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Branded, Bombarded and Besieged: Advertising Exposure and the "Average" Consumer

Mark Blackwell
University of Nebraska at Omaha

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BRANDED, BOMBARDED AND BESIEGED
Advertising Exposure and the “Average” Consumer

A Thesis

Presented to the

College of Communication, Fine Arts and Media

and the

Faculty of the Graduate College

University of Nebraska

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Arts in Communication

University of Nebraska Omaha

by

Mark Blackwell

May, 2007

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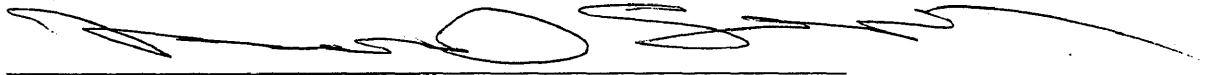


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THESIS ACCEPTANCE PAGE


Acceptance for the faculty of the Graduate College,
University of Nebraska, in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree Master of Arts,
University of Nebraska at Omaha.

Committee



Hugh J. Reddy - Communication

Mark O. Roussou, Sociology



Chairperson

Date April 12, 2007

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BRANDED, BOMBARDED AND BESIEGED
Advertising Exposure and the “Average” Consumer

Mark Blackwell, MA

University of Nebraska, 2007

Advisor: Michael Sherer, Ph.D.

This study explored the commonly accepted estimate that the average consumer is exposed to about 1500 advertisements a day. Through single-subject, naturalistic observation, the researcher quantified the number of advertisements a subject was *consciously* exposed to over a seven-day period. In addition, this study recorded the day of the week, time of day, media source and product or service of each advertising exposure.

This study found that this subject was consciously aware of being exposed to 690 advertisements during the weeklong study — an average of 98.5 exposures a day. The study also revealed that exposure to advertising could occur nearly anytime or anyplace, but for this subject, exposure was virtually assured whenever media was consumed. Finally, this study showed that, without a large, national, longitudinal study, accurate generalizations concerning advertising exposure are not possible.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Suppose a dozen people are in a small room. Two begin to talk to each other at the top of their voices. The others must either give up conversation or shout also. The result is that no one hears as well as before and that comfort is at an end. So it is with advertising. *Richardson Evans, 1890*

Richardson Evans' prophetic understatement is "Nostradamic" to say the least. In 2004, U.S. advertisers spent over \$263 billion shouting at the top of their voices to consumers (U.S. Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States, 2006). In addition, if the dozen people in Evans' analogy represented present-day branded products, the room would now be swollen with tens of thousands (Schudson, 1984). It would appear that the comfort is indeed, at an end. Evans' insight regarding the strategy and disposition of the advertisers *inside* the room is impressive. However, he could not have possibly forecast how far and how often they would venture *outside* of the room.

It did not take long for advertisers to learn that traditional advertising was, as Evans analogously stated, *inside the room*. With all of the other advertisers shouting at once, advertisers' messages were getting lost in the clutter and rendered ineffective (Conover, 1995; Goodrum and Dalrymple, 1990; Twitchell, 1996; Avery, 1998; Gomes, Leupold and Albracht, 1998; Kluger, 1998; Gardner, 1999; McFall, 2004; Berthon and Pitt, 2005). Therefore, in order to be heard above the din, advertisers learned to adapt. They soon gravitated to quieter environs where their messages could more easily stand

out: Direct mail; telemarketing; faxes; e-mail (“spam”); Internet pop-up ads; skywriting; billboards; product placements in movies, television and print; point of purchase displays; sponsorships; police cars; schools; viral/word-of-mouth; golf course holes; bananas; eggs; airplane sick bags; urinals and bathroom stalls and even on people’s foreheads. Indeed, it may be easier to say where advertising is not.

Insuring that an advertisement resonates, while a room full of other advertisements attempt to achieve similar results, is a daunting prospect. Regardless of the difficulty that clutter creates, advertisers know that they must advertise in order to compete. If they do not, consumers are likely to choose their competitor’s products or services. Once an advertising method is proven to be effective, advertisers pile on the bandwagon so as not to be left out. However, every new advertising method eventually becomes old, less effective and part of the clutter. The result is an ongoing, escalating battle for consumers’ attention.

Ultimately, this thesis endeavors to determine the pervasiveness of advertising and the frequency with which consumers are aware of exposure to advertisements.

To this end, the researcher conducted a review of the literature consisting of a historical perspective of advertising, a distinction between advertising and advertisements, the purpose of advertising, the problems associated with advertising, the focus of previous research, the media used to deliver the advertisements, and techniques used by advertisers.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

“Not only has the volume of advertising increased in most media, but the variety of ad media has increased. Even if all individual ads are blameless, the aggregate volume may well be becoming a problem” (Ambler & Ford, 2005). While this statement may have an abundance face validity, quantifying the volume of advertising has proven to be elusive. Therein lies the purpose of this study.

It is commonly stated that the average consumer is exposed to about 1,500 advertisements a day. In fact, this number has been repeatedly quoted for about 50 years. As Bauer and Greyser (1968) explain, the estimate of 1,500 advertising exposures originated in 1957 with Edwin Ebel, a vice president and marketing director for General Foods. Ebel settled on this figure after devising a model of a “typical metropolitan family,” whose members would spend the “national average amount of time” reading newspapers and magazines, watching television and listening to the radio. At the end of the day, the members of this fictitious family had been exposed to 1,518 advertisements each. Despite the fact that the family was not real and actual exposures were never counted, the number stuck and as Bauer and Greyser (1968) put it, it became “almost a universally accepted part of advertising folklore” (p.173).

Today, Ebel’s number (commonly doubled to account for increases in modern media) is still quoted, even in academic circles. In addition, others have weighed in. The variety of speculations regarding daily exposure to advertising range from a low of 76 (Bauer and Greyser, 1968) to a high of 20,000 (amic.com, 2004).

However, the existing literature regarding *conscious* exposure to advertisements is inconclusive. Therefore, this study will attempt to answer the following questions:

RQ1: How pervasive is advertising in a person's daily life (number of exposures)?

RQ2: What media are the most common sources of advertising exposure?

RQ3: What products and service are most commonly advertised?

CHAPTER II

LITERATURE REVIEW

Historical Perspective

When Evans scribed those foreboding words in 1890, advertising was already well established. Indeed, hundreds of years earlier, it was common for gladiatorial contests to be advertised on the walls of Rome (Turner, 1953). In addition, the problems of advertising clutter (the density of advertisements in a media vehicle) and pervasiveness (where and when exposure occurs) to which Evans alluded, had been documented decades before his observation. In 1853, London passed the London Hackney Carriage Act in an attempted to abolished the horse-drawn “advertising vans” that had been clogging its passageways since the 1820s (McFall, 2004). In the late 1800s, another attempt to control clutter and pervasiveness occurred in New England where advertising on trees was banned in some areas. Sequential roadside signs, each displaying one word or short phrases that together would make a complete message, were a common sight to passing motorists on rural roads in the early 1900s before they too were banned. As regulation attempted to harness clutter and pervasiveness, advertisers searched for new ways to reach consumers by using the latest media and modern delivery techniques (Goodrum and Dalrymple, 1990). For example, in 1893 New York’s Pulitzer building was fitted with a machine that would enable advertisers to project messages onto the clouds. On the occasion of a clear night, fireworks would be used to make smoke, which would simulate the surface of the clouds (Turner, 1953).

The early 1900s witnessed a continuation of the air assault as advertisers began using World War I surplus aircraft to bomb the public below with leaflets, cover the sky with smoke writing and pull banners in tow. Other early attempts to rise above the clutter included the practice of sky shouting, where crews in low-flying aircraft would literally yell at pedestrians on the ground below (Turner, 1953).

Clearly, where advertising goes, clutter is not far behind. Therein lies what Berthon and Pitt (2005) call “the paradox of advertising” because advertising creates its own noise (p. 540). Indeed, the clutter phenomenon perpetuates itself and creates distinct problems for advertisers as well as consumers. Before taking a closer look at those problems, this study will first define and highlight the distinction between *advertising* and *advertisements* and briefly discuss the purpose of advertising so that the issues facing advertising can be better understood.

Advertising vs. Advertisements

While it may seem obvious, there is a critical distinction between advertising and advertisements. The terms are not mutually exclusive, because advertisements are forms of advertising. Needless to say, the terms are often used synonymously. Bauer and Greyser (1968) offer an excellent clarification: Advertising is “...the institution with its pervasive impacts on society – and advertisements [are] – the individual ads that Americans see and hear daily” (p. viii). Of course, it is impossible to discuss one at great length without discussing the other. Therefore, some crossover is inevitable and should be expected.

Another distinction lay between marketing/promotion and advertising. The line of demarcation between these specialties is a fine one. Marketing and promotions are inclusive terms that encompass nearly every aspect of delivering products and services to consumers. For the purposes of this review, virtually any promotion and/or marketing initiative that looks and/or sounds like an advertisement, falls under the umbrella of advertising. Finally, advertising can be defined simply as the practice of placing an advertisement in a medium.

As this study will explore, advertisements have evolved beyond the traditional forms of delivery. With this in mind, the current review attempts a broader, more inclusive definition of advertisements, one that covers the wide range of modern media and techniques that advertisers use in an attempt to distinguish themselves.

Advertisements are: Any form of presentation of ideas, goods or services designed to inform, solicit, persuade and/or influence an audience's views or purchasing behavior. In line with Bauer and Greyser, this review offers a simplified definition of advertising: Advertising is: The phenomenological aspects of advertisements. Advertising includes all advertisements, as well as the media and techniques used for delivery and the related social issues such as clutter and pervasiveness.

