

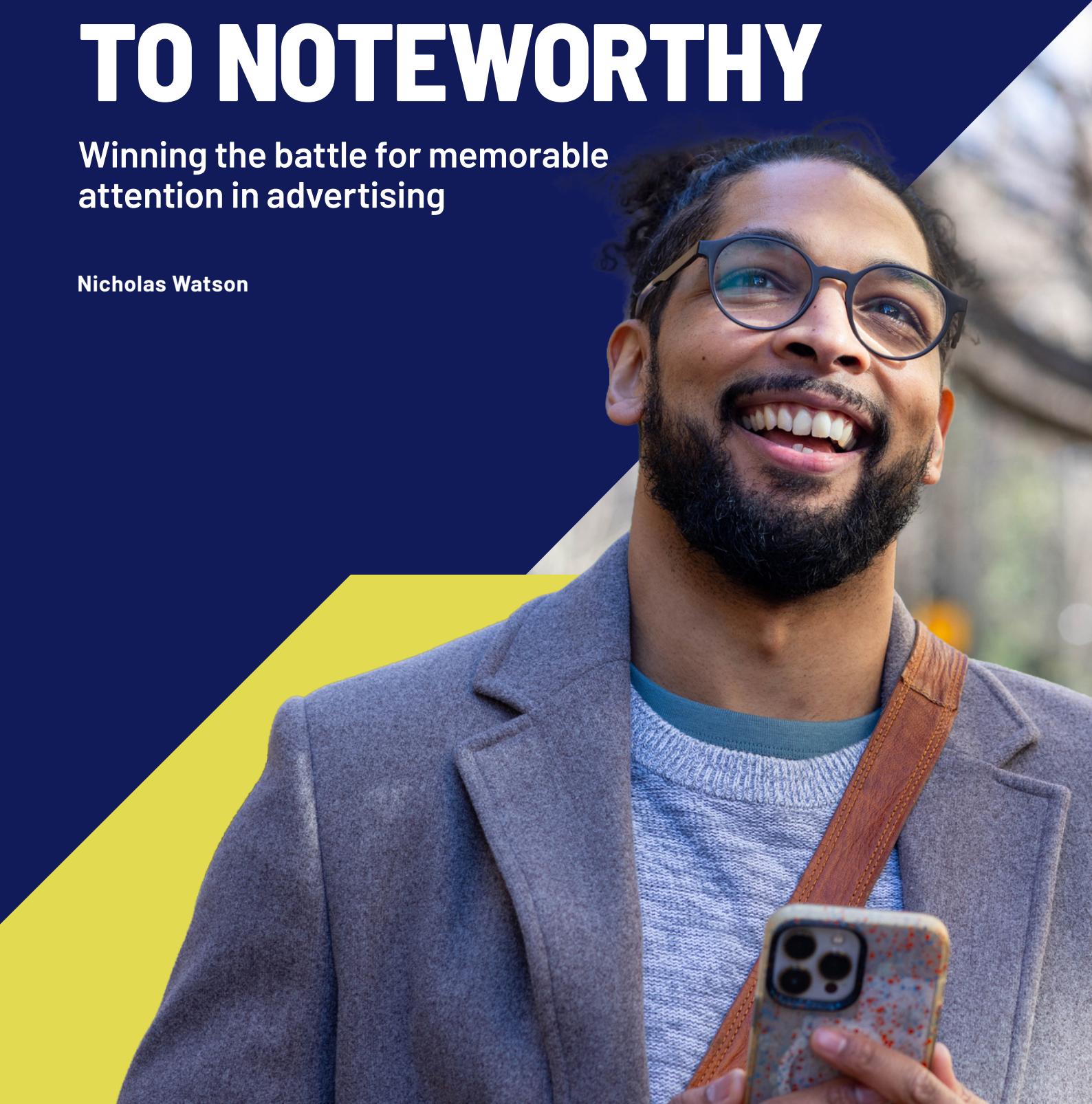


IPSOS VIEWS

FROM NOISE TO NOTEWORTHY

Winning the battle for memorable
attention in advertising

Nicholas Watson





For advertising to work, it must grab attention, be encoded, remembered, and linked back to the brand.

The party test

Imagine you're at a crowded party. Music is pumping, glasses are clinking, and the room is buzzing with conversation. Dozens of voices compete for your focus, but suddenly someone across the room says something that piques your interest. Instinctively, you turn. In that moment, amidst all the noise, your attention is captured.

Advertising works the same way. Brands are constantly trying to be noticed in a crowded environment. But it's not enough for an ad to simply appear in someone's feed or play before their favourite show. For advertising to work, it must grab attention, be encoded, remembered, and linked back to the brand. Something that we refer to, at Ipsos, as gaining "memorable attention". Without it, ads and campaigns risk slipping by unnoticed, never securing the foothold in memory that they need to build long-term perceptions of a brand and influence short-term actions.

