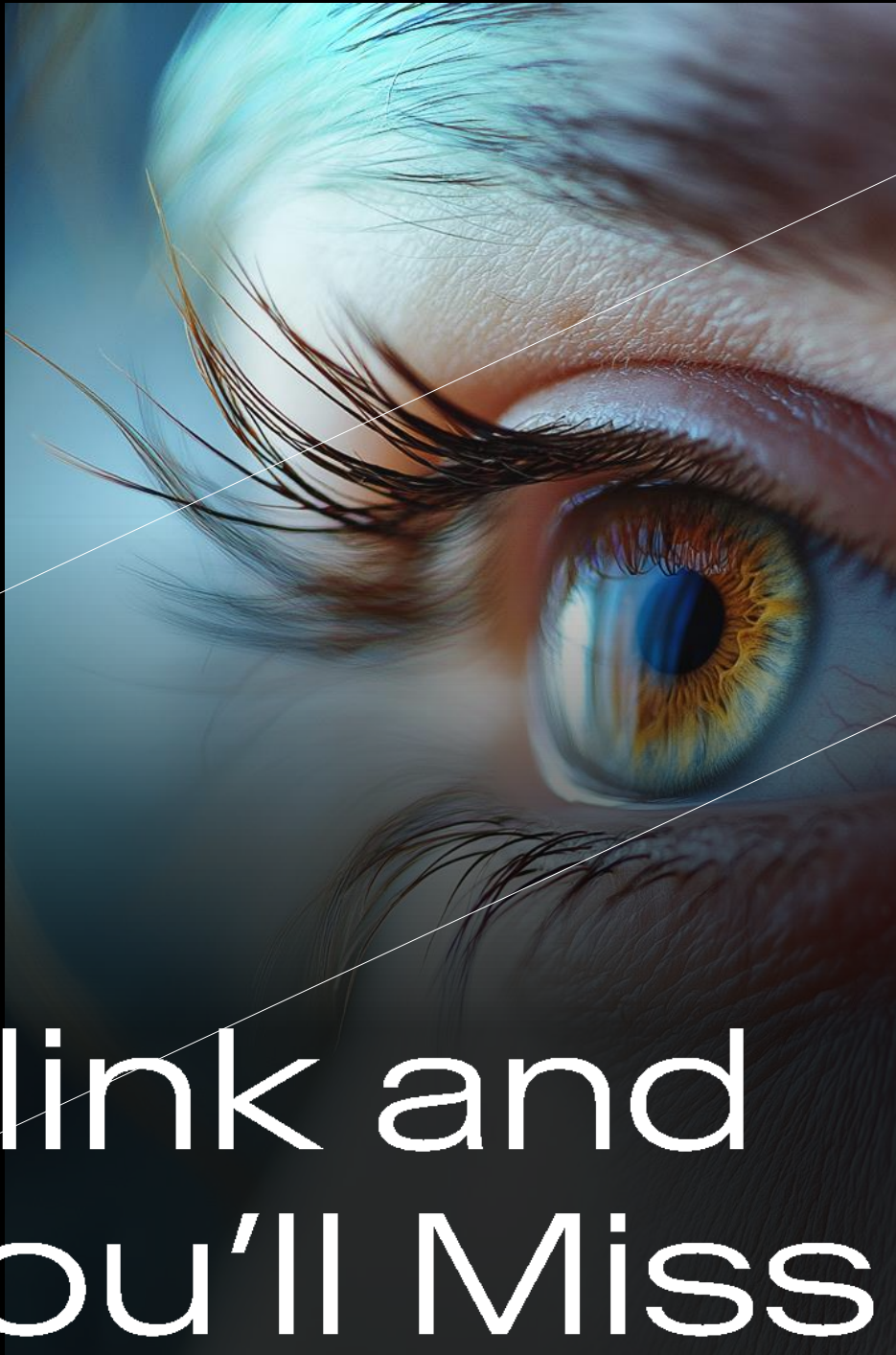


HAVAS Media
Network



Blink and You'll Miss It

Three Seminal Papers on Attention
and Brand Growth

Over the past six months, three landmark studies – comprised of completely different data sets – explored the connection