A notable omission from the definition of advertisement is that the attempt does not have to be a "paid attempt." While the vast majority of advertisements are indeed paid, savvy promoters often employ techniques of advertising such as "viral" or "guerrilla" marketing in order to spread their message with little or no ongoing costs. This analysis will discuss viral marketing and other non-traditional advertising techniques

later in the review. Finally, it is important to note that not all advertisements involve the selling of a tangible product. Sometimes, an idea or a political candidate is the purpose of the pitch. However, for this review, whether the advertisement is pitching a candidate or a cola, the purpose of the advertisement will be considered the same.

Purpose of Advertisements/Advertising

First, it is notable that while there are distinctions to be made between advertising and advertisements, the purpose of each is identical. Both the institution and the individual ads exist to sell something. Therefore, the synonymous use of the terms in this section is appropriate. Initially, it may appear redundant to state that the purpose of advertisements is to inspire consumers to buy something. In the case of a political or social advertisement, the purpose is to inspire the public to vote, think or feel a certain way. While the purpose of advertising may be evident, understanding how this process comes about is important when we consider the medium, technique, exposure and frequency of advertisements. In addition, how advertisers use these elements in their attempts to rise above the clutter and how clutter leads to pervasiveness is another important consideration.

Terms such as “Branding” “Mind Share” and “Top of the Mind Awareness” are far more telling than might be assumed (Ha, 1996; Sharp, 2001). The fundamental purpose of advertising is to sell goods and services. However, the effect does not have to be immediate. In fact, a cumulative effect is what “top of the mind awareness” and “mindshare” are all about. As du Plessis (2005) states in *The Advertised Mind: Groundbreaking Insights into how our Brains Respond to Advertising*, “The job of

advertising is to make itself remembered so that it can in some way influence the purchase decision” (p. 8). Therefore, it is reasonable to conclude that the purpose of an advertisement is to purchase a space in our brains. For example, if asked to name a brand of cola, a person may respond “Coke” (or “Coca-Cola”). If asked for a brand of tissue, they might respond “Kleenex.” These brands have purchased (or at least rented) a space in our brains through the use of advertisements. The ultimate purpose being that when it is time for us to buy a product or service, their brand is at the top of our minds and is subsequently chosen for purchase.

The Problems

Advertising is a fundamental part of doing business. If businesses do not provide information regarding their products and services, customers will not seek them out. This may be one of the few aspects concerning advertising that is in general agreement. However, where and when these advertisements should occur are the fundamental problems confronting advertising.

Advertising is ubiquitous (Bauer and Greyser, 1968; Leo, 1989; McAllister, 1996; Ha and Litman, 1997; Shenk, 1997; Elliott & Speck, 1997; Li, Edwards & Lee, 2002; Phillips and Rasberry, 2005; McFall, 2004; Redmond, 2005). One would have to search far and wide to find anyone who has not been exposed to advertising through the traditional media of television, radio and print (newspapers and magazines). Indeed, between 1967 and 1986, the number of advertisements delivered through those traditional channels increased by 133% (Krugman, 1988).

In a word, the problem for advertisers is clutter. Ironically, advertisers have become their own worst enemy. In fact, their predicament is the classic “Tragedy of the Commons” syndrome (Hardin, 1968), whereby each green pasture that advertisers colonize quickly becomes overgrazed by competitors, each seeking refuge from the clutter while simultaneously creating still more. The perpetual environmental inundation has reduced advertisers to little more than graffiti taggers, each looking for the mythical white subway car on which to leave their mark, only to see other taggers promptly spray them out of distinction.

Meanwhile, as advertisers fight for elbowroom in an increasingly crowded atmosphere, consumers have their own problems. As the target of this advertising arms race, the consumer is caught in the crossfire. Bombarded with an estimated 76 (Bauer and Greyser, 1968) to 20,000 (amic.com, 2004) advertisements a day, consumers are running for cover. However, despite their best avoidance strategies — including commercial-free services such as TiVo; Sirius and XM radio; pop-up blockers and junk e-mail folders — consumers have few places to hide from the onslaught. For consumers, the problem is the pervasiveness of advertising (Bauer and Greyser, 1968; Leo, 1989; McAllister, 1996; Ha and Litman, 1997; Shenk, 1997; Speck and Elliott, 1997; Li, Edwards and Lee, 2002; Phillips and Rasberry, 2005; McFall, 2004; Redmond, 2005).

Clearly, the phenomena of advertising clutter, exposure and pervasiveness are cyclical: The problem begins when advertisers seek increased distinction from their peers and forge into new avenues of message delivery and/or use new tactics to deliver those messages. As the volume and frequency of exposure to advertisements increase,

consumers tune out and turn off the advertisements so they will not be overwhelmed (Marshall, 2004). The clutter problem is then returned to the advertiser in the form of consumers who are seeking relief from the advertising barrage any way they can. As a result, advertisers experience diminishing returns on their advertising investment and are left to devise new ways to cut through the clutter, thus, starting the cycle anew.

Focus of Previous Research

The overwhelming majority of research on advertising has actually been concerned with advertisements. Researchers have provided a wealth of information regarding the content of advertisements such as alcohol, tobacco and provocative sexuality (Buijzen & Valkenburg, 2003; Stephens & Hill, 1994). Perhaps with an eye toward improving the persuasiveness of advertisements, researchers have also provided a great deal of insight into advertisement effectiveness. This review does not focus those aspects of advertising because they do little to further the current analysis of pervasiveness as it relates to the awareness of exposure to advertising. Instead, this review examines clutter and pervasiveness from the rarely researched aspect of awareness of consumer exposure to advertisements. While the issue of exposure is present in the literature, the majority is concerned with exposure to the content of advertisements. Few quantitative analyses have explored awareness of exposure as it relates to advertising as a whole.

Indeed, previous studies have noted the remarkable lack of attention to the frequency of consumer exposure (Alwitt & Prabhaker, 1992; du Plessis, 2005; Ha, 1996; Kent, 1993; Pollay, 1986). As Pollay and Mittal (1993) explain, “The bulk of research to

date has centered on and relied upon a classical two-dimensional measure of perceived social and economic effects of advertising” (p.100). Gomes, Leupold and Albracht (1998) confirm, “Despite the extensive literature on advertising from the perspective of marketing, there has been little research examining its impact on the quality of everyday human experience” (p. 26). Finally, Ray and Webb (1986) add, “Suddenly, interest in research on clutter stopped” (p. 73). Therefore, this review focuses on the media and techniques advertisers use to expose consumers to their messages, the clutter that ensues, and the frequency and pervasiveness of the exposure.

Medium

When it comes to choosing a delivery vehicle for their commercials, advertiser have plenty of choices: Television, radio, print (newspaper, magazines, yellow pages etc.), outdoor, Internet, direct mail and point of purchase displays just to mention a few of the traditional channels. As discussed in the introduction, advertisers do not always stick to traditional methods of delivery. Indeed, advertising in movies and TV shows, golf course holes; schools; police cars; bananas; eggs; airplane sick bags; bathrooms and on people’s foreheads are just a few of the vehicles advertisers use to stand out. In addition to non-traditional methods of delivery, this study takes a closer look at the mainstream media commonly used by advertisers to reach consumers, and how the problem of advertising clutter has emerged in each medium.

Television

On average, television viewers are exposed to an hour of commercials every night (Marshall, 2004). Daytime television viewers are exposed to an average of 37

advertisements per hour (Kent, 1993). By the time students graduate from high school, they have watched 900,000 commercials (Wulfemeyer & Mueller, 1992). Maybe it is a fair trade: Networks provide an abundance of “free” entertainment, and in exchange the audience agrees (implicitly, by tuning in) to make themselves available for exposure to advertising. The advertiser finds an audience, the networks get paid for their trouble and consumers get “free,” high-quality programming. Everybody wins, or so it would seem.

In 2004, advertisers invested over \$67 billion on television advertising (U.S. Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States, 2006). However, despite that investment, advertisers are finding less viewing-audience and more advertising clutter on television (Kreshel, 1998;. Cronin & Menelly, 1992; Speck & Elliott, 1997). In fact, Krugman found in his 1988 study that between 1967 and 1986, the number of television “messages” (i.e. commercials) increased by 257%. Krugman is not the only one to notice the increase. Alwitt and Prabhaker found in their 1994 study that 69% of the 1000 people they surveyed said the increase in television commercials is the reason they dislike television advertising.

As a result, consumers are taking evasive action and actively avoiding ads. Armed with remote controls, VCRs, DVDs, and services such as premium cable channels, satellite TV and Video on Demand (VOD), consumers have taken command of their own television programming and can avoid many of the commercials directed at them (Abernethy, 1990; Cronin & Menelly, 1992; Mack, 2004). “The popularity of cable movie channels that played no advertising during the films provided evidence that audiences seek to avoid advertising intrusion into their television and movie viewing”

(Kreshel, 1998, p. 172). Then came TiVo, a personal video recording service that allows viewers to digitally record broadcast programming and skip the commercials entirely during playback. The company reports that 1.9 million of their 2.9 million subscribers skip 75% of the commercials (Mack, 2004). Cronin and Menelly found that 68% of the commercials in their 1992 study were fully or partially skipped. Another study found that during commercials, muting the TV increased by 700%, ignoring the TV increased by 400% and talking increased by 40% (Speck & Elliott, 1997).

In addition, when consumers are not mechanically avoiding commercials by changing the channel, muting the volume or using another technological aid (such as a VCR or TiVo), many of them are simply getting up and leaving. A 1993 Roper study showed that nearly half of adults claim to “get up and do something else during commercials” in order to physically avoid exposure to them (Waldrop, 1993, p. 16). A Speck and Elliott (1997) study found that leaving the room during commercials increased 100%. In addition, a 1990 Abernethy study found that 32% of television viewers either physically or mechanically avoided television commercials.

