



WHITE PAPER

Attention and Mental Availability

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We wanted to know...

The question: Can attention be linked directly to mental availability?

The answer: Yes, there is a direct relationship between mental availability, sometimes defined as brand salience, and active attention.

For this study, Amplified Intelligence partnered with OMD Worldwide and some of their clients. It was conducted in the US, with 600 participants, who collectively viewed over 3,300 impressions of 12 brands across three categories on three online video platforms. The data collected offers individual level attention and Mental Availability.

Even though large numbers of people were involved, by our standards this is still a case study. We will keep testing attention against industry marketing metrics to quantify the value of attention for both short-term and long-term gain.

What is Mental Availability?

Mental availability (MA) is the likelihood of a brand to be thought of at the buying occasion, compared to competitors. It is closely related to market share change, both growth and decline, and is a metric that is widely accepted by marketers as an indicator of brand strength.

People don't think about their purchases as much as you think they do. Buying behaviour is mostly non-conscious and largely habitual. Let's face it, most of what we buy, we have bought many times before. It becomes automatic. As a brand, you are fighting for space in a consumer's memory, linking to category cues. You're fighting to be thought of at the buying moment.

Category cues are the real life moments, reasons and occasions that prompt people to think about buying. A brand's job is to bring the brand to the surface of memory on those occasions. You want people to think of Vegemite for breakfast or a box of Favourites chocolates as the dinner party gift you give when you've been told not to bring anything. A brand's other job is to make that product physically available otherwise money and effort have been wasted. It's a numbers game, so the more cues linked to a brand, the more likely it will come to mind at purchase time.

This is how big brands grow and stay big. They have more category buyers who associate the brand with more category cues, while small brands have fewer category buyers who associate the brand with fewer category cues.

Market share

MA and market share are related. MA is a leading indicator of future market share movements. When MA goes up, so will market share. Or, when a brand's MA falls below expected levels, market share will decline. Which is why it's important to regularly track both.

Reasons for MA decline could be ad creative that is failing to drive mental links between the brand and the category cues. Or ineffective media placement that doesn't give the creative a chance to cut through.

The most important point here is: monitoring Mental Availability and market share offers a brand the chance to arrest decline before it gets too hard and too expensive.

The study

We started with the logical idea that if there is zero attention to a brand's advertising there is zero opportunity to build your brand. To maintain or grow MA advertising needs to work. And advertising that works needs to be well-branded and be seen by many. When we say well-branded, we mean with strong distinctive assets and clearly attributed branding.

We worked with OMD because they represent global brands who consider MA to be an important market-based asset. Our two main pillars of investigation were:

Is there a link?

Is there a direct link between attention and MA gain/loss? Does mental availability suffer if attention is not paid to advertising?

If there is, could low attention environments damage MA?

What is the impact on a brand's MA if the media planning skews towards platforms that foster less attention? Could low quality platforms/formats be more damaging to a brand's MA?

The method

Amplified Intelligence data collection uses a combination of rigorous methodology and technology to determine whether people are looking directly at an ad or not while they are viewing media in real-time. Our work finds consistently that human attention **is** a precursor to ad impact for both long- and short-term metrics.

A key component is our customised attentionTRACE Collection App that each participant downloads onto their device called. The App can turn on the device camera when viewing social 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, and
- 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.

We recruited 600 people in the US who collectively viewed more than 3,300 impressions across three platforms. After the viewing experience, respondents were directed to complete an MA survey which was indexed against the baseline to determine uplift. In total we considered 12 brands across three categories across three online video platforms. For the sake of this study, we define MA uplift as the difference between the mental market share for non-exposed and exposed.

No attention = no MA uplift

In simple terms, when active attention is paid, MA uplift is positive and when no attention is paid, MA uplift is negative (or no sizable change).

