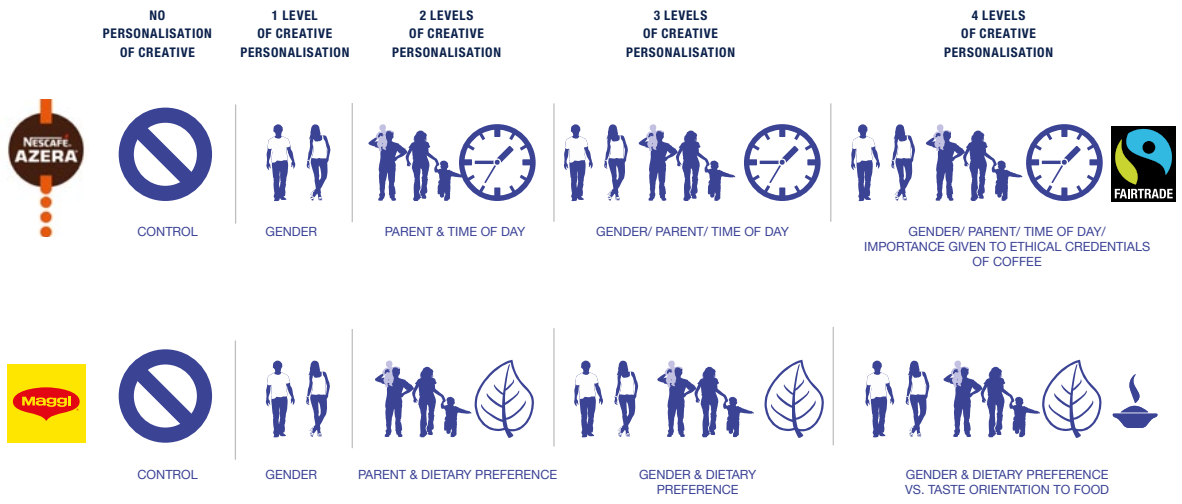
Currently, granular targeting is being offered to clients at relatively premium pricing. This premium comes from a higher number of links in the transactional chain vs. traditional media trading. Analytics company Ebiquity estimates that roughly $0.15-$0.20 of every $1 reaches a real audience in an ADMAP article 'The real cost of personalisation'.[2] Ipsos sought to understand whether personalisation of creative to individuals did indeed offer brands bang for their buck in terms of attention and impact. We partnered with Nestlé to help develop an initial hypothesis with a base level of evidence which we plan to expand on going forward. We aimed to provide initial thinking on how much to tailor ads, what types of variables were most relevant and, most importantly, whether the trade-off between the money spent in creating and serving dynamic creative was worth the effort.

THE RESEARCH

Ipsos designed research to measure the impact of digital banner ads in two of Nestlé's core categories in the UK – coffee and food. Ipsos' digital ad measurement approach Connect:Digital was used to run the experiment. Connect: Digital uses ad replacement technology to serve creative to respondents while they browse live social platforms in a natural way. This method allows advertisers to evaluate creative effects on YouTube, Facebook, Instagram and non-native websites. For this experiment, we used the website browsing context as it was best suited to serving the digital display ads.

We used an experimental design, setting up five cells per category, each featuring a different level of personalisation – no personalisation and between 1-4 levels.

Figure 1 Connect:Digital live website in-context study, conducted online in the UK



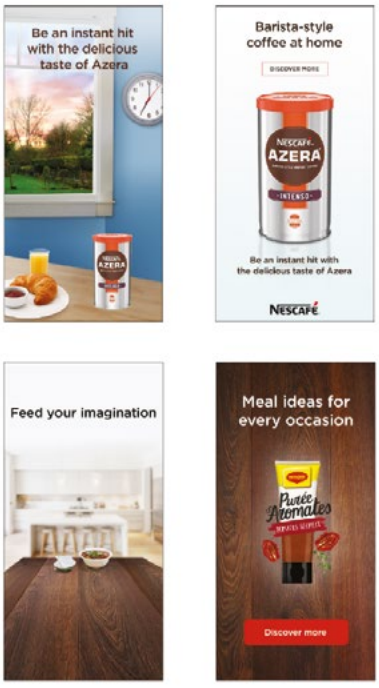
Source: *Connect:Digital Live website in-context study, conducted online in the UK, n=1500 per category (n=300 people per level of personalisation)*

Personalisation variables that were common across categories were demographic; namely gender and whether the individual was a parent or not. The remaining variables were tailored to category relevant or lifestyle criteria such as type of diet (vegetarian or not), time of day, whether taste or health were more important to the individual and whether the ethical credentials of brands mattered strongly to their purchase decisions. Each cell was controlled for the number of brand buyers (see figure 1).