This paper uses Ipsos and industry-led data to analyse the concept of memorable attention. This considers not only ad viewability (eyes on screen), but also whether it is retained in memory. We provide evidence of the decline in memorable attention and underscore the urgent need for advertisers to take action. By detailing the steps advertisers can take, we aim to provide guidance around crafting strong creatives and optimising the media mix within campaigns that can win the battle for memorable attention and positively shape short-term behaviours and long-term brand perceptions.

The changing media landscape

Let's start with the backdrop. Global ad spend hit a trillion US dollars in 2024¹, and almost 70% of that went to digital – a figure forecast to rise to 80% by 2030. The growth in digital can, in part, be attributed to the fact that advertising has become more accessible to more businesses – consumers are no longer just being reached online by large, traditional advertisers, but by small local brands as well.

The evolving media landscape continues to present new opportunities for advertisers, offering more outlets for advertising, greater precision, and more ways to engage with audiences. Over the past few years, advertisers are investing more in short-form content (TikTok, Instagram Reels, YouTube Shorts), social commerce, and influencer partnerships. These formats are designed against the context of meeting people where they are seeking to be entertained, inspired, connected and sometimes even directly shopping from. However, these platforms and ad formats have also often been optimised for short-term performance metrics, such as engagement and conversions, rather than longer-term brand building.

At the same time, the proliferation of platforms and formats has introduced fragmentation. Every new platform and format makes media planning, budgeting, and effectiveness measurement more complex and, critically, fragmentation can make it harder for any single message to stand out and be remembered. It's no surprise that 88% of Chief Marketing Officers (CMOs) now see attention measurement (did people genuinely look at and pay attention to my ads?) as a critical measure of their media activities².

Attention matters, it's on the CMO's table because, amongst all the noise, they want to know how campaigns can cut through, grab attention, and build brand memories that will make a positive impact for their brand. They want to avoid the fragmentation trap of developing lots of different creatives to chase specific audiences with different messages across different media, and focus on holistic campaigns where media, creatives and audience targeting work to build upon the campaign story – positively impacting key brand objectives. When we see an advert on TV, YouTube or Netflix, are the creative teams working together to create a positive impression of the brand? Does the whole exceed the sum of its parts?

