



# Unlocking the Currency of Attention

Dentsu's Attention Economy Program Phase 2 Research

**dentsu**

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ATTENTION  
ECONOMY

# Introduction

The fact that the media landscape today is vastly more fragmented, complex, and cluttered than in the past, is unquestionable. The reality that the industry has not adequately adapted to this, is uncomfortable.

Herbert Simon, the 1970s Nobel Prize winning economist, coined the term “Attention Economy” saying: “What information consumes is the attention of its recipients. Hence a wealth of information creates a poverty of attention”. Fast forward for today, and this statement could not be more relevant of the media landscape. Yet the fundamentals of how the industry approaches media planning and buying has not evolved. Current value systems still consider all impressions equally, regardless of how much attention they receive. Furthermore, there’s been a proliferation of device-centric metrics that are easily measurable and proxies for ‘attention’, but they do not represent a meaningful exposure.

It is with this context in mind, that three years ago, we set ourselves the ambitious challenge of transforming the way we plan and buy media. We established the *Attention Economy* program with a goal of researching advertising attention and developing a value system more indicative of a *real opportunity to communicate with a consumer*.

Most importantly in all of this, we needed to make the research tangible in practice. In many ways, this is where the devil is in the details. The concepts, research, and insights into human behavior is illuminating; finding a way to translate it and adopt it into practice across channels and platforms is an enormous challenge. As such, we had several issues to address:

- Can we be confident that attention is a valuable media currency that predicts a real (versus optimistic) opportunity to communicate with a link to brand outcomes?
- Can we develop an attention model that can be operationalized in a way that is useful to compare across channels, and captures the value and nuances of attention and human behavior within each?

- As an agency, can we bring clients and media owners on board to participate, so that we can influence both the buy and supply side to drive the industry in this direction?

Three years later, we’ve met these objectives. The cost has been an incredible amount of time and rigor in conducting and acquiring the highest volume of eye-tracking attention studies to date, working with the most cutting edge and forward-thinking partners in the space.

We have just completed Phase 2 of our research program in partnership with Lumen Research, TVision, and Amplified Intelligence. As a result, we now have a comprehensive data set which has enabled us to develop the attention model we set out to create. This model will allow us to put attention into practice and deliver more effective solutions for our clients.



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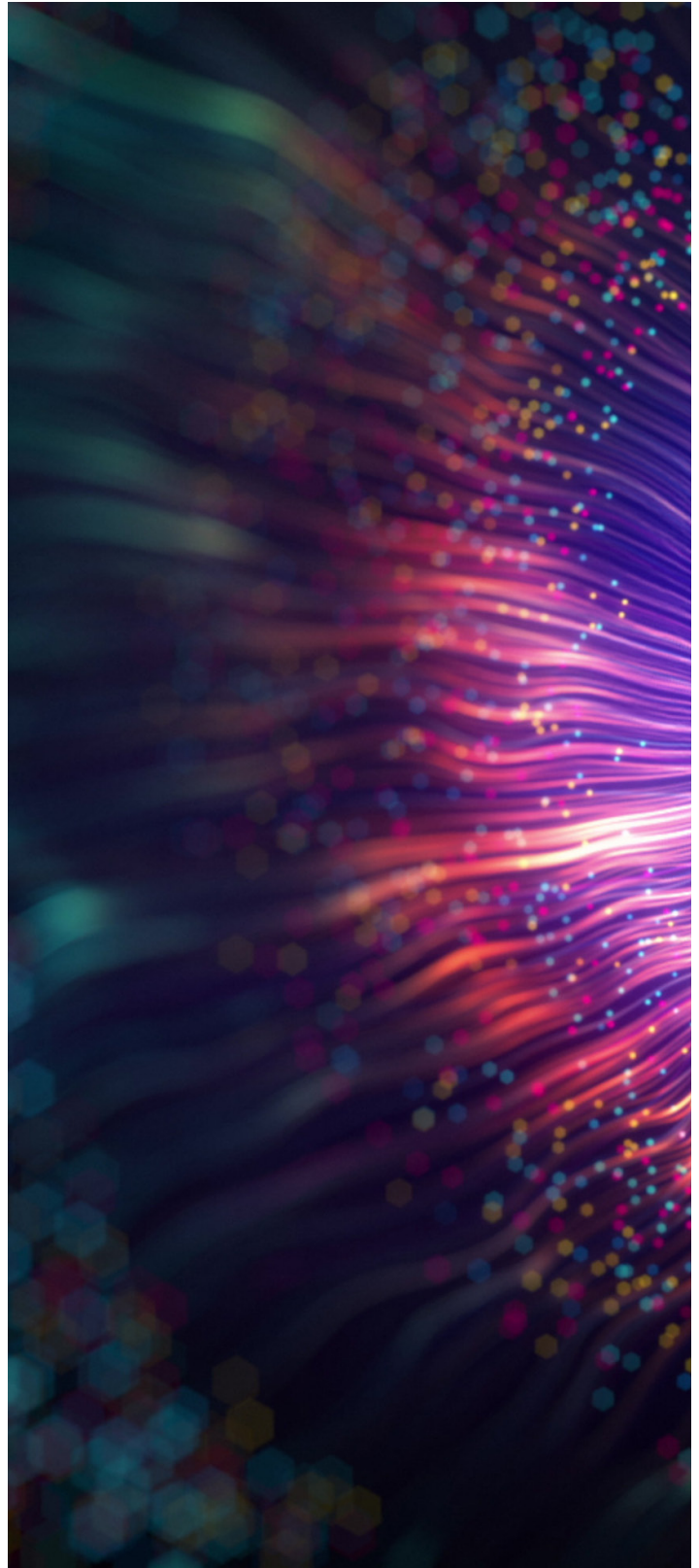