Obviously, increasing advertisement clutter causes an avoidance reaction in viewers. When viewer numbers shrink, advertisers cannot get a decent return on their investment, resulting in the law of diminishing and negative returns (Ray & Webb, 1986; Kent, 1993 & 1995; Ha & Litman, 1997). Subsequently, advertisers look for new, more effective ways to reach their target audience. Ultimately, the balance once shared between the television networks, advertisers and viewers is upset.

Radio

According to audiences, radio is second only to television in the amount of advertising clutter (Elliott & Speck, 1998). However, radio may have been the first of all the modern, mainstream media challenged with a fleeing audience. After all, many radio listeners have turned a collective deaf ear to the medium since the 1960s when the advent of the 8-track tape provided them with a commercial-free alternative. Of course, cassette tapes, CDs and other digital formats soon followed the 8-track, further depleting an audience who once had few other options than standard broadcast radio. More recently, radio audiences have flocked to commercial-free services such as XM Satellite Radio, which claims 5 million subscribers and Sirius Satellite Radio with 3 million subscribers (Omaha World-Herald, 2005).

However, none of the challenges to radio stopped advertisers from spending over \$8 billion on the medium in 1990. By 2004, their investment had grown to nearly \$20 billion (U.S. Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States, 2006). Despite the increased spending, or perhaps because of it, Americans may have grown tired of poking blindly at their pre-set buttons until they find a station that is actually playing music. In a 1991 study of car-radio listeners, Abernethy (1991) found that only 41% of the commercials broadcast were exposed to listeners. "Overall, these results strongly suggest that the subjects switched radio stations in their cars in order to avoid radio advertising" (Abernethy, 1991, p. 39). Abernethy concluded with a warning for potential advertisers: "The data indicate that listener avoidance of car radio advertising poses a potentially serious problem for purchasers of radio advertising" (p. 39). Therefore, like television

advertising, it would appear that radio advertising is out of balance. As listeners seek to reduce exposure to commercials, advertisers double their efforts to increase it, initiating a perpetual game of cat and mouse.

Print

Newspapers

Newspapers are arguably the foundation and predecessor of all other news and advertising in America. Indeed, it was one of America's Founding Fathers, Benjamin Franklin, who first harnessed the power of the daily paper in the early 18th century and pioneered the transformation of leaflets and handbills into a potent commercial medium (Avery, 1998; Turner, 1953; Goodrum & Dalrymple, 1990). Newspapers remain a popular choice of advertisers who spent nearly \$50 billion on ads in 2004 (U.S. Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States, 2006). With 64% of their content committed to advertisements, newspapers are heavily cluttered (Elliott & Speck, 1998). As we have seen with broadcast media, advertising clutter is consistently met by an evasive audience that actively attempts to avoid the ads. While considered less cluttered than television and radio, nearly 23% of readers report that newspaper ads disrupt their search for editorial content (Elliott & Speck, 1998). Speck and Elliott (1997) also found that avoidance of newspaper ads is easier to accomplish than broadcast media because readers can "...remove the newspaper ad from their attention by ignoring it" (p. 62).

Magazines

Magazines are 50% advertising (Elliott & Speck, 1998), and while most contain some editorial content, others such as Colors from Benetton, Le Magazine de Chanel,

Lucky and Sony Style are essentially product catalogs (Twitchell, 1996). In addition, some of the “news stories” that appear to be objective reports, are actually glowing endorsements in return for paid advertisements (Phillips & Rasberry, 2005). Such arrangements are known as product placements and will be discussed later in this review. According to Ha and Litman (1997), the fact that magazines are 50% advertising is not good news for the magazine industry. Their research showed that 50% clutter is the precise point that investments turn negative, “Returns turn negative when advertising pages reach an average of about half of the total pages” (p. 40). Regardless, that did not stop advertisers from investing over \$12 billion in magazine advertising in 2004 (U.S. Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States, 2006).

Yellow Pages

Out of all the advertising media, the Yellow Pages (and other similar directories) are one of the purest forms of advertising. After all, the book is a directory of businesses that provide goods and services. In fact, the Yellow Pages are completely made up of advertisements. When a consumer picks up a Yellow Pages directory, they are actively searching for a product or service. Perhaps that is why the Yellow Pages, despite being filled with advertisements, is not considered to be cluttered with advertisements (Elliott & Speck, 1998). The ads are precisely what the reader is searching for. As such, the advertisements are not invasive, disrupting to the reader or hindering their search for information (Elliott & Speck, 1998). The same cannot be said of other forms of advertising that attempt to insert themselves into a consumer’s space uninvited. There is

no record in any of the literature of Yellow Page-type directories being considered cluttered.

Outdoor

Clutter inside a magazine or newspaper is considerably different than billboards and many other outdoor advertisements. With magazines and newspapers, readers have paid to read the publication, thereby entering an agreement of sorts (although one could argue that the act of payment would allow you to *not* be exposed to the ads). With billboards, bus stop benches and blimps, among many others, there is no such agreement. Billboards, et al, indiscriminately advertise to anyone and everyone within eyesight. Indeed, advertisers spent nearly \$6 billion in 2004 on outdoor advertising attempting to do just that (U.S. Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States, 2006). One Chicago-based outdoor provider that specializes in graphically covering vehicles with ads, promises to “saturate the streets of Chicago with your brand” (wrappedexposure.com, 2006). Their promotional materials claim that Chicagoans are exposed to 40 outdoor messages each day. Meanwhile, a picture in their promotional material shows pedestrians trying to navigate around one of the company’s graphically covered vehicles that is strategically blocking a crosswalk. While regulating individual vehicles covered in advertisements could prove difficult, lawmakers continue to clean up the roadways. Since 1965, the Highway Beautification Act has attempted to limit billboard clutter by restricting the placement of signage along the nation’s highways (Kreshel, 1998).

Internet

Internet advertising consists primarily of banner ads (graphics located in a specific area); junk mail delivered via e-mail (“spam”) and pop-up/pop-under advertisements that spontaneously appear on a computer monitor as the user views an Internet site. These methods are among the most invasive forms of forced exposure (Stafford & Faber, 2005). In just six years, spending on Internet advertising has grown to over \$7 billion (U.S. Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States, 2006). That is more than advertisers spend on outdoor advertising, which has been practiced since colonial times.

Banner ads are the most common method of Internet advertising, representing 55% of all advertising on the Internet (Faber, Lee & Nan, 2004). The ads are so common that they are barely noticed. Despite all of the distracting blinking and eye-catching imagery, Internet users are so desensitized to the presence of the ads that the term “banner blindness” has been coined to describe their ineffectiveness (Cho & Cheon, 2004). In fact, click-through rates (the number of people who click on a banner) were a mere 0.3% in 2000, and declining (Faber, Lee & Nan, 2004). Despite banner ads’ apparent insignificance, Cho & Cheon (2004) found that perceived ad clutter was the reason that people avoid advertising on the Internet.

Meanwhile, the practicality of communicating via e-mail is under attack. There are 15 billion spam messages sent out daily (Marshall, 2004). Called “the scourge of the Information Age” by Senator Burns, R-MT, the practice is universally despised by nearly everyone, except the advertisers. Businesses spend \$10 billion a year managing the

deluge of spam directed at their employees (Congressional Research Service, 2003). Internet users set up bulk e-mail folders to automatically trash the flood of junk mail, which accounts for nearly 70% of all e-mail (Omaha World-Herald, 2005). “Spamming,” is considered so invasive and bothersome, that in 2003 Congress passed the “CAN-SPAM Act” in an attempt to regulate the practice (Congressional Research Service, 2003). According to Marshall (2004), 70% of e-mail users report that “spam has made being online unpleasant or annoying” (p. 51).

Pop-ups are advertisements that appear on a computer monitor as a new window over the window the user is viewing. Pop-unders are similar except they appear under the window being viewed. With each, computer users must actively click on the pop-up to close it. Unfortunately, closing the first pop-up can sometimes trigger another to appear. Occasionally, the computer user must shut down their machine in order to stop the continuous succession of ads. It comes as no surprise then that a 2002 study showed that pop-up ads were considered the most irritating form of online advertising (Faber, Lee & Nan, 2004). Regardless of their lack of popularity, or perhaps because of it, advertisers launched over 11.3 billion pop-ups ads in the first half of 2002 alone (Faber, Lee & Nan, 2004).

The forgoing channels of advertising exposure are not intended to be a comprehensive list. Indeed, such a compilation may not be possible considering the dynamic nature of the phenomenon. Still, this review would be remiss if it did not briefly mention telemarketing, point of purchase displays and direct mail.

Telemarketing, Point-of-Purchase Displays and Direct Mail

Before the Federal Trade Commission implemented the national do-not-call list in 2003, telemarketers incessantly badgered families at dinnertime. And it worked. In 2002, consumers spent \$100 million on products marketed to them over the phone (Marshall, 2004). Still, telemarketers' success in separating customers from their money should not be confused with their targets condoning the practice. In fact, in the first three months that the do-not-call list was available, 54 million consumers signed up (Marshall, 2004). Violating the ordinance can result in fines up to \$11,000 per-incident.

Direct mail is the polite term for what is more commonly called junk mail. Advertisers spent over \$52 billion on direct mail advertising in 2004, making junk mail well-known to anyone who has a mailbox (U.S. Census Bureau, Statistical Abstract of the United States, 2006). In fact, the average American is forced to sort through 20 pounds of junk mail every year (Speck & Elliott, 1997). A lack of government regulation has contributed to the unbridled increase in junk mail. As long as the advertisements are not false or misleading, advertisers need only to concern themselves with the cost of postage (Marshall, 2004). Despite the volume of direct mail, and the fact that it has been dubbed "junk" by consumers, direct mail has not experienced the inspired backlash that many other types of advertising have. It is possible that the public may have adapted to junk mail exposure. In addition, as Redmond (2005) described it, junk mail "is less intrusive and more easily ignored" (p. 12).