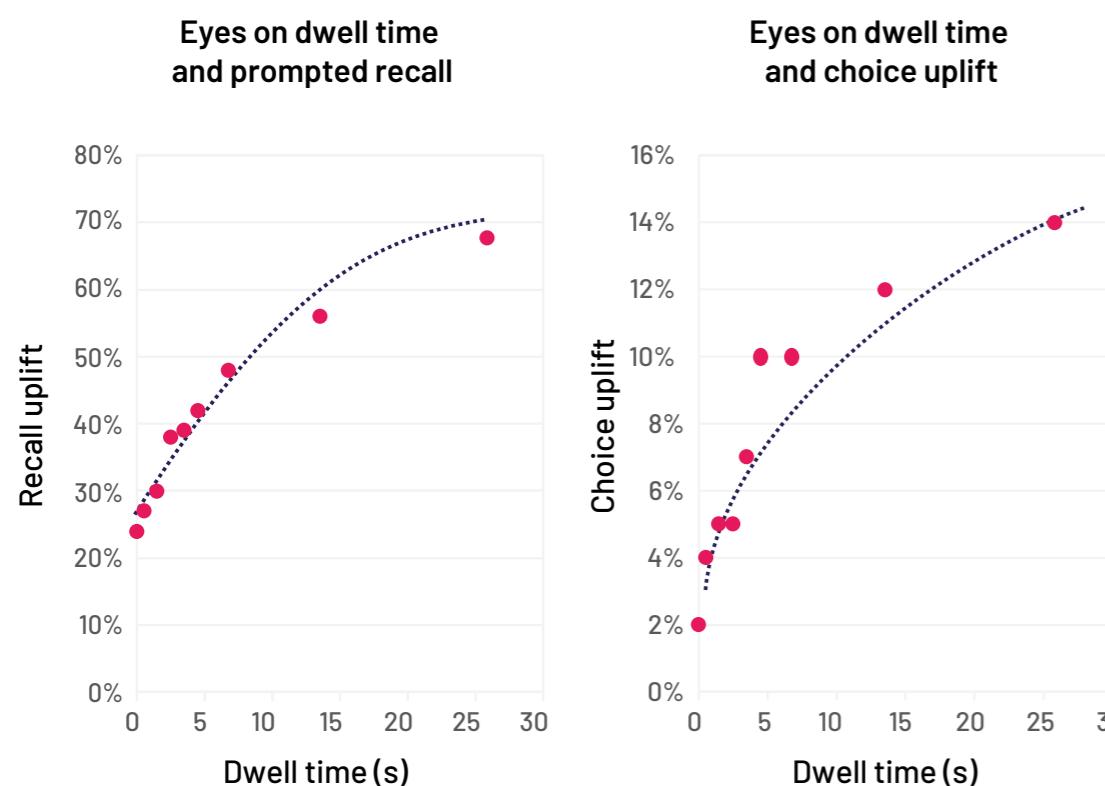
The attention battleground

At Ipsos, we regard attention as foundational for achieving brand impact goals. This importance is rooted in the concept of predictive processing, as explored by cognitive scientists like Jakob Hohwy and Anil Seth, as well as insights from our *Dancing with Duality* paper³, which focuses on how consumers often make decisions in a “mindless” state, driven by habits and subconscious influences. Research shows that when an ad captures our attention, it’s often because it disrupts expectations. Our brains are prediction machines, constantly filtering what we see. Ads that align too closely with

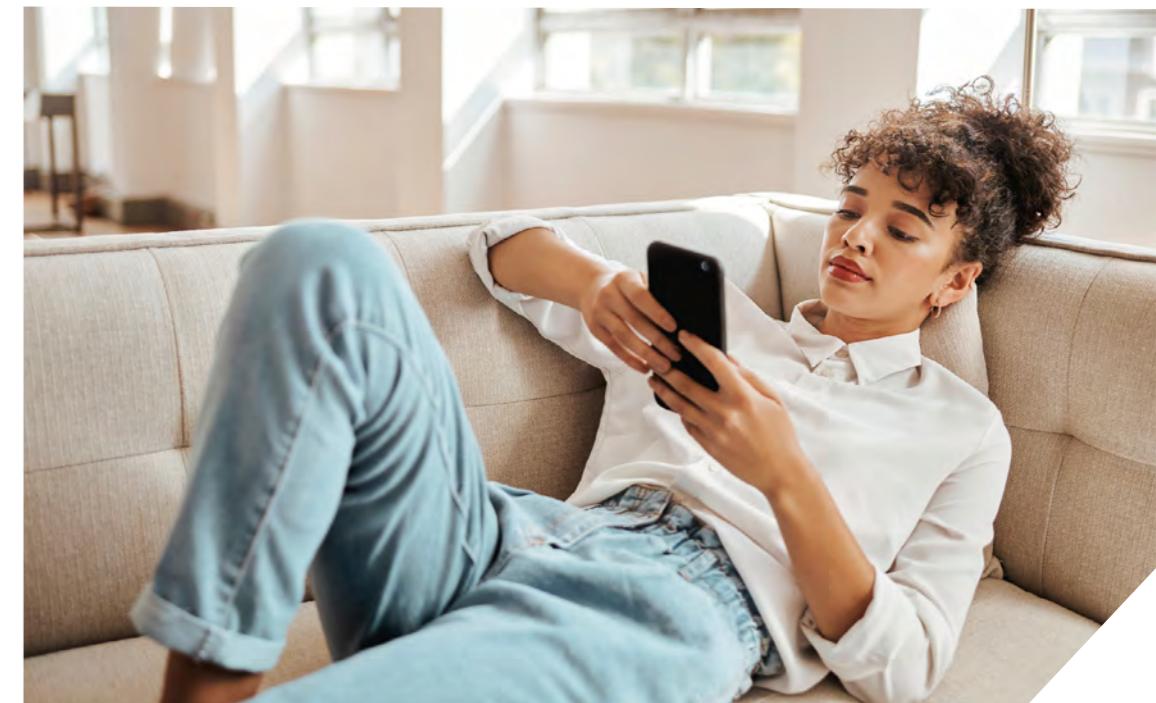
what we expect are often ignored. Ads that diverge – that surprise, delight, or interrupt – force us to pay attention and process. It’s at this point the ads need to make an impact, they need to hold that attention and ensure they deliver the intended message.

Evidence backs this up: Teads and Lumen found a direct correlation between “eyes-on” attention and metrics like ad recognition and choice uplift⁴. Presence isn’t enough, you need to capture and hold attention to get the payback of memory and brand impact.

Figure 1: Eyes on dwell time



Source:
Teads and Lumen



However, the stark reality is that few ads disrupt our expectations and hold our attention. Research by Amplified Intelligence showed that **memory starts to form after about 2.5 seconds of active attention**⁵. Anything less, and the ad exposure is unlikely to stick. The problem? **85% of ads fail to cross this 2.5-second threshold**. That means the vast majority of advertising exposures never create the memories needed to drive brand outcomes.