# The Speed Read

In the latest phase of attention research with Lumen Research, TVision, and Amplified Intelligence, dentsu set up large scale eye-tracking panels to build our proprietary attention model. This model captures the drivers of attention, as well as the effectiveness of attention across platforms, channels, and formats. The output of this model are a massive database of attention metrics that can be used for cross-channel planning.

That results shed light into several interesting insights such as:

1. Viewability and other device measures can be quite arbitrary proxies for real attention. In many cases, the % of viewable impressions reported are higher than the % of ads that get attention. In some cases, viewability standards leave value on the table, specifically when it comes to mobile or in-feed formats. Many of those ads can be “noticed” without being considered viewable and can drive some uplift in recall and choice. Therefore it is critical to evolve beyond viewability and measure attention better to get to a more genuine exposure vs. an optimistic one.
2. Creative is the biggest driver of how hard attention works; the difference between strong and poor performing creative drives the largest shift in outcomes compared to other factors. After that, it is followed by volition (whether attention is earned or forced), sound, and duration.
3. Duration is correlated with higher levels of attention, but shorter video ads can pack a lot of punch, they can be more “attentionally efficient” by delivering outcomes in a shorter amount of time.
4. Sound is nuanced; the impact of sound can be dependent on whether it is expected by the consumer to be part of the platform experience.
5. The new metrics for planning drive increased value. For one client, re-optimizing towards attention garnered 3.7 years of extra attention in one month at the same budget vs original plan that was optimized towards Reach and Frequency.



# Attention is more valuable than our current value system

At dentsu, we are committed to delivering our clients with media exposures that lead to genuine outcomes for their brands. Therefore, to advocate attention as a media currency, we needed to test its link to brand outcomes.

Across Phase 1 and Phase 2 research, we conducted robust multi-brand studies in the US, UK, and Australia combining eye-tracking technology with choice and recall measures to understand the drivers of attention and its link to impact. This enormous undertaking has left us in no doubt that the link exists and insight into what drives this link.

The research shows that higher dwell times are associated with a greater likelihood to choose a brand's advertising, and we see clear (and statistically significant) uplifts vs the control group at even low levels of attention (see figure 1 and figure 2 below).