Finally, point-of-purchase displays are ads that appear where customers typically make purchases. The closer a customer is to a cash register, the more displays they are

likely to encounter. A quick peek inside any convenience store is enough for a consumer to be exposed to hundreds of point of purchase displays. A partial list includes counter units, cash register units, clocks, floorstands, on-product units, overheads and mobiles, sound units and testers just to name a few (Dunn & Barban, 1982).

From this review of advertising in traditional media, it is evident how the problem of advertisement clutter has emerged in each medium. Now, an exploration of several of the techniques and tactics advertisers use to rise above the clutter will provide additional insights into advertising clutter and pervasiveness.

Techniques and Tactics

Advertisements do not always fit neatly into one type of medium or method. For example, while a traditional television commercial is clearly a television commercial, an observer might find it difficult to categorize an advertisement for a product that appears *within* the programming itself. Such a blurring of entities is a tactic known as product placement and is one of several strategies that advertisers are using in an attempt to rise above the clutter (Kearney, 2004; Marshall, 2004; Faber, Lee & Nan, 2004). Researchers are just beginning to investigate the distinction:

Another growth trend cited by Faber (2002) was research examining content areas that were not traditionally viewed as advertising. These include things such as sponsorships, nonpaid promotional communication, and brand placements. [There] has been a rapid development of more alternative delivery forms and less clear-cut distinctions between advertising, other forms of brand

promotion and information dissemination, and other types of brand and product information (Faber, Lee & Nan, 2004, p. 448).

In addition to product placements, advertisers are increasingly using sponsorships, endorsements and viral marketing in order to rise above the clutter.

Product Placements

Product placements occur across media. Television, print and film, among others, have all practiced the blending of commercial advertisements with their entertainment and editorial content. As we have seen with other aspects of advertising, many “new” tactics and strategies are simply older ones that have been dusted off and re-used. The practice of product placements in television, for example, began with soap operas in the 1930s (Segrave, 2004). Yet, according to Kearney (2004), product placement is the fastest growing advertising medium in the United States. Economist.com (2005) noted that in 2004, the value of product placements in TV, films, magazines, videogames and music grew by 46% and had a market worth of \$3.5 billion.

Television

While research has shown that the average American watches a full hour of commercials for each night of prime-time viewing (Marshall, 2004), that figure does not include the commercials viewers are exposed to during the programs. One study found over 900 product placements on the three major networks in a 24-hour period (McAllister, 1996). In addition, 75% of all scripted prime-time TV shows contain paid product placement ads (economist.com, 2005). That number is likely to rise based on the

results of Coca-Cola's product placements on American Idol, which generated audience recall 49% higher than during other programs (economist.com, 2005).

Film

The convention of placing products in films for compensation experienced a series of false starts caused by a number of factors, not the least of which was the rise of television (Segrave, 2004). It was not until 1982, when a little boy lured a stranded alien out of a shed using a line of Reese's Pieces candies in the blockbuster film *E.T. the Extra Terrestrial*, that the modern practice of product placement truly emerged (Gupta & Lord, 1998). When word spread that sales of Reese's Pieces had increased by 65% within several months of the film's release, presumably because of the placement in *E.T.*, the gold rush was on (Gupta & Gould, 1997). What followed was the rise of a billion-dollar outgrowth of the advertising industry as advertisers flocked to a less cluttered environment in which to hawk their wares (McKechnie & Zhou, 2003). As with television product placements, the practice of advertising within movies is unlikely to decrease. Steven Spielberg's *Minority Report* collected \$25 million in endorsements before it was even released (Schneider & Cornwell, 2005).

Print

To some people, the concept of product placement in newspapers, magazines and books is most disturbing because it blurs the line between objective reporting and endorsement (Phillips & Rasberry, 2005). Indeed, Shenk (1997) openly questions if the practice marks the end of journalism.

'Infomercial' and 'advertorial' are the two hybrid buzzwords of the emerging public relations bonanza. They refer to advertisements disguised to look like journalism, with the intent of eliciting from the consumer the kind of trust he or she would normally place in a newspaper article or TV news segment (p. 164).

In addition, Phillips & Rasberry (2005) point out that publications often use news stories to promote the products and services of their advertisers.

Sponsorships & Endorsements

Perhaps the ultimate sponsorship/endorsement would be NASCAR. The National Association of Stock Car Racing (NASCAR) is the country's fastest growing spectator sport (Levin, Joiner & Cameron, 2001). That is good news for advertisers because the cars involved in the races are completely covered in advertisements. "Primary sponsorship essentially turns the team's race car into a 'rolling billboard'" (Levin, Joiner & Cameron, 2001, p. 24). Having tens of thousands of fans in the stands (and millions more at home) watching the ads go around the track is great exposure. In addition, residual exposure through highlights broadcast on national sports shows and photos run in local newspapers continue to deliver an audience for the advertisers long after the event has passed.

As NASCAR's popularity continues to accelerate, companies are paying handsomely for the exposure: \$25,000 - \$100,000 for the small bumper sticker sized ads on the quarter panel and \$5 million - \$7 million for the title sponsorship (Levin, Joiner & Cameron, 2001). For their investment, advertisers enjoy brands with greater recall than brands not promoted on cars. An added bonus for advertisers is that many fans purchase

merchandise such as hats, shirts and jackets that features their favorite drivers. Of course, in NASCAR, the sponsor and the driver are inseparable. As a result, hordes of NASCAR fans disperse into the general population adorned with sponsor logos. Turning people into billboards is a windfall for advertisers and is part of a growing trend known as viral marketing.

Viral

As with many of the advertising techniques discussed in this review, viral marketing may be older than it appears. In this case, viral marketing (also called “stealth” and “covert” marketing) appears to be a new spin on guerrilla marketing (Levinson, 1990). Guerrilla marketing, popular in the 1980s, employs innovative, low cost and practical tactics to promote products and services. Ultimately, guerrilla marketing was a newer version of something even older: word of mouth.

The goal of viral marketers, as the name implies, is “to spread a marketing message from person to person like a virus” (Vranica, 2006, p. 1). With this method, advertisers hope to create a “buzz” and generate excitement about a product or service. Modern viral marketers achieve this through e-mail campaigns, blogs, podcasts and chatrooms (Creamer, 2005). Viral promoters even recruit influential teens and trendsetters to drive specific cars, wear certain clothes and use various products in order to influence their circle of friends (Phillips & Rasberry, 2005).

Guerrilla and viral marketing may have started as low-cost alternatives for budget-conscious, grass-roots businesses, but its success has attracted the attention of mainstream marketers. A recent study of 18-30 year-olds showed that 68% of

respondents indicated that word-of-mouth advertising was the most influential marketing tactic on their purchasing decision. Large companies such as Dell Computers have embraced the concept; they have recently named a word-of-mouth marketing manager (Creamer, 2005).

Summary

The evolution of advertising is propelled by advertisers who continuously strive to distinguish themselves from the competition. Motivated by the need to inform consumers about their products and services, advertisers are forced into a self-perpetuating advertising escalation with their competitors. As a result, advertisements have emerged in nearly every imaginable form and fashion and in virtually every location where consumers can be exposed to them. As such, the institution of advertising is characterized by ongoing pervasiveness and ever-increasing consumer exposure.

Yet, despite advertising's proliferation into nearly every facet of consumer life, very little research specifically focused on this phenomenon exists. Indeed, the research that has been done on this aspect of advertising is dated. A benchmark study conducted by Bauer and Greyser (1968) represents the most complete investigation of the pervasiveness of, and conscious exposure to, advertising in consumers' everyday lives. In their study, Bauer and Greyser instructed 1,536 subjects to document every time they were aware of being exposed to an advertisement during a portion of the day. The results of their study showed that Americans are exposed to an average of 76 advertisements each day.

This study expands on the work of Bauer and Greyser by measuring how many advertisements a subject is conscious of being exposed to over a period of one week. Then, documenting when the exposure takes place and what medium was used to deliver the advertisement.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

This study replicates a portion of Bauer and Greyser's 1968 research titled, *Advertising in America: A Consumer View*. A joint study between Harvard Business School and Massachusetts Institute of Technology, the research is actually a collection of studies that gathered qualitative and quantitative data related to how consumers experience advertising. The portion of the Bauer and Greyser study that the current research replicates concerns the documentation of commercials that the consumer is aware of being exposed to.

In the Bauer and Greyser study, 1,536 subjects recorded every time they were aware of being exposed to a commercial via television, radio, magazines and newspapers. Participants were given hand counters and instructed to press the button every time they became aware of an ad. In addition, subjects were supplied with advertising record books in which they recorded the number on the counter for each ad they were exposed to, the product being advertised and the medium (TV, radio, magazine, newspaper) among other items. Participants were assigned time periods from wake-up to 5:00 p.m. or from 5:00 p.m. to bedtime. The results showed that the American consumers in their study were aware of being exposed to an average of 76 advertisements a day. Of course, a definitive number may be a difficult claim and the authors are quick to qualify their results. "Our figures for advertising exposure are for exposure as measured by this method, and like any other figures of exposure are a function of the method of measurement" (Bauer & Greyser, 1968, p. 176).

The current research models a quantitative portion of Bauer and Greyser's study, with several modifications. This study employs a single subject design with the researcher documenting the commercial data. While there are limitations associated with this approach, the diverse and individual experience of awareness to commercial exposure makes it a logical method. In addition, this study records exposure over an entire week and documents awareness of commercial exposure during all waking hours. Like the Bauer and Greyser study, the medium, day, day part, product or service and number of advertisements are documented. However, this study includes advertising exposures from any medium, Bauer and Greyser limited their research to TV, radio, newspapers and magazines. In addition, this study adheres to the fundamental instruction given to Bauer and Greyser's participants: "Do not pay any more or any less attention to advertisements than you normally would" (p. 432). Finally, a replica of Bauer and Greyser's advertising record book was used to catalog the advertising exposures. However, instead of a hand-held counter, a digital voice recorder enabled the documentation of the necessary data.