This is the battlefield: across a crowded landscape, how can advertisers transform impressions from fleeting glances into sustained attention, that sticks in consumers’ minds and has a positive impact on the brand?



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Here's the wake-up call: today, advertisers must spend eight times more to achieve the same level of recognition they achieved in 2012.

The recognition crisis

If this all feels challenging, our own Ipsos database shows just how urgent the problem has become. We use survey recognition as our measurement to assess which ads not only capture attention in the moment but are also remembered for a period of time after that exposure – what we refer to as memorable attention.

Our in-market communications database reveals a concerning trend. Recognition has been declining steadily since 2012. Fewer people remember ads today compared to a decade ago. Although an increase in Gross Rating Points (GRPs) behind an ad can boost recognition, this

trend has weakened since 2012, likely due in part to the rise of second screening, whereby viewers split their attention between TV and other devices (see Figure 2).

Here's the wake-up call: today, advertisers must spend eight times more to achieve the same level of recognition they achieved in 2012 (see Figure 3).

Recognition, the gateway to brand impact, has become vastly more expensive to buy. The implication is clear: you cannot just spend your way to strong recognition.

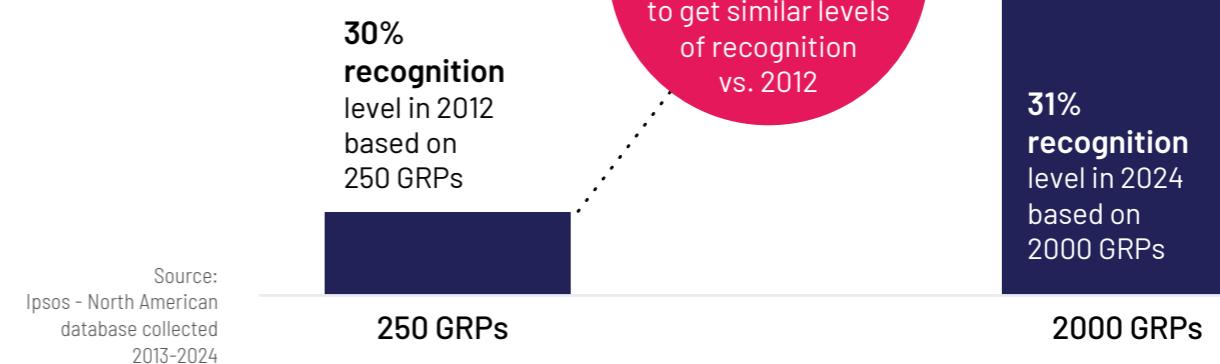
Figure 2: An increase in GRPs does boost recognition, but since 2012 this trend has weakened