Fig. 1 Eyes on dwell time and prompted recall

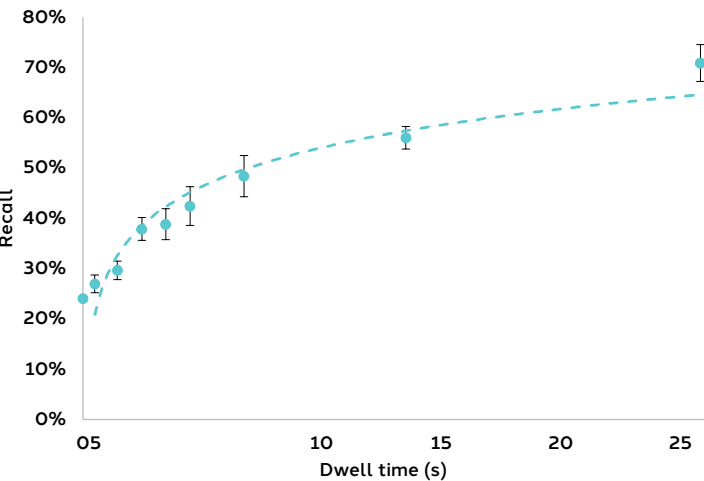
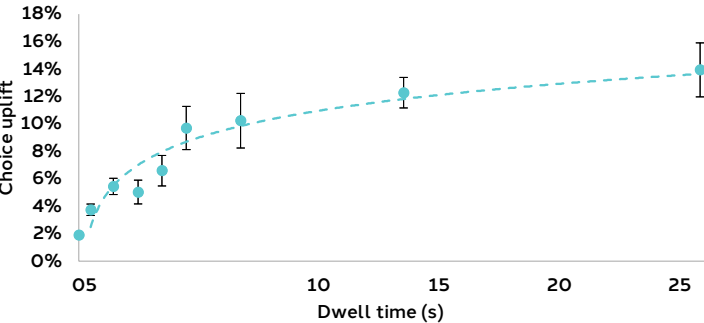
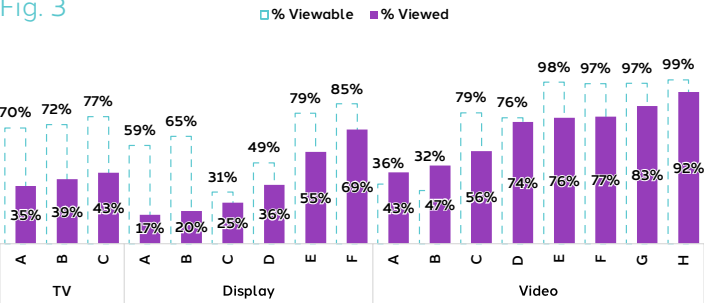


Fig. 2 Eyes on dwell time and choice uplift



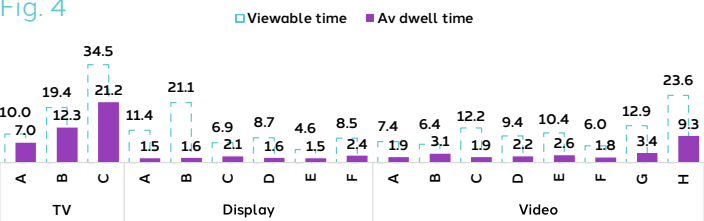
Can we rely on our current system's metrics like viewability to equally represent real behaviors that lead to brand outcomes? Not really. We see in our research that there is a significant difference between ads that meet MRC viewability standards and ads that are genuinely viewed. Conversely, many ads, especially those that tend to be in-feed and mobile can be noticed without being considered viewable (see figure 3).

Fig. 3



There is a similar pattern between the average viewable time and the average number of seconds someone looks at an ad (dwell time). Ads are typically seen for much shorter durations than they appear on screen (see figure 4).

Fig. 4

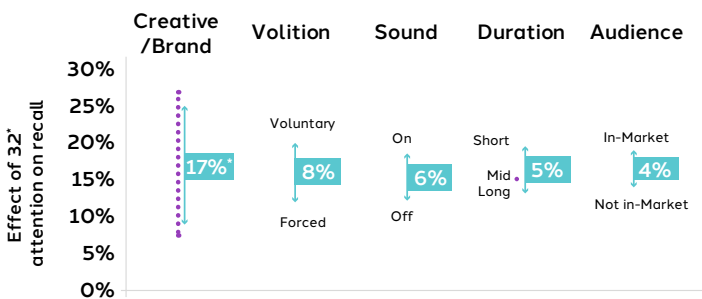


What this chart reflects is that device measures like viewability and viewable time are rather arbitrary proxies for real attention. Sticking solely to them is not a guaranteed precursor to improved advertising ROI. In the past, viewability has served a purpose in reducing ad wastage, but today it is simply not enough; attention gets us much closer to an effective brand exposure.