As Bauer and Greyser noted in their study, it is important to mention an inherent limitation of the proposed methodology. This study is a "snapshot" of one participant's 7-day experience with advertising. Certainly, different consumers in diverse locations with varying degrees of access to media would produce contrasting results, even while using the same methodology.

Other methodological considerations:

Unit of analysis: The unit of analysis is each *commercial (advertisement)* for a product, service, political or social purpose.

Instrumentation/Tools

- Exposure recording form (diary)
- Olympus VN 90 Digital Voice Recorder

Setting: The setting includes any place a person can be exposed to advertising (work, home, shopping, driving, walking, biking, etc.).

Sampling: Each day of the week and the day parts were equally represented. The participant used media as they normally would any other week.

Coding: One area of concern is inclusion vs. exclusion of potential advertisements. In this study, advertising is defined as, *Any form of presentation of ideas, goods or services designed to inform, solicit, persuade and/or influence an audiences' views or purchasing behavior.*

Therefore, in addition to all of the commercials that fall under the definition above, the following **was** included as Advertising:

- Logos and brand names that appear out of context, in unrelated settings (i.e. the name of a beer on a t-shirt).

Similarly, the following **were not** included as Advertising:

- Brand names or logos used to identify a directly related product (i.e. a shoe logo that is on the shoe).

- Signage that marks the location of a store.

For documenting each exposure, the number of exposure, day, day part, medium and product or service recorded for each advertisement are coded as follows.

CODING CATEGORIES

NUMBER The linear order and cumulative sum of advertisement exposure over the recording period.

DAY The day of the week that exposure occurred

DAYPART **M** = Morning – Wake-up through 12:00 Noon
A = Afternoon – 12:00 Noon through 6:00 p.m.
E = Evening – 6:00 p.m. through Bedtime

MEDIUM

- **DIRECT MAIL** – Any advertisement received through the mail (including bill inserts).
- **RADIO** - Exposure through radio advertising (i.e. :10, :30 and :60 second commercial breaks and product mentions).
- **TV** – Exposure through television advertising (i.e. :10, :30 and :60 second commercial breaks and product mentions).
- **MAGAZINE** – Any identifiable advertisement in a magazine.
- **NET** – Exposure through Internet advertising including pop-ups, pop-unders and SPAM (see individual definitions of Internet exposures).
- **NEWSPAPER** – Any identifiable newspaper advertisement, excluding classifieds.
- **OTHER** – Any form of exposure not included in any other category
- **OUTDOOR** – Any advertisement designed to be received outdoors (billboards, bus benches, blimps, planes pulling banners, signs on cars, taxis, buses).
- **POINT OF PURCHASE DISPLAY** – Signage, floor units and exhibits and inside retail establishments.
- **PRODUCT PLACEMENT** – (See definition). Coded as follows:

- PPTV (product placement on a TV show)
 - PPMOVIE (product placement in films)
 - PPNEWSPAPER (product placement in the paper)
 - PPMAGAZINE (product placement in a magazine)
- **PRODUCT OR SERVICE** – It would be virtually impossible to list every advertised product or service that a person could be exposed to over the course of a week. Therefore, some products were coded after they were recorded. However, a general framework with logical subheads served as an effective guideline. In the examples below, the secondary categories are coded under their parent heading (i.e. “auto repair” would be coded as “automotive”).
 - AGRICULTURE
 - AUTOMOTIVE
 - Dealer sales
 - Repair
 - Rental
 - Gas stations
 - BUSINESS EQUIPMENT/SERVICES
 - CLOTHING/APPAREL
 - EDUCATION
 - ELECTRONICS
 - Cameras
 - TVs
 - MP3 players
 - Computers
 - ENTERTAINMENT
 - Movies
 - Concerts
 - Sporting Events
 - EMPLOYMENT

- FINANCIAL SERVICES/BANKING
- FOOD & BEVERAGE
- HOME IMPROVEMENT
- INSURANCE
- INTERNET
 - Website
 - Service
- MEDICAL/PHARMACEUTICAL
- POLITICAL
- REAL ESTATE
- RESTAURANTS
- SPORTING GOODS
- TELECOMMUNICATIONS
 - Cell phone service
- TELEVISION SHOW PROMOTIONS
- TOBACCO
- TOILETRIES
- TRAVEL

DEFINITIONS

ADVERTISEMENT	Any form of presentation of ideas, goods or services designed to inform, solicit, persuade and/or influence an audiences' views or purchasing behaviors.
AUDIENCE	The target or receiver of an advertisement.
AWARENESS	See conscious exposure.
COMMERCIAL	See Advertisement.
CONSCIOUS EXPOSURE	As defined by Bauer and Greyser: "...what people see and hear...ads that [participants] pay at least some attention to." Not to be confused with an <i>opportunity for exposure</i> where advertisement may be present but not perceived.
MEDIUM	The vehicle used to transmit an advertisement.
PERVASIVE	Where and when exposure takes place.
POP-UNDER	An advertising window that appears under the window being viewed by a user during an Internet session.
POP-UP	An advertising window that appears over the window being viewed by a user during an Internet session.
PRODUCT PLACEMENT	The paid inclusion of branded products or brand identifiers, through audio and/or visual means, within mass media programming (Karrh, McKee & Purdun, 2003 Journal of Advertising Research).
SPAM	Advertisements delivered via e-mail.
VIEWER	See audience.

Analysis Plan

- Data was recorded in Microsoft Excel
- Data was segmented to determine:
 - Conscious exposure to advertising over a 7-day period
 - What day the ads were recorded
 - What day part the ads were recorded
 - By what medium the ads were delivered
 - What products and services were represented

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Advertising Exposure by Day and Daypart

The researcher documented one individual's conscious exposure to advertising over a seven-day period. The study was conducted from January 22, 2007 through January 28, 2007 in a large midwestern city.

RQ1 asked: *How pervasive is advertising in a person's daily life?* For this study, the researcher collected data showing when conscious exposure to advertising occurs. Statistics showing the weekday and day-part of advertising exposure are indicators of advertising's frequency and volume, and thus, the overall pervasiveness of advertising. From figures 1A and 1B, we can see that that of the 690 commercials the study registered during the seven-day period (Monday – Sunday), 35%, or 243 of the advertisements, were documented on Sunday. The fewest advertisements were observed on Tuesday and Wednesday with both days recording about 8%, or 52 advertisements on Tuesday, and 58 advertisements on Wednesday.