Figure 1 shows four brands from one of the three categories tested and is consistent in the large majority of cases across all groups. It shows the MA uplift relative to exposed (active attention paid) and non-exposed (no attention paid). **Three quarters of cases show that no attention drove no-uplift/decline, while active attention drove MA uplift.** Additionally, across all groups and brands we see that on average there is a 6pp difference between the MA uplift of exposed versus non-exposed.

BRAND	SOCIAL A		SOCIAL B		SOCIAL C	
	Active Attention	MA uplift pp	Active Attention	MA uplift pp	Active Attention	MA uplift pp
Exposed Brand 1	3.0	6	3.3	3	4.0	6
Competitor A	0	-8	0	0	0	-2
Competitor B	0	1	0	-2	0	-3
Competitor C	0	1	0	-1	0	-2

Fig 1. Exposed brand 1 – Expected

We keep saying that different platforms and formats deliver different amounts of attention, and it turns out they drive varying amounts of MA as well.

MA uplift achieved across all brands 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 ($r = .77, p < .05$). Higher attention-grabbing formats such as stories, account for a higher proportion of the MA variation than lower attention-grabbing formats.

Formats, attention and memory

The findings for this study are based on individual level data where we have actual attention and mental availability per person. Interestingly, they also support aggregate level findings. For our large-scale and long-term MA data collection in Australia (10,000 people per year), we have been asking respondents to record high/low usage of high/low attention-grabbing platforms. The findings are strikingly similar—high attention-grabbing platforms/formats contribute more to MA than low attention-grabbing platforms/formats.

None of this is surprising given what we know about the relationship between active attention seconds and memory.

Higher active attention seconds is related to higher memory retention.

High-attention platforms take longer for memory to decay to zero, than low attention platforms.

No relationship is perfect

This case study shows a strong positive relationship between active attention seconds and MA uplift, but the relationship is not perfect. In 25% of cases the relationship did not hold, but it didn't hold for a systematic reason.

Figure 2 shows that while attention was paid to the test brand, the associations were attributed to the (larger) competitor (Competitor A). In close collaboration with the brands, the remaining cases can all be explained by this. The creative, for various reasons including, new packaging, late and non-obvious branding, prompted the viewer to think of the larger competitor. This is a classic Andrew Ehrenberg double jeopardy principle.

The moral of the story is that **attention can lead to mental availability uplift only when the creative is clearly linked to the correct brand.**

BRAND	SOCIAL A		SOCIAL B		SOCIAL C	
	Active Attention	MA uplift pp	Active Attention	MA uplift pp	Active Attention	MA uplift pp
Exposed Brand 2	2.6	-4	3.4	-2	3.0	-4
Competitor A	0	6	0	7	0	3
Competitor B	0	-7	0	-4	0	1
Competitor C	0	na	0	-1	0	0

Fig 2. Exposed brand 2 – Misattribution

So why does it matter?

We have found in previous work that attention and memory are related, we know that memory and MA are related, and now we can see a direct link between attention and MA.

The following figure pictorially represents what we have found in this study: that increases in attention give a brand an increased chance of market share growth (or at least stability), while decreases in attention give a brand no chance of market share growth (and at worst likely decline).

What should you remember?

- Real attention metrics (not proxies) can be used for planning, buying and verification with confidence.
- Increases in attention give a brand some chance of market share growth, while decreases in attention will likely direct brand decline.
- Platforms and formats that deliver more active attention seconds drive better long-term outcomes.
- When attention is fleeting, distinctive branding becomes even more important. Creative does play a role in building mental availability.
- The brand must be early, bold and distinctive, or the attention you earn will be for a larger competitor.]

What next?

If you would like to use attention metrics for media planning, or to Attention Adjust™ an existing campaign, have a look at [attentionPLAN™](#).

If you are thinking of buying media using attention metrics, keep an eye out for our new product attentionTRADE™ or contact us for a chat.

If you have more questions, just send them through to hello@amplifiedintelligence.com.au and one of our team will find an answer for you.