# Not all attention is equal

We've validated how important attention is, we have the data and models to plan and buy it (as we discuss further below), and the industry is following. But they do not have sight of the data we have linking attention to outcomes, and the knowledge that recognizing and valuing appropriately the nuances across seconds of attention is critical to the equation. As with other forms of communication, how different advertising messages work is a function of a combination of circumstances – the message and creative, the context, the device, etc. Focusing solely on how much attention an ad gets is an overly simplistic approach that does not consider the impact of these factors.

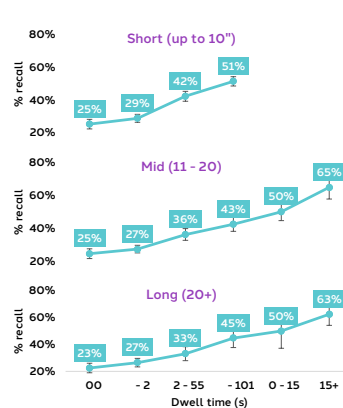
Fig. 5



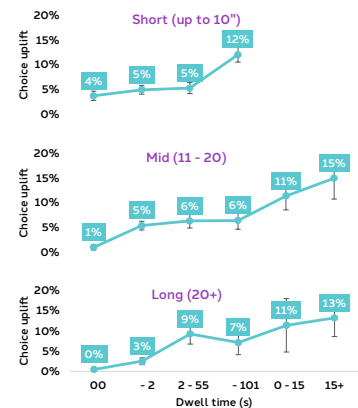
As part of our study, we analyzed the key drivers of the value of attention. Figure 5 showcases the impact to recall each one has on a 'typical' 3.2 seconds of attention. Creative is by far the biggest driver of how hard attention works. The difference between good creative and poor creative can impact recall by 17%. After creative, the other key drivers are volition, sound, duration, and audience (note that these factors interrelate, which is not captured here).

Other analyses in the study further demonstrate how different the value of each attentive second can be. For example, we see that shorter ads can be more "attentionally efficient" compared to longer ones. This intuitively makes sense, ads that were designed to work in a short period of time are likely able to land their message quicker and more up front compared to longer ads.

Fig. 6 Prompted Recall

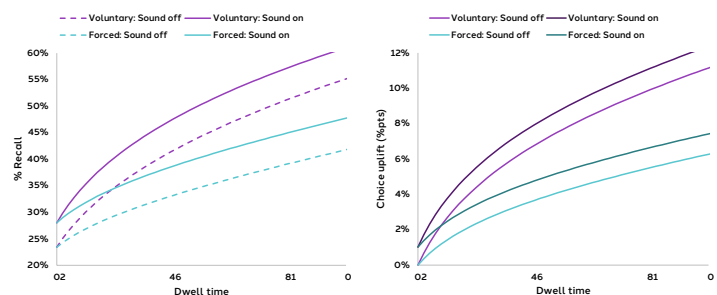


Choice Uplift



We also see that sound is an area with important nuance. Having "sound on" generally lifts choice and recall, but the strength of that impact is dependent on other factors, such as whether the audience is or is not forced to view the ad, if sound is expected as part of the advertising experience on the platform, or creative factors such as whether sound is primarily music or a voiceover. The impact of sound to a "forced vs. voluntary" exposure is reflected in the figure 7 below.

Fig. 7



Overall, the contribution of all of these variables and nuances will be reflected in each platform and format's ability to drive recall or choice. As such, it is important that any value system used in planning for attention considers the ability of each second to translate into a brand outcome.

# Developing an approach for planning

So how does all of this come together? The robust and comprehensive dataset that we have amassed through our eye-tracking studies enables us to have attention norms that can predict attentive seconds and the value of that attention.

Combining factors like attention, dwell time, and the outcome model with cost allows us to create a CPM based on an “effective attentive second” specific to various media circumstances.

It is important to note that although we have norms for both recall and choice, we recommend leveraging recall as the benchmark for planning, as it is more robust and has less sensitivity to the specific brand/creative. We also see that recall has a strong correlation to brand choice.

