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## WHY DIRECT MAIL IS MORE MEMORABLE THAN DIGITAL ADVERTISING: A RESEARCH STUDY

**Neuromarketing research shows physical advertisements have a pronounced effect on consumer decision-making.**

The most optimal marketing campaigns are multifaceted endeavors, mixing multiple mediums to hit their target audience. Magazine ads, websites, billboards, direct mail, social media and smartphone apps are just a few ways companies convert customers. To drive profits, businesses must allocate their marketing dollars across the right channels. Today, no brand can dispute the power of the digital world, but what about physical advertisements like direct mail and print ads? What gives them their edge?

To get to the heart of this question, the U.S. Postal Service Office of Inspector General partnered with the Center for Neural Decision Making at Temple University's Fox School of Business to study the power of print and digital advertisements. Together, they found participants spent more time with physical advertisements, showed more desire for a product seen in print and were more stimulated by physical ads than by their digital counterparts. Below, we'll dive deeper into the research and the results. Read on to learn how and when physical advertisements dominate digital marketing.

### Neuromarketing Explained

At the heart of this study lies neuromarketing. This emerging field combines the insights of multiple disciplines, including neuroscience and psychology, to answer questions about marketing, consumer behavior and advertising phenomena.<sup>1</sup> Working with Temple University, the USPS used neuromarketing tactics to explore how consumers processed and engaged with physical and digital advertisements, both consciously and subconsciously.

NEUROMARKETING RESEARCH TECHNIQUES		
	How It Works	What It Reveals
 <b>Eye Tracking</b>	A camera and infrared technology monitor eye movements, in terms of speed and duration of attention.	Tracks visual attention

 <p><b>Core Biometrics</b></p>	<p>Sensors placed on fingertips measure heart rate, skin conductance (sweat), motion and respiration.</p>	<p>Gauges the depth of emotional engagement</p>
 <p><b>Functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging</b></p>	<p>This brain scanner measures change in oxygenated blood flow to show what parts of the brain are activated during a task or experience.</p>	<p>Pinpoints specific deep-brain activity beyond surface cognitive function, i.e., empathy and reward</p>

([https://www.uspsdelivers.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/article\\_direct-mail-more-memorable\\_01.png](https://www.uspsdelivers.com/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/article_direct-mail-more-memorable_01.png))

By looking at these neurophysiological measurements, researchers were able to make conclusions about consumers at three stages of the buying process. These stages include: exposure to information, retrieval of information, and action. By understanding consumers' subconscious responses, businesses can optimize their marketing strategies and determine when to use mail, digital media or both in combination.

## The Methodology

Temple University used survey questionnaires, eye tracking, core biometrics and neuroimaging to compare the effectiveness of both types of advertisements. In the first study session, participants viewed physical and digital ads for products, services and restaurants. The physical ads were printed

on postcards, while the digital ads were embedded in emails. Eye-tracking equipment captured which ads they looked at and for how long. At the same time, biometrics equipment measured heart rate and skin conductance, which indicated physiological response resulting from emotional engagement.

A week later, researchers carried out a second session, in which they tested memory and willingness to pay. During this session, a functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) scanner measured the participants' brain activity while they answered a series of questions about advertisements. Each subject had to indicate which ads they remembered from the week before. Finally, they underwent a simulated purchasing process, in which they had to report the amount they were willing to pay for each service, product or meal. Parsing through this data, researchers were able to make a number of telling conclusions.

## The Results

Physical advertisements were proven to have more influence than digital ads in a number of ways. Not only did participants spend more time with physical ads, they also remembered them more quickly and confidently. Physical ads also elicited a stronger emotional response than their digital counterparts and, overall, had a longer-lasting impact. Looking at brain activity, researchers also discovered that participants showed a greater subconscious valuation and desire for products or services advertised in a physical format. This means physical ads are particularly effective in two stages of the consumer journey: exposure to information and retrieval of information. Digital ads trumped their physical counterparts in only one area: focused attention. Though participants did show more attention to digital ads, they gained the same amount of information from both types of advertisements.

Factor	Definition	Most Effective Ad Format
Attention	Focusing on key components of an ad for a sustained period of time	
Review Time	The amount of time a customer spends with an ad	
Engagement	The amount of information a customer processes or absorbs from an ad	
Stimulation	An emotional reaction to an ad	
Memory Retrieval Accuracy	Accurately remembering the advertising source and content	

<b>Memory Speed &amp; Confidence</b>	Quickly and confidently remembering advertising sources and content	
<b>Purchase &amp; Willingness to Pay</b>	Whether the customer is willing to pay for a product, and how much	
<b>Desirability</b>	A subconscious desire for the product or service	
<b>Valuation</b>	The subconscious value a participant places on the product or service	

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## Conclusion

What does this mean for marketing decision-makers? A few things. Digital media is both cost-effective and the fastest way to communicate an idea to customers. Stakeholders should use these digital ads when looking to gain attention and quickly deliver their message. However, print materials like direct mail, billboards and magazine ads have a more pronounced emotional effect on consumers. For marketers who want advertising with long-lasting impact and easy recollection, a physical ad simply has more psychological influence. Both mediums have their advantages. The most effective campaigns will use both in combination to create the most potent marketing mix.

<sup>1</sup>RARC-WP-15-012 *Enhancing the Value of the Mail: The Human Response*. www.uspsoig.gov. Office of Inspector General, United States Postal Service, 15 June 2015.

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