Several combinations of animated skyscraper banner ads were generated (see figure 2) – from neutral to highly personalised. For example, if a respondent in the coffee category survey was allocated to cell four and identified as female, with kids and was taking the study in the morning – she would be served an ad with a female character and with a message tailored to time out for herself and featuring a morning/breakfast image. The aim was to be as evocative and relatable as possible based on these variables.

Figure 2 Examples of different levels of personalised creative banner ads used in the research

From neutral creative…



…to heavily personalised creative…

Source: *Connect:Digital Live website in-context study, conducted online in the UK, n=1500 per category (n=300 people per level of personalisation)*

“Ipsos research shows that the presence of brand assets is strongly linked to positive branded attention effects, more so than just directly showing or talking about the brand.”

IMPLICATIONS FOR BRANDED ATTENTION

Branded attention as measured by the Ipsos Connect: Digital approach is the ability for the viewer to remember the ad when prompted with it after their browsing session (Visibility) and spontaneously attribute the ad to the brand (Brand Link). One of the most surprising findings from this study was that personalising the creative to the individual did not vary the levels of attention paid to the banners. In both coffee and food legs, branded attention did not improve with the increasing levels of personalisation to the individual based on their gender, life stage, shopping preferences or time of day.

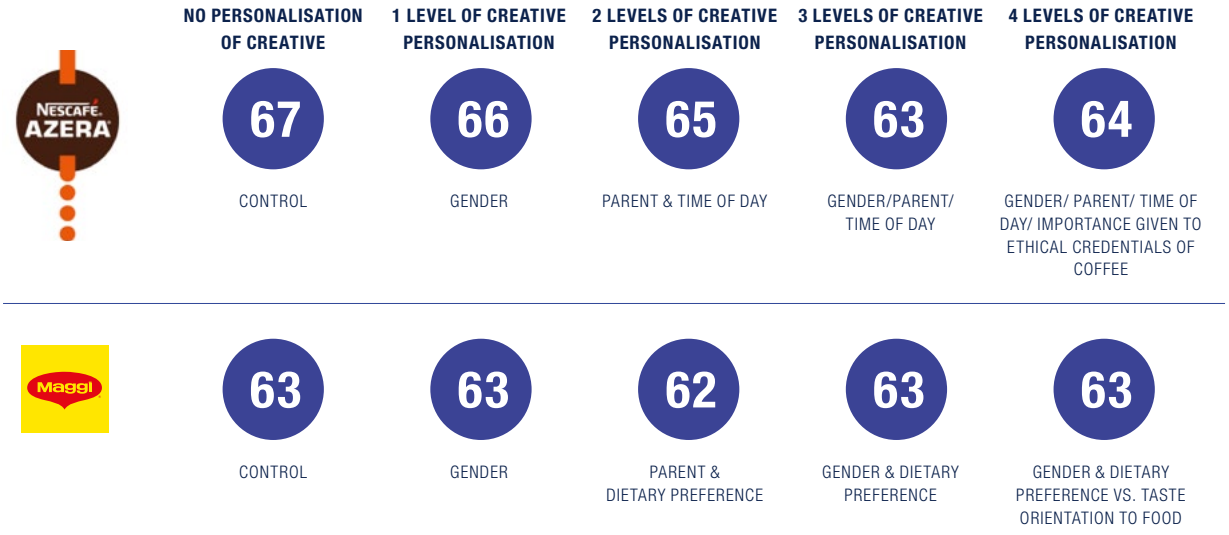
The implication for brands is that personalising to the individual viewer does not guarantee better attention. The ad still needs a creative 'hook' which means thinking about how you use the real estate in a display banner in an appropriate way. Rather than using the space to enhance relatability to the individual, you may be better served by enhancing the space in a way that disrupts browsing behaviour to capture the viewer's attention.

Ipsos research shows that the presence of brand assets is strongly linked to positive branded attention effects, more so than just directly showing or talking about the brand.[3]

A great example of creative use of targeting tech for consumer benefit was the 2015 Post-it campaign, 'The banner that makes you like banners'.[4] It showed Post-it notes you could write messages on that then followed you around the web while you browsed. These messages helpfully reminded you to book tickets, buy milk or whatever you had jotted down. The campaign won a 2016 Webby award, a D&AD wood Pencil and a 2015 Bronze Clio. The Star Wars Rogue One delivery of trailers based on identifiable audience segments from their trailer views is also a masterful use of personalisation. Disney personalised trailers by dialling up a theme that would resonate most with specific audiences – pitching it as a heist movie to some and a modern thriller to others.[5] Disney were able to deliver a 29% increase in booking attributed to media and won the Gold Award for best use of data in the WARC media awards 2017.