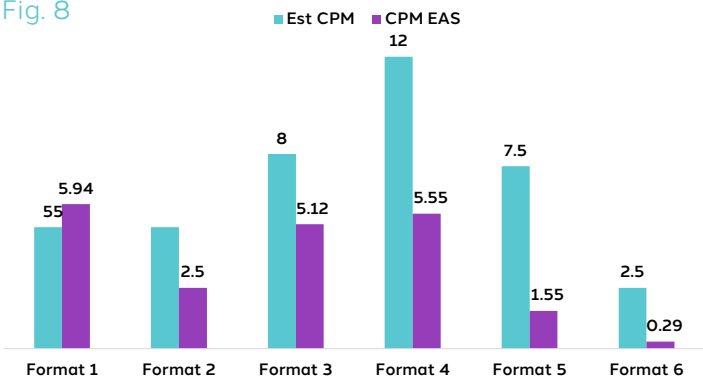
The graph below is an example of how this data can be put into practice, comparing what the format allocation would look like if optimized towards a standard CPM plan vs. a CPM based on an “effective attentive second”. The resulting optimization showcases quite a different mix when accounting for attention.

We were able to maintain reach and cost for the plan but were able to gain 3.7 years of attention in one month.

The beauty in this approach sits with its flexibility such that we can tailor it to different brands, categories, markets, and business objectives. Through our Attention Economy dataset, we have robust averages and norms across placements that will already deliver a significant improvement in planning compared to standard impression-based approaches. These norms can be swapped to be category and brand specific if our clients choose to conduct their own tailored attention measurement. They can develop their own benchmarks for dwell time and recall (or other KPI) to optimize towards. All this data will be made readily available across our planning tools so that teams are able to easily leverage this for their clients.

Gained 3.7 years of attention in one month

Fig. 8





## Activation and measurement

Beyond research, data acquisition, and planning, the next step is to bring this data into life via campaign activations. The attention model we've built through our research can then be applied to impression level data to predict the amount of attention those impressions will receive.

**As such, our “Attention Algorithm” can put theory into practice and enable optimization towards high attention inventory in display and video in real time.**

We are also developing strategic partnerships with ad tech companies and scaled platforms on solutions for activating attention data on their platforms. This attention model can also be used for measurement so that brands can have a more dynamic indicator of how their campaigns are performing.

We are also pushing the envelope within the TV marketplace by testing models with bold clients and advocating for fresh methodologies on how to utilize TVision's attention data as a currency. We have been leading the charge on collaborating and rallying media owners and industry bodies behind this.



## Delivering meaningful progress in the Attention Economy

The Attention Economy program, the largest in scope and scale of its kind, is an important contribution to improving advertisers' communication effectiveness. The research has further validated the value of attention as a media metric, and most importantly, how we can apply this in practice. We are working with innovative clients and media partners to ensure we build attention metrics into their media frameworks to drive success.

As with the adoption of any new currency or forward-thinking model, there will be some risk-taking and

increased collaboration needed within the industry ecosystem to accomplish any robust change. This involves lots of research, lots of testing and strategic partnerships.

At dentsu, we are continuing to rally our clients and the media owners we work with to continue to move the needle and to solve for the sizable gap between current metrics and real human behavior. However, we know we are at a turning point and are willing to do the collaboration and hard work to help build a fairer, more robust, and effective advertising landscape.

# About the Attention Economy Program

In one of the largest studies of its kind, dentsu's Attention Economy initiative has significantly invested in the creation and data acquisition across the US, UK, and Australia. We work with the leaders in the space such as Lumen Research, TVision, and Amplified intelligence in robust and independent studies on attention.

Since March 2018, we have been measuring attention to advertising through eye-tracking. Additionally, we are collaborating with forward thinking partners such as Facebook, Spotify, Snap, Teads, Yahoo and Broadcasters and Tech platforms.

Mobile eye-tracking panels of 3400 respondents were built with Amplified Intelligence, further eye-tracking panels of 6,000 were built with Lumen and large-scale TVision data was purchased based on a panel of 5500 households in the US. Data was collected both "in the wild" audience behavior across multiple platforms and ad formats as well as conducting extensive controlled experiments for brand ads in 20 plus sectors across numerous platforms.

## Contacts

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