Linking Attention to Mental Availability: early findings

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Mental Availability (MA) measures the likelihood of your brand coming to mind, compared to competitors, when a purchase occasion arises. It’s causally related to market share, which means when MA goes up, so will market share. Or put another way, when a brand falls below expected levels of MA, market share decline is imminent. For these reasons, MA is considered a true north measure of brand strength and this study should matter to advertisers who consider their brands’ mental availability a market-based asset.

**Proof Points For Attention Measurement**

We at Amplified Intelligence have been laser focused on reporting the value of attention as a measure of quality reach for a while now. We consistently find that human attention is a pre-cursor to ad impact for both long and short-term metrics.

But sometimes new metrics take extra proof to convince people they will work. And that’s OK. It’s hard to move on from legacy metrics that are ingrained in our buying systems, even though these metrics (like viewability and dwell time), tell us little about whether a human has planted their eyes on an ad.

In our continued commitment to demonstrating the value of attention measurement, in partnership with OMD Worldwide, we decided to consider the relationship between a true north measure of brand strength and a true north measure of human engagement. This study set out to understand whether there’s a direct link between human attention and mental availability gain/loss. And if yes, could lower attention platforms/formats be more damaging to a brands’ mental availability?
How It Worked

A key component of Amplified’s research technology is a customised collection app that each participant downloads onto their device called attentionTRACE. It can turn on the device camera when viewing media in real-time (not simulated portals), and collect facial footage when ads appear. This data is then converted to attention seconds.

Our Models Deliver Three Levels Of Gaze:

- **Active Attention** – looking directly at the ad;
- **Passive Attention** – looking at the mobile screen but not the ad;
- **Non-attention** – looking away from the mobile screen.

The app can also seamlessly replace native ads with test ads without the viewer being aware that the ad wasn’t naturally targeted. This real-time insertion code is valuable for controlled brand experiments like this where the number of brand views needs to be sizable enough to support effectiveness metrics like MA.

In this study we recruited 600 people in the USA, who collectively viewed more than 3,300 impressions across three online video platforms. After the viewing experience, respondents were sent to complete an MA survey, which was indexed against a non-exposed baseline to determine uplift. In total we considered 12 brands across three categories across three online video platforms.
Key Findings

- Findings show that increases in attention gives a brand some chance of market share growth, while decreases in attention will likely impart brand decline ($r = .77$, $p < .05$). In other words, when active attention is paid, mental availability uplift is notably positive, and when no attention is paid mental availability uplift is notably negative (or no sizable change).

- Consistent in 3/4 of cases, no attention drove no-uplift/decline, while active attention drove MA uplift. On average, there was a 25% difference in MA uplift between brands where active attention was paid compared with brands with no attention at all.

- Additionally, we found that the MA uplift achieved is in line with the platform average active attention score. In other words, platforms that inherently deliver higher levels of attention will likely drive higher MA uplift.

- But this wasn’t overly surprising – MA is about remembering the brand, and our previous research shows that more active attention seconds is linked to memory retention and that attention performance of the platform is the driver of rate of memory decay.

- The 25% of the cases where the relationship did not hold are explainable. We found in the remaining cases that while attention was paid to the test brand, the associations were attributed to the (larger) competitor due to the creative execution i.e., new/non distinctive packaging, brand not obvious and not shown early. This is a classic double jeopardy pattern. This means that even with attention, if the brand is missing, we fill in the blanks. And the attention you work so hard for is likely to be misattributed to the larger competitor.

Fig 1. The path from attention to brand growth/decline

- Brand Growth (Market Share gain)
- Brand Decline (Market Share loss)
Key Takeaways

- An increase in attention gives a brand some chance of market share growth, while decreases in attention will likely impart band decline (see Fig 1).

- Attention to advertising is hard to earn, but when you earn it, your brand will grow.

- Higher attention platforms make a larger contribution to your MA score. Understand the attention performance of your media mix.

- Attention drives sales and mental availability. Make sure this attention works for you (and not your competitor).

- When attention is fleeting, distinctive branding becomes even more important. Teach your customers, quickly, to remember you.
Attention drives sales and mental availability.

Make sure this attention works for you (and not your competitor).