■ 2012 ■ 2024



Source:
Ipsos - North American
database collected
2013-2024

Figure 3: 250 GRPs in 2012 gets you the same recognition as 2000 GRPs in 2024

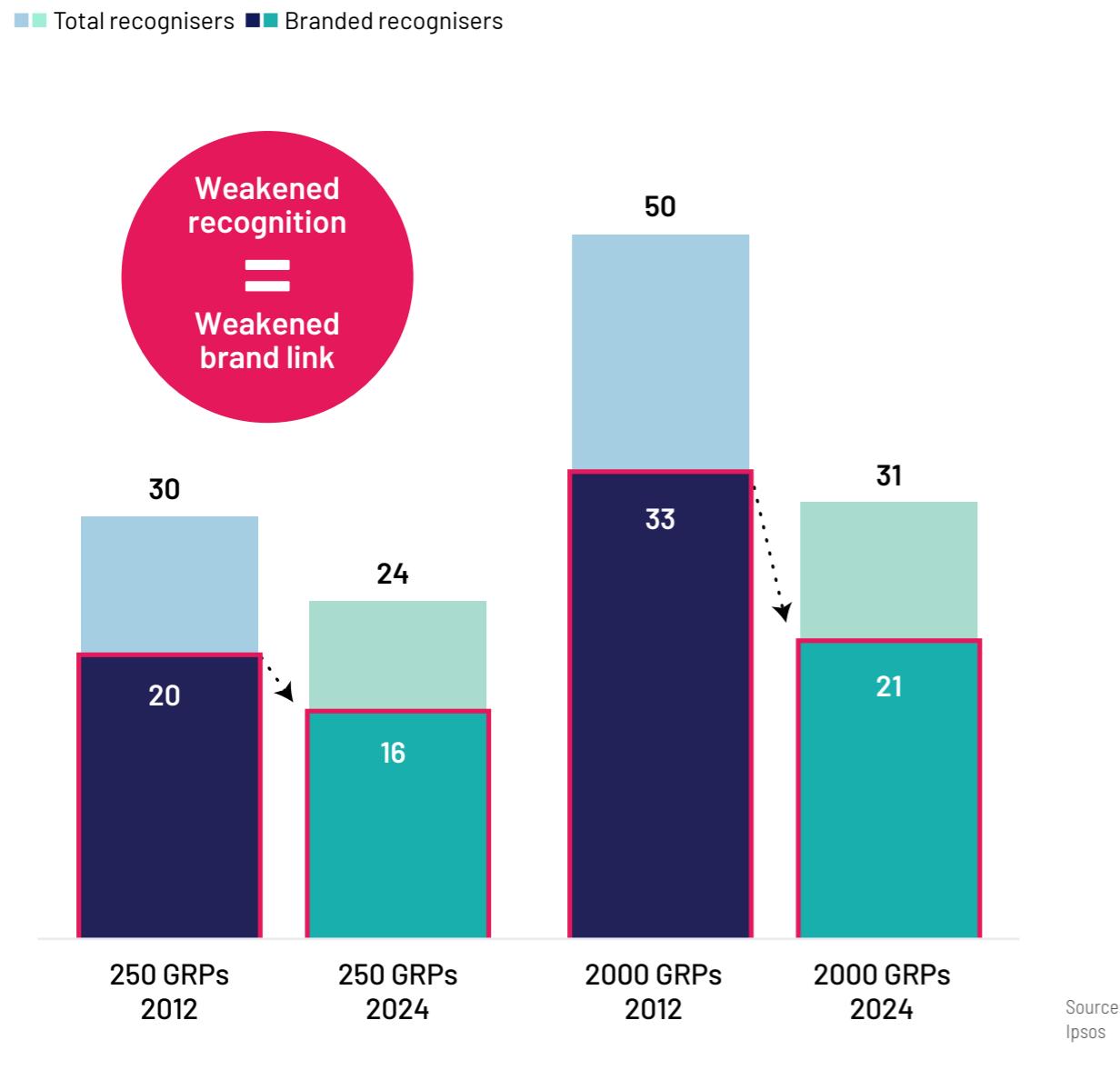


Source:
Ipsos - North American
database collected
2013-2024

But recognition is only half the challenge. Data from our database also shows that approximately two in three of those who recognise an ad can correctly attribute it to the right brand. Brand linkage is a critical metric for marketers who need to make sure that their ads not only stand out, but that the memories they generate are linked to their brand, and not to the competition. Although

these "brand link ratios" have remained relatively stable since 2012, fewer people are now both noticing ads and correctly remembering the brand being advertised. This underscores the importance of not only capturing attention but also ensuring that the branding is clear in the ad and in addition the messaging is effectively communicated and reinforced throughout the ad.

Figure 4: Approximately two in three of those who recognise an ad can correctly attribute it to the right brand



How can brands create effective campaigns to win the battle for memorable attention?

If you cannot spend your way to memorable attention, where do brands turn? Here are three tips to

consider across a combination of creativity, branding and media strategy.



Tip #1 Creative: the three dimensions of memorable ads



Creating ads that capture attention is crucial for shaping brand expectations. When it comes to creativity, our Ipsos *Misfits*⁶ research identifies three creative dimensions that drive memory encoding and have the potential to change behaviour, increasing sales lift effects:

01 Creative experience: This links to the ad being seen as unique, entertaining, and inspiring discussions among viewers. Ads that stand out in these ways are more likely to capture attention and leave a lasting impression.

02 Creative ideas: This involves the audience taking something new away that's of value to them. It is not just about new product information, but rather about presenting new choices, lifestyles, or opportunities to the viewer. Such creativity can enhance engagement by offering fresh perspectives.