Figure 3 Branded attention scores by level of creative personalisation

Scores are indexed to UK benchmarks for digital display advertising (100 = country average)



Source: *Connect:Digital Live website in-context study, conducted online in the UK, n=1500 per category (n=300 people per level of personalisation)*

INFLUENCE OF AD EXPOSURE ON BRAND RELATIONSHIPS (BRAND IMPACT)

Personalisation was seen to have some impact on the brand relationship albeit in one of the categories - coffee. This impact had less to do with the degree of personalisation and more to do with a specific target being addressed. In the coffee leg, one level of personalisation (gender) saw an uplift in brand image. Men responded better to creative that was more personalised to them and featured a male protagonist. Women responded the same regardless of the protagonist (or lack thereof) in the ad.

Figure 4 Brand relationship scores by level of creative personalisation

Scores shown on purchase intention, average brand image attribution, brand performance relative to the category and level of closeness felt relative to brands in the category

MEN

	Not personalised	1 Level	2 levels	3 levels	4 levels
PURCHASE INTENT % yes definitely/ yes probably	51%	60%	56%	57%	57%
IMAGE (average attribution accross 5 statements)	58%	70% ↑	65%	64%	68%
	Not personalised	**1 Level**	**2 levels**	**3 levels**	**4 levels**
PERFORMANCE (Mean)	6.28	6.71	7.14 ↑	6.69	6.93 ↑
CLOSENESS (Mean)	5.37	5.92	6.04	6.07	6.1 ↑

Source: *Connect:Digital Live website in-context study, conducted online in the UK, n=1500 per category (n=300 people per level of personalisation)*

The implication for brands in this instance is to consider more carefully how the audiences in your campaign are being created. Some types of audiences may be more responsive to personalised creative than others, taking the example of men in the coffee leg of this study. It would be best to test this in advance of launching your campaign to understand the effectiveness vs. spend trade-offs to help better manage costs.

Brands should also consider how to capture people at the 'right time'. We saw in this case that coffee ads personalised to and served at breakfast and afternoon occasions did not alter impact – it will be useful to layer on motivation and the right need states to the personalisation criteria assess the outcome in future experiments. This is something we seek to explore further with Nestlé.

In previous research conducted by Ipsos for Birds Eye (a brand of frozen foods),[6] ads were served between 5pm-11pm when they were most likely to be hungry and in the mood for a fish finger sandwich. The hypothesis that reaching people in the right need state is more likely to lead to activation was confirmed by the finding that 33% of hungry people who were exposed to the ad said they wanted to "eat fish fingers right now" compared with just 12% of those who were not hungry. The campaign also drove brand effects: 43% of hungry people who saw the ad said they'd buy Birds Eye Fish Fingers next time they shopped, compared with 33% of hungry people who didn't see it.

LEARNING FROM CREATIVE DIAGNOSTICS ON THE BANNER ADS

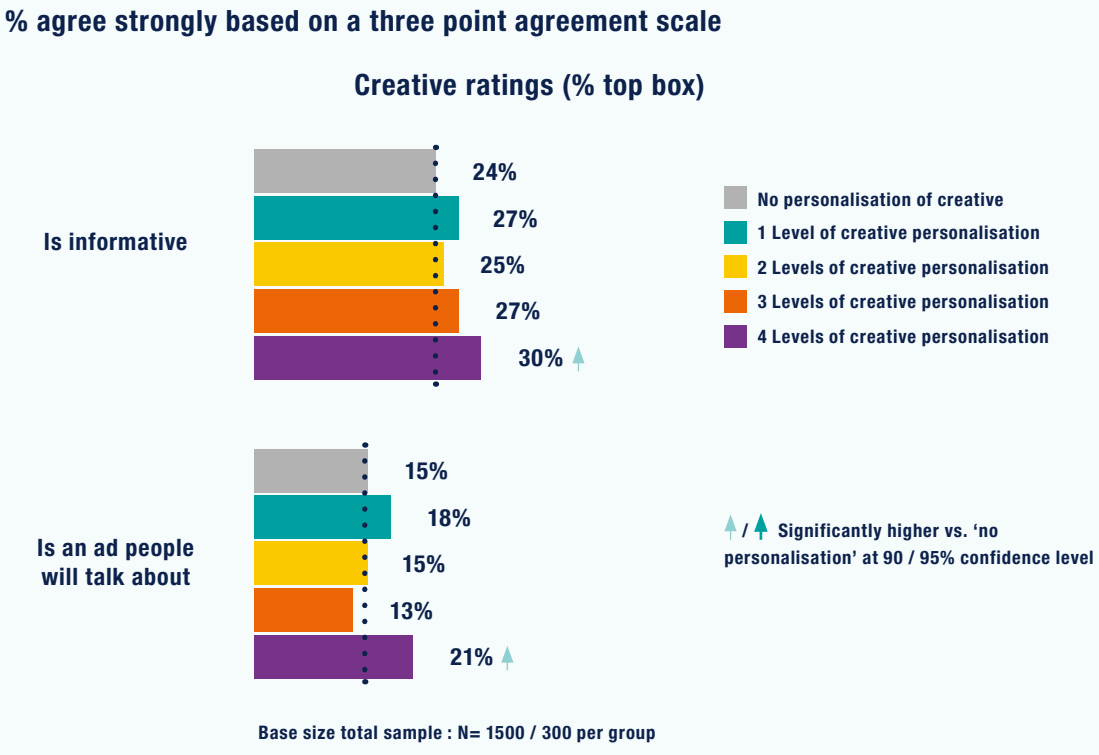
Once data on attention and brand impact was gathered, we re-exposed respondents to the creative to get a little more granularity on how the creative was working.