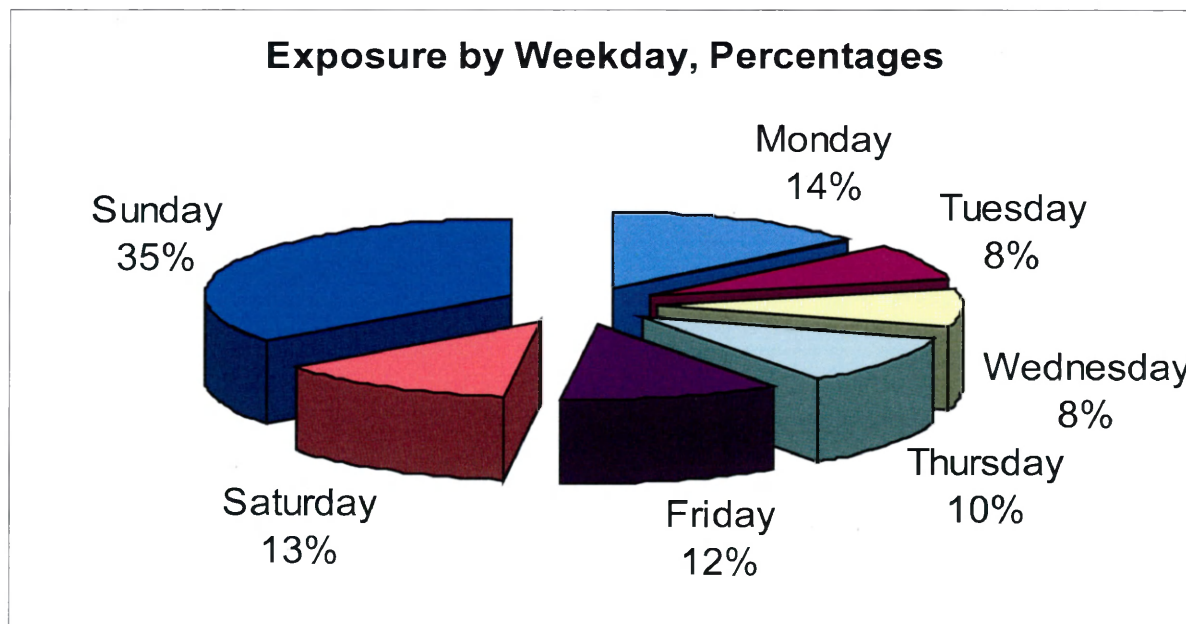


Figure 1A
Percentage of Exposures by Day

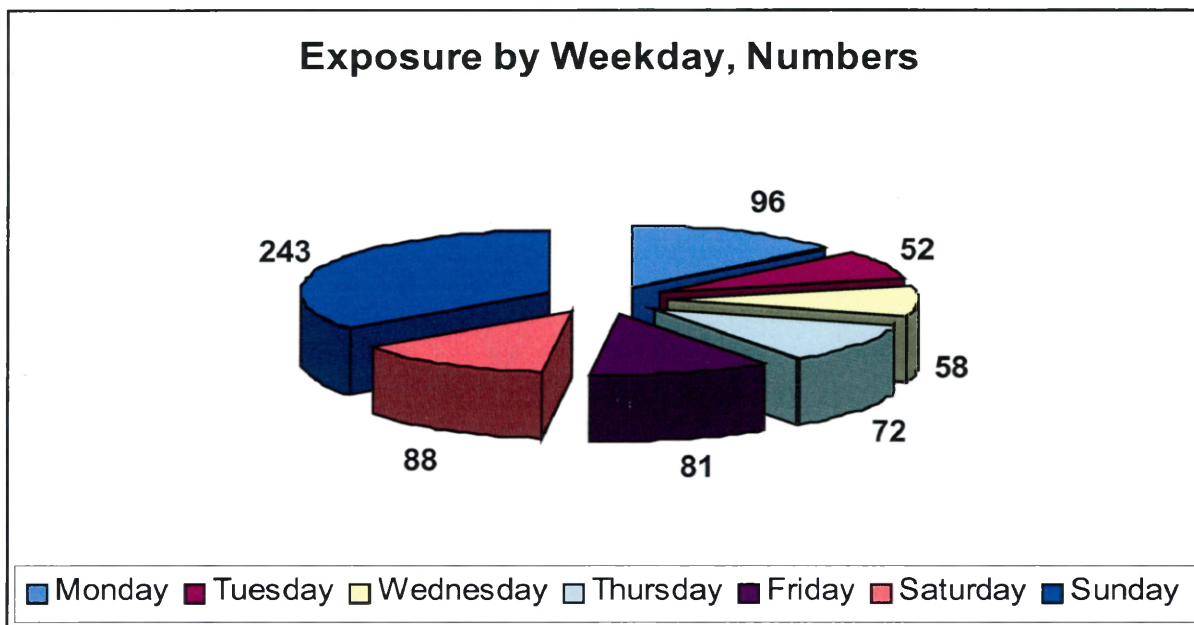


Figure 1B
Number of Exposures by Day

Figures 2A and 2B reveal that of the 690 advertisements recorded during the week, the researcher was consciously exposed to 54%, or 375 of the advertisements, during the evening hours (6 p.m. – bedtime). Thirty-one percent, or 213 of the exposures, occurred in the afternoon (Noon – 6 p.m.); while 15%, or 102, were noted in the morning (Wake-up – Noon).

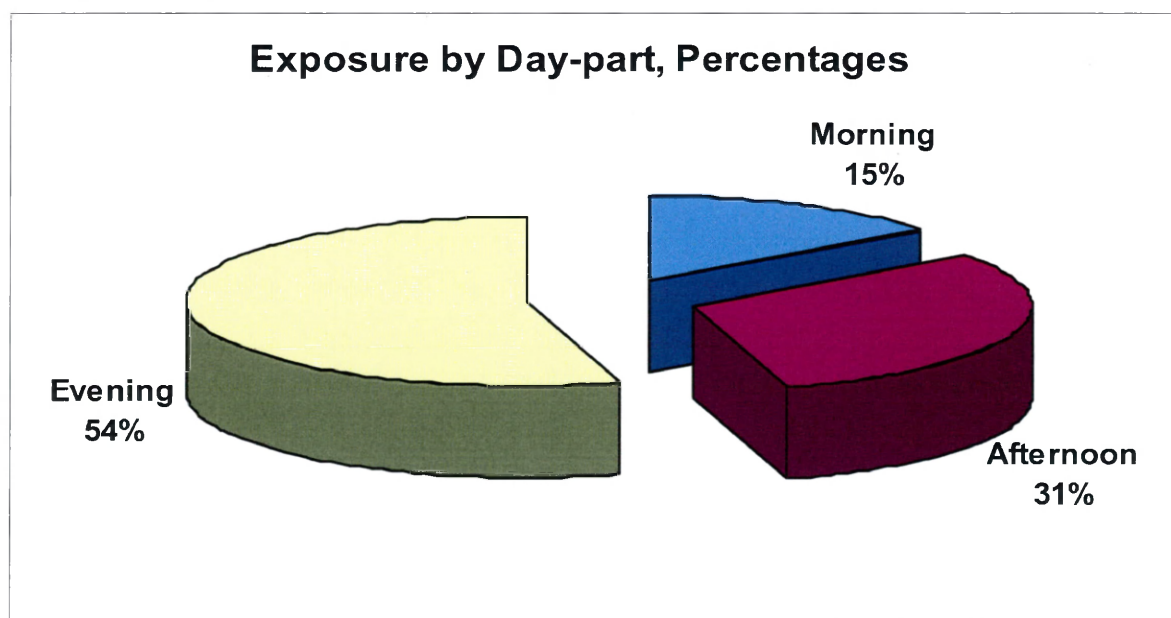


Figure 2A
Percentage of Exposures by Daypart

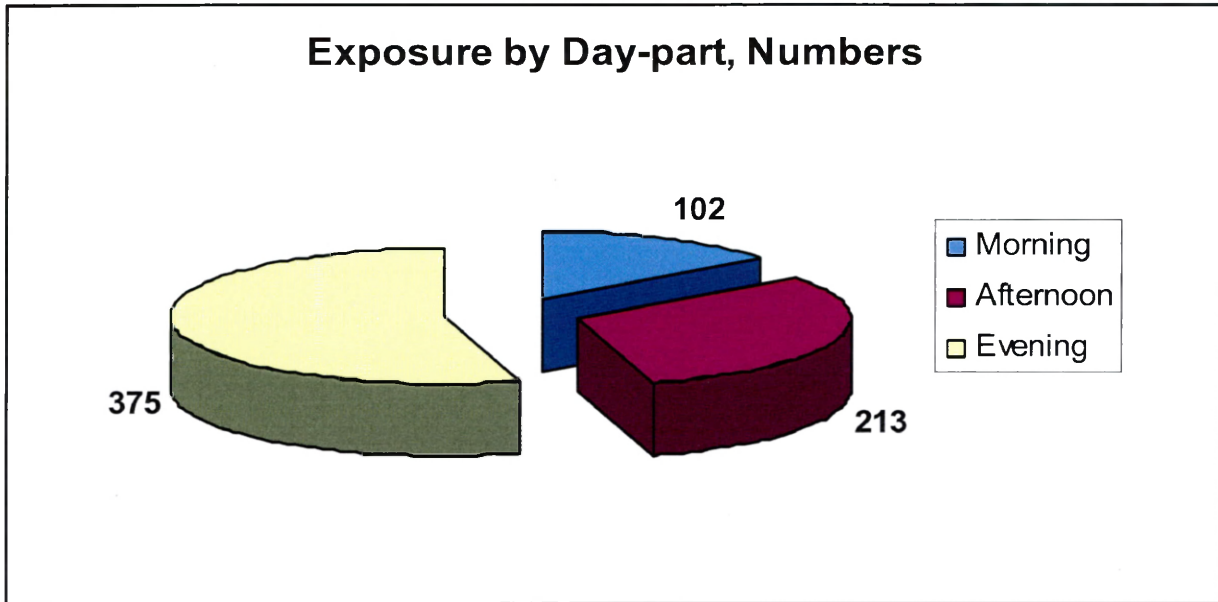


Figure 2B
Number of Exposures by Daypart

Advertising Exposure by Medium

RQ2 asked: *What media are the most common sources of advertising exposure?*

By recording the sources of advertising exposure, this study sought a measure of how (and to some degree, where) conscious exposure to advertising occurs. Data revealing the media sources of advertising exposure are an additional gauge of advertising's overall pervasiveness for this subject. To that end, this study noted each media source of advertising exposure over the seven-day period. The results shown in Figures 3A and 3B indicate that nine channels accounted for all the advertising delivered to the subject, with 74% (513) of the 690 advertisements reaching the subject via television. In addition, newspapers contributed 10% (71), the Internet 6% (40), outdoor signage 4% (27), radio 3% (18), indoor signage 1% (12), word-of-mouth 1% (5), direct mail and promotional items both with less than 1% (2 each).