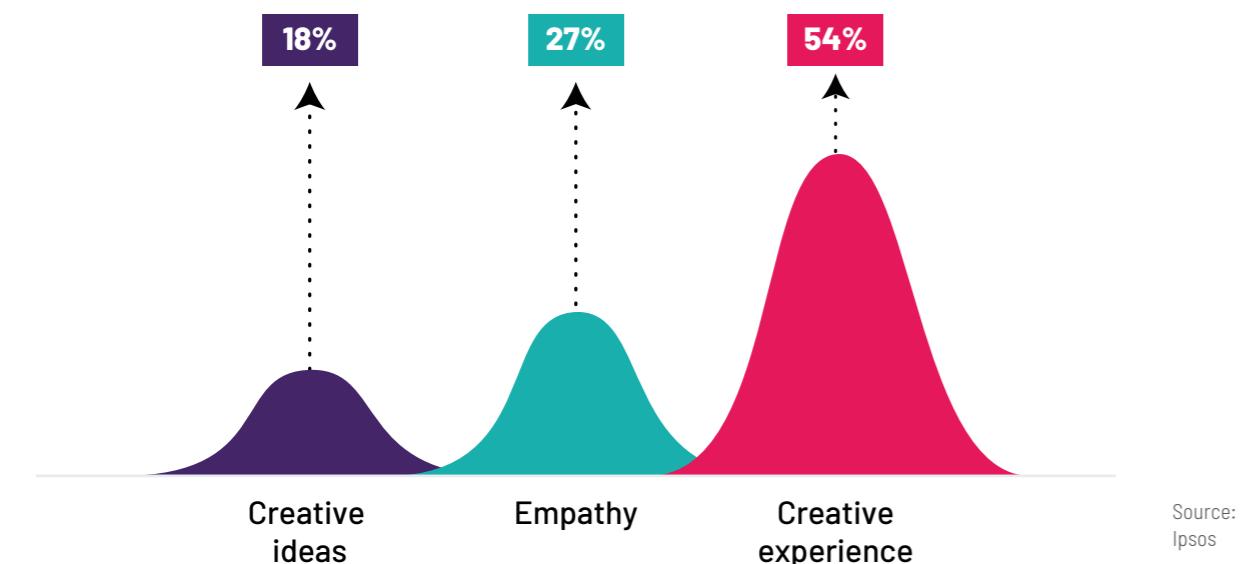
03 Empathy and fitting in: This relates to the audience's belief that the ad is targeted at them, reflecting their world, dreams, and challenges. When viewers see themselves in the ad, it fosters a deeper connection and enhances memorability.

Our findings reveal that the creative experience – viewing an ad as entertaining, unique, and discussion-worthy – strongly correlates with enhanced memory encoding (the extent

to which people remember an ad). This evidence-based measure highlights the importance of ads being distinctive and engaging to ensure they are not only seen but remembered.

Figure 5: A creative experience fuels memory coding

% proportion of variance explained in regression model for memory coding



with KitKats in people's hands. Audiences instantly recognised KitKat and, through that recognition, associated it with the tagline, which itself acted as a subtle, memorable call to action: take a break from your devices. This demonstrates how a strong, well-established brand asset can carry the brand, convey the message,

and drive memorable attention, all without explicitly stating it.

But we also know that only around one in seven brand assets are truly "gold standard" – instantly and uniquely signifying their brand. Advertisers must identify and use the right assets to gain these branding benefits.

Figure 6: KitKat's "Phone Break" outdoor campaign



Click the image to watch the advertisement

Tip #2 Branding: craft and deploy your brand assets



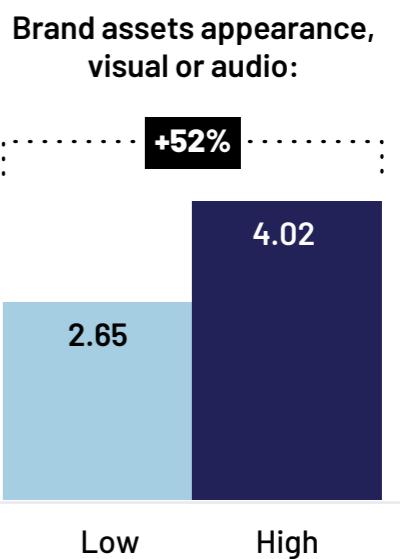
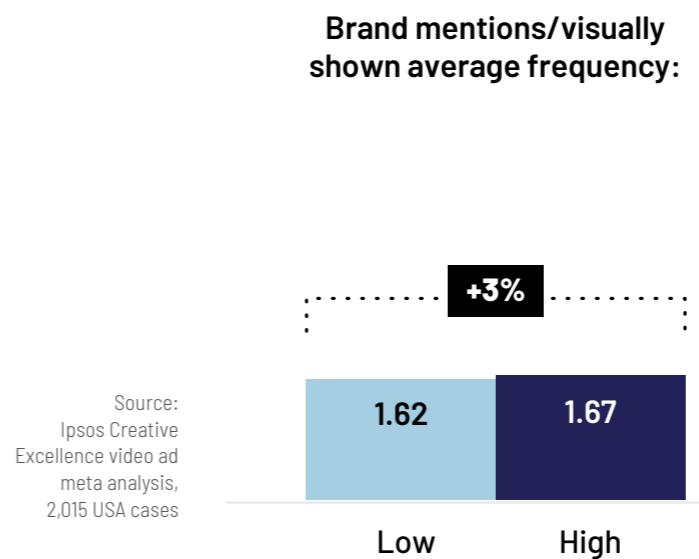
While creative content is undoubtedly a crucial contributor to memorable attention, people need to remember which brand is being advertised – a well-remembered ad is just an entertaining film if people cannot correctly link the ad to the brand. Branding matters.