It was clear from reading the responses that creative objectives truly need to remain at the heart of the personalisation strategy. This means thinking about whether you have more complex or simple information to convey in order to achieve your campaign goals.

Creative principles observed from the research were that:

- Any personalisation contributed positively to how believable the ads were
- Fewer levels of personalisation meant the product was more front and centre and there was less clutter in the ad real estate. This worked well for a more single-minded objective such as generating appetite appeal in the food category.
- High levels of personalisation meant more elements in the copy. These versions were rated as more informative and likely to get talked about.

Figure 5 Creative ratings given to the different levels of personalised creative



Source: Base size total sample: N = 1500/300 per group

As an illustration from the food category, non-personalised creative was more likely to have simpler, more generic playback of the key message for "That it helps to make tasty meals." Meanwhile, more personalised creative had richer playback from the featured content such as "That it is a tasty vegetarian product that makes a meal easy to put together." Or "Will make chicken tasty, and it's healthy" (this was personalised based on the diet of the individual).

Implications for brands in terms of how messages are received again come back to creative principles and thinking carefully about what and how much you want to communicate. As with any medium used, beware overly complex messaging as people will switch off.

Figure 6 Main message take out

Open ended feedback on what consumers felt the main message of the ad was

Maggi

NO PERSONALISATION OF CREATIVE

High level broad message playback

"That Maggi sauces will help you make great food.

"That it helps to make tasty meals.

4 LEVELS OF CREATIVE PERSONALISATION BASED ON GENDER/PARENT/ DIETARY PREFERENCE/ HEALTH VS. TASTE

More granular and specific message playback

"That it is a tasty vegetarian product that makes a meal easy to put together.

"It would make chicken taste great and improve your cooking.

"Will make chicken tasty, and it's healthy.

Source: Connect:Digital Live website in-context study, conducted online in the UK, n=1500 per category (n=300 people per level of personalisation)

FINAL THOUGHTS

Strategy needs to encompass the campaign idea, audience planning and personalisation rather than leading with it. This then needs to work in tandem with attention-grabbing and interesting creative executions. Weaker creative will not be made more effective by personalisation, but personalisation can help strong creative work harder for you when used effectively.

For example, by connecting to a specific requirement for information, need state or phase in the consumer journey.

This experiment has presented us with a good starting point to expand the evidence base for how marketers should think about personalisation of the creative.

THREE QUESTIONS FOR YOUR PERSONALISATION STRATEGY

What is the cost implication of having several levels of personalisation?

Given the level of attention paid to a medium, does the investment in development and targeting outweigh the benefits? In a paper Ipsos produced with Lumen, we found that in live web browsing 82% of ads that are technically viewable don't get viewed.[7]

What audiences do you want to reach and how are they split out in terms of layering of campaign messages?

Does a personalised approach matter to them? We saw from our initial findings that men respond better to the brand when the ads are more tailored to them and parents to a lesser degree.

And finally, have you led with creative objectives vs. personalisation ones?

The research showed that leading with personalisation goals to increase relatability to the individual and their context did not have any effect on attention paid. Instead, lead with creative objectives by:

- Adapting the execution to the viewing behaviour of the platform it is being shown in
- Focusing on generating enough interest to capture attention (vs. relatability)
- Making brand cues prominent
- Having a clear message and call to action

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