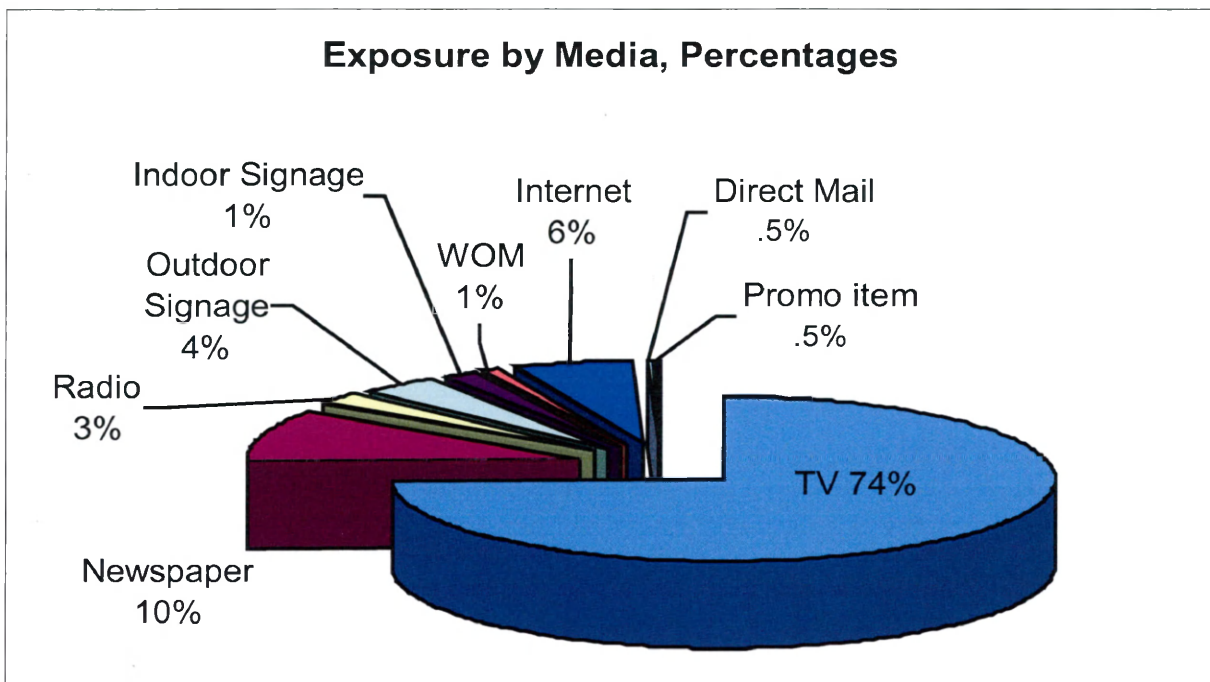


Figure 3A
Percentage of Exposures by Media

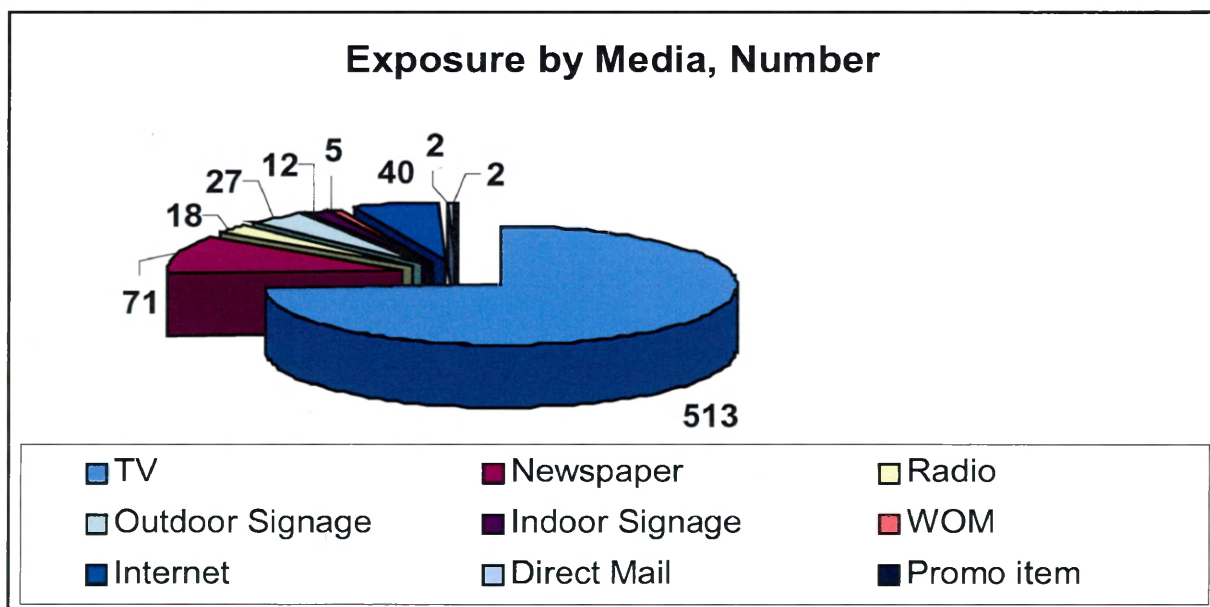


Figure 3B
Number of Exposures by Media

Advertising Exposure by Products & Services

Finally, RQ3 asked: *What products and services are most commonly advertised?*

While the previous research questions relate specifically to the *when* and *how* of advertising exposure, RQ3 sought to answer the intrinsic question of *what* is being advertised to the subject in this study. Overall, the subject catalogued 50 different categories of products and services over the course of the study. Certain products and services such as jewelry and legal services accounted for less than 1% of the advertisements recorded. Others, such as automotive products and services, constituted 86% of the 690 advertisements noted. Figures 4A and 4B illustrate the various product and service advertisements the subject was conscious of being exposed to throughout the study.

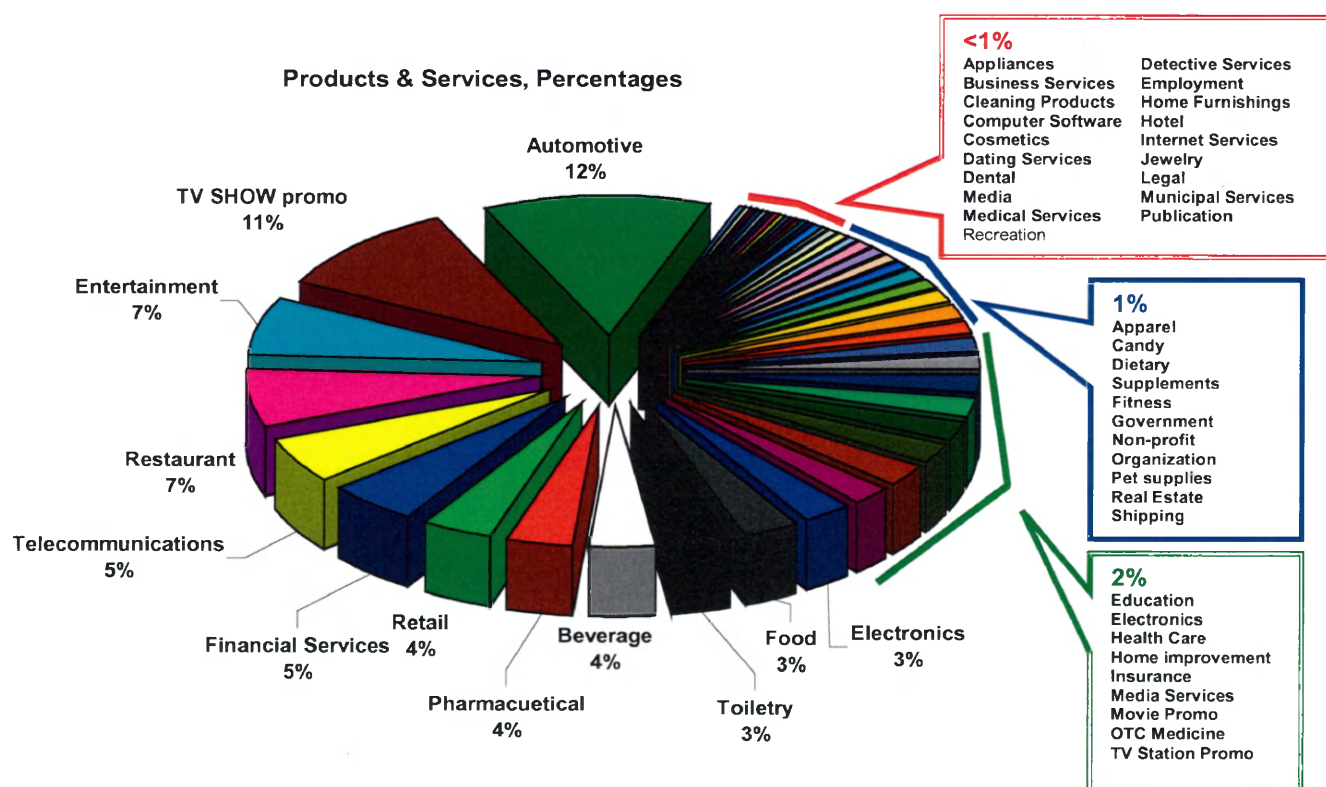


Figure 4A
Products & Services, Percentages

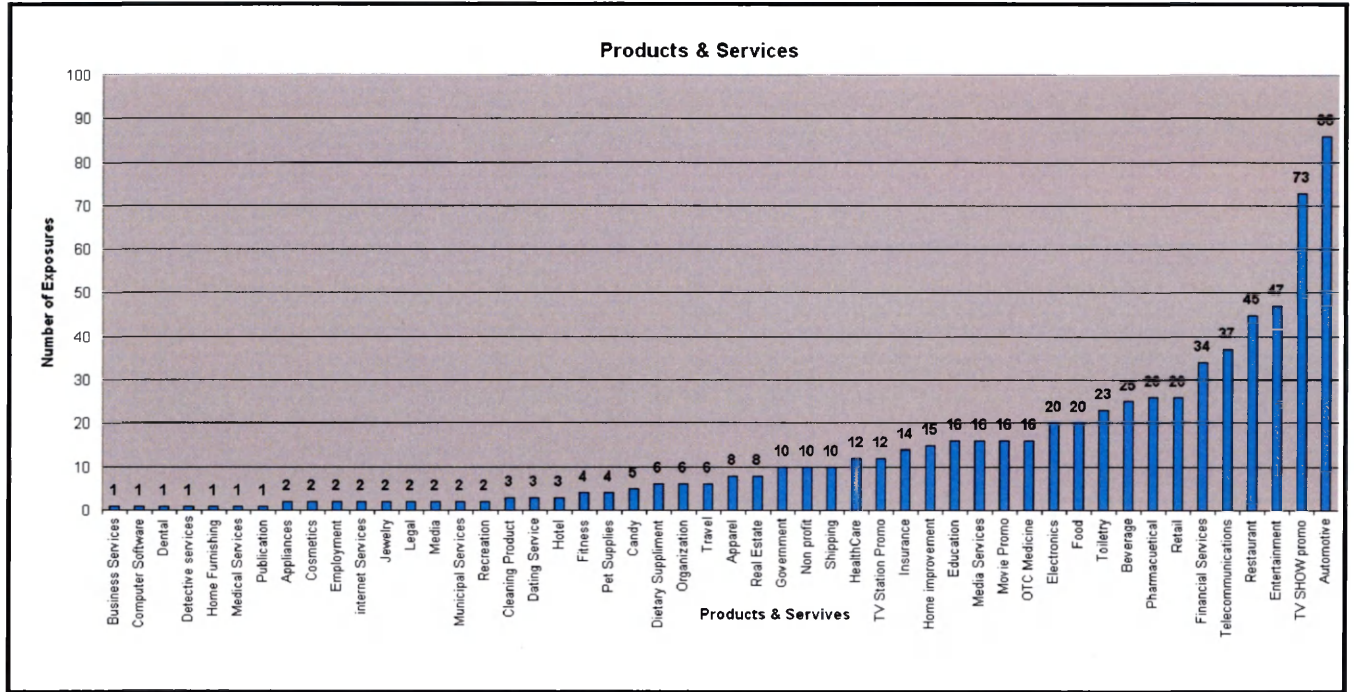


Figure 4B
Products & Services, Numbers

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Summary of Findings

This study sought to discover how pervasive advertising is in a person's daily life. To that end, the researcher conducted a study whereby a single subject catalogued all of the advertisements that they were *consciously* aware of over a seven-day period. The subject collected data showing the day of the week and day part that they were consciously aware of being exposed to advertising. In addition, the subject recorded what media vehicle delivered the advertisements. Finally, the study tallied the total number of advertisement exposures over the course of the week. A byproduct of the investigation revealed what types of advertisements (products and services) this subject was exposed to most often.