Our paper, *Power of You*⁷, and our distinctive brand assets database analysis shows that brand assets (like colours, characters, sounds, taglines) are more effective at linking memorable attention to

the brand than simply showing the logo or saying the name. In fact, high-performing ads used brand assets 52% more often than the average (see Figure 7). These sensory cues weave the brand into the story, making it easier to recognise the ad and the brand which is being advertised.

A strong example is KitKat's "Phone Break" outdoor campaign, which won a Cannes Lions Grand Prix. The campaign reimagined KitKat's iconic tagline, "Have a break, have a KitKat", without ever stating it. The creative replaced smartphones

Figure 7: Avg. number of distinctive brand assets used for low and high performing ads on brand attention



Tip #3

Media strategy: maximise the impact of cross media campaigns



Creative and branding are key contributors to memorable attention, but they must work hand-in-hand with media. Campaign success relies on a combination of creative, media strategy, and audience targeting. There is no definitive formula for success, and it is essential for advertisers and media agencies to continually question, refine, and experiment with the right mix of these elements to optimise campaign effectiveness to shape positive brand expectations with future campaigns.

Within our database and as highlighted in our paper, *Campaign Effectiveness Ignited: Unlocking Cross-Media Synergy with TV and Social*⁸, the more diverse media used within a campaign, the greater the likelihood that the campaign will positively impact brand KPIs. Our analysis showed that campaigns including TV in the media

mix achieved 7% higher potential reach and an 11% higher score for memorable attention compared to campaigns not using TV in the media plans.

This underscores TV's continuing strength – not only in extending reach, but also in enhancing memory encoding and amplifying the impact of other media when used together (see Figure 8).

Our analysis also showed when a campaign was recognised across five or more media channels, compared to just one, intent to take action rose by 21% (see Figure 9).

Again, the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. A campaign that is present consistently across multiple touchpoints has more power to drive memorable attention and positive brand impact than single media alone.

Figure 8: Potential reach and memorable attention for campaigns with and without linear TV

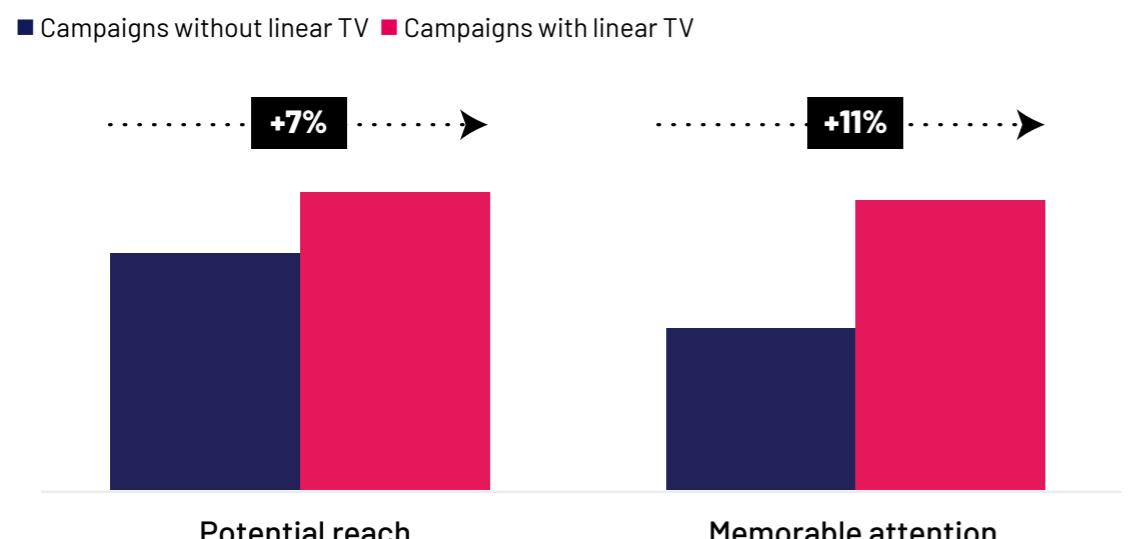
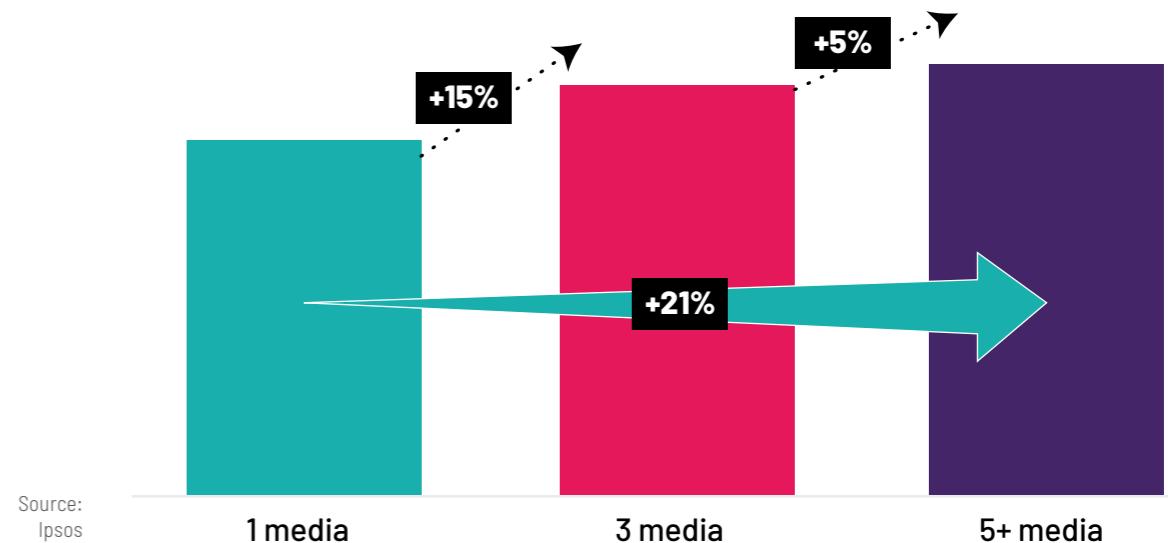