The main findings of this study reveal that the subject was consciously aware of being exposed to 690 advertisements over the course of the seven-day study, an average of 98.5 per-day. Of those, the day of the week with the majority of exposures was Sunday (35%), the daypart with the most exposures was the evening (54%), the medium that delivered the majority of advertisements was television (74%) and the product or service most often advertised was automotive-related (12%).

Research questions one asked: *How pervasive is advertising in a person's daily life?* This study clearly shows that the answer is relative to the individual. One measure of advertising pervasiveness is the number of exposures an individual experiences. For the past 50 years, folklore has told us that the average individual is exposed to about 1,500

advertisements a day (Bauer & Greyser, 1968). This number, proposed by Edwin Ebel in 1957 (Bauer & Greyser, 1968), is remarkable considering it is so widely accepted, yet it was derived from a purely speculative process, not an actual study. In addition, Ebel's number pre-dates the Internet and widespread television usage, both of which combined for 80% of the exposures in the current study. Regardless, compared to Ebel's estimate, the subject in the current study experienced substantially less pervasiveness with 98.5 exposures per-day. Indeed, Ebel's daily estimate exceeds the current study's total number of 690 exposures for the entire week.

However, when the current findings are weighed against Bauer and Greyser's 1968 study, which the current study partially replicates, the number of average daily exposures is comparable. In their study, Bauer and Greyser found that subjects recorded 76 daily advertising exposures. It is plausible to consider that the 22.5 exposure difference between the two studies is related to the nearly 40 years of elapsed time between the studies, the increase in media outlets and the subsequent increase in opportunities for exposure. In addition, the participants in Bauer and Greyser's studies were instructed to record exposures from only four sources of advertising (newspapers, television, magazines and radio). The current study recorded exposures from any and all sources. Therefore, in comparison, the pervasiveness of advertising for this subject is relatively consistent with Bauer and Greyser's findings.

Advertising pervasiveness can also be indicated by the sources of advertising exposure. Research question two asked: *What media are the most common sources of advertising exposure?* The subject in this study reported that television accounted for

74% of all the advertising he was exposed to over the course of the study. Of all the variables that collaborate to render exposure to advertising such an individual and unique phenomenon, the source of exposure is perhaps the most personal and fluctuant. Simply put, an individual who does not own a television has much less opportunity for exposure via that medium than a person who owns two televisions. This consideration can be extrapolated to all the media sources represented in this study. An individual's media consumption habits and choices largely determine what sources of advertising exposure affect them. However, it appears that an individual does not always need to choose to consume media in order for exposure to occur. In the current study, this subject noted that the largest percentage of exposures (35%) was recorded on a day that the subject was visiting a relative and had no control over media choice. Furthermore, the relative was viewing a sports program that had a high number of product sponsorships and endorsements, substantially increasing the number of exposures.

It is clear from this study that individuals do not have to consume traditional media in order for exposure to occur. One source of exposure that was not expected during planning was "indoor signage." The subject noted that locations such as his place of employment and his daughter's school displayed various advertisements that accounted for 12 of the 690 total advertising exposures. While 12 exposures (1%) may appear to be of little significance, radio (a traditional source of advertising exposure) only accounted for 18 exposures (3%), a mere six more than indoor signage.

A "non-traditional" source of exposure that was considered during planning was product placements. It was thought that product placements, especially via television and

movies, would account for a substantial number of exposures. The subject described 33 of television's 513 exposures as programming containing an embedded advertisement, while only one (1) of newspaper's 71 exposures contained a product placement embedded in a story. No other product placements were observed.

It is surprising that so few direct mail and SPAM exposures were recorded during the study. In fact, the few direct mail pieces that were recorded were discarded before the participant became aware of the exposure. The subject regularly receives solicitations from both sources, so it is unlikely that there was an absence of both vehicles during the study week. A possible explanation might relate to the aforementioned "banner blindness" response whereby consumers are in fact exposed to the advertisement, but are conditioned to essentially filter it out and the advertisement never registers.

Overall, a very small number of exposures were recorded outside of the traditional media. Word of mouth, for example, was responsible for two exposures. Still, the ubiquity of advertising cannot be underestimated. One of the subject's outdoor advertisement exposures occurred when he became aware of a billboard while looking out of his living room window. Despite the occasional odd exposure, this study showed that, for the most part, media choices and media familiarity combine to determine overall exposure. For the participant in this study, media consumption inevitably led to advertising exposure.

Research question 3 asked: *What products and services are most commonly advertised?* Clearly, this measure holds no bearing on the question of overall exposure. However, as a byproduct of the study, the data hold intrinsic value that could provide

insight for future studies. The subject in this study found that automotive industry products and services lead with 12% (86) of the advertisements over the course of the study, while television programming promotions were a close second with 11% (73) of the advertisements over the course of the week. Nineteen product or service categories accounted for less than one percent each of the total number of products and services advertised, eleven products or services totaled at about 1% each, and nine products and services made up about 2% each of the total number of exposures. Curiously, employment services (<1%), dietary supplements (1%) and media services (2%) were among the products and services in these groups. Perhaps not as surprising was the twenty-six pharmaceutical advertisements tallied which constituted 4% of the total number of products and services. Certainly, the season and the geographical location that this study was conducted in influenced the overall outcome of the product and services measurement.

Limitations & Recommendations

The limitations of this study include sample size, duration and geographical constraints. While single-subject research and self-reporting are common and recognized methods of research (Bordens & Abbott, 1988), a representative sample would enable researchers to construct broader generalizations with a high degree of confidence.

Similarities between individual experiences could then be assessed.

While the current study successfully avoided “sweeps” and Super Bowl week, both of which can skew regular advertising schedules, a year-long sampling would provide a seasonal perspective of advertising exposure that is not currently available.

Finally, geography is a critical factor in advertising exposure. If a subject lives in an area where there are no billboards, there is little chance that they will be exposed to advertising by that medium. Likewise, a dairy farmer will have a drastically different experience with advertising exposure than a New Yorker who must commute through Times Square twice a day. As such, a study that renders a national (or international) perspective would further advance the understanding of awareness of advertising exposure.

Indeed, future studies should consider the individual relativity of the advertising experience. The advertising industry itself may be in the best position to undertake such a large, national and longitudinal study from which, generalized data can be gleaned. In addition, the advertising industry probably has the most to gain from such a study. Insights into when and how individuals are consciously exposed to an advertising message have the potential to produce more effective advertisements. Likewise, recognizing the advertising boundaries that consumers feel comfortable with could help advertisers maintain a favorable disposition with consumers.

Finally, one must consider the number of advertisements available for exposure compared with the number that is consciously registered by an individual. A base number that would enable a comparative analysis is not currently available. Such a foundation could be used to establish a ratio between the number of potential advertising exposures and the number of conscious exposures. It is only in this context that we can further our understanding of conscious exposure to advertising.

Implications & Conclusion

The findings from this study must be interpreted with caution. Indeed, the impetus for this study was previous research that claimed a definitive number of daily advertising exposures for the general population. At this time, such a claim is not possible. Exposure to advertising is unique to the individual. Researchers replicating the current study would certainly produce varied results. It is clear; however, that the pervasiveness of advertising is directly associated with an individual's media habits, choices and geographical location. All of these factors, and perhaps others, dictate how much advertising one is exposed to.

Regardless of the limitations of sample size, duration and geography, this study has a place in the discourse of advertising exposure. This study has confirmed that broad generalizations concerning advertising exposure cannot be ventured from a "snapshot" of one individual's experience, much less from a speculative process. Therein lies the value of the current study. While 1,500 daily advertising exposures is generally accepted as the definitive number for the average person, and it may be true for some individuals in specific circumstances, it cannot possibly be true for everyone, not even the average person. Therefore, broad generalizations cannot accurately be concluded from Ebel's speculative calculation. Indeed, even if this number was true at one time, that time was 50 years ago, well before the advance of several very prolific sources of advertising exposure. Randomly doubling the 1,500-exposure estimate to 3,000 in order to account for modern day increases in advertising sources is no more accurate than the number it is

based on. Therefore, at least for the subject in this study, the widely accepted but speculative estimate of 1,500 daily advertising exposures has been rebuked.

At the end of the day, questions concerning the pervasiveness of advertising yield to more philosophical considerations. After all, the concept of exposure is relative. Certainly, there is no “average” person: What one person considers advertising bombardment may be unremarkable for another. Exposure is in the eye of the beholder. In addition, once the element of conscious exposure is factored in, the individual and variable nature of the query becomes far too capricious for definitive answers. Still, one can glean from the present study that advertisements are indeed ubiquitous. When an individual goes to work or school, turns on the television, jumps online, opens a newspaper or consumes any type of media, there will be an advertisement available for exposure.

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