Figure 9: Action intent lift across number of media with campaign attention



Conclusion

In an era where attention is craved by brands, the quest for memorable advertising has never been more critical. However, the evidence is clear: recognition, our measurement of memorable attention, is declining. Today, it costs **eight times more** to buy the same recognition as in 2012.

But this is not a story of despair. It's a story of focus. The challenge for advertisers is to break through the noise and clutter of today's media landscape, not by simply demanding attention, but by earning it through creativity, branding, and media strategy. Brands can still win the memorable attention battle, but only by shifting the levers they pull.

To drive memorable attention and have the best chance of creating brand impact, advertisers must:

- 01 Leverage creativity that is **distinctive, entertaining, and empathetic**.
- 02 Consistently deploy **brand assets** as sensory cues to strengthen branded memories.
- 03 Execute media strategies that **build and amplify** the campaign message to positively impact brand KPIs.

Memorable attention is an essential gateway. Without it, ads cannot shape expectations, build memories, or grow brands. With it, even in a fragmented, distracted world, advertising can still deliver powerful and lasting brand impact.

Ipsos' brand toolkit includes:

Campaign Effect

Understand media effectiveness of your campaigns with Campaign Effect. Track how well your creative captures memorable attention across media platforms and audiences exposed during the campaign. These insights provide a holistic view of how creative, audience, and media combine to drive brand KPIs. Armed with these insights, you can refine media planning, strengthen creative, and maximise the overall impact of your marketing activity on brand.

Brand and Communications Tracking

Track and evaluate the cumulative cut-through and brand impact effectiveness of your communications activity over time. We reveal unique insights into the campaign's ability to achieve memorable attention and connect to the brand. By analysing the brand impact of that memorable attention, we can unpack its ability to lift key brand KPIs. With access to Ipsos's extensive communications database, you can benchmark performance, diagnose creative strengths and weaknesses, and make confident, data-driven decisions for future campaign success.

Brand Distinctive Assets

Unlock the full value of your Brand Distinctive Assets with Ipsos' Multi-Choice Reaction Time (MCRT) technique. MCRT measures the implicit strength of associations consumers have with your assets, going beyond what people say to reveal what they truly recognise, quickly and intuitively. These insights help you prioritise the strongest assets, invest where it matters most, and ensure your brand is both instantly recognisable and consistently memorable across marketing communications.



Endnotes

- 1 WARC (2024). [Global advertising to top \\$1 trillion in 2024, as big five attract most spending.](#)
- 2 Dentsu (2024). [Dentsu CMO Navigator: Media Edition 2024.](#)
- 3 Ipsos (2020). [Dancing with Duality: Achieving brand growth in a mindful and mindless world.](#)
- 4 Teads (2023). [Unveiling the Connection: Attention and Outcomes. A Brand Lift Meta-Analysis Created with Lumen.](#)
- 5 Amplified Intelligence (2022). [Why does the Attention - Memory Threshold Matter?](#)
- 6 Ipsos (2022). [Misfits: How Creativity in Advertising Sparks Brand Growth.](#)
- 7 Ipsos (2020). [The Power of You: Why distinctive brand assets are a driving force of creative effectiveness.](#)
- 8 Ipsos (2025). [Campaign Effectiveness Ignited: Unlocking cross-media synergy with TV and social media.](#)

Further Reading

Be Distinctive. Everywhere.
A report into how only 15% of brand assets are truly distinctive and what you can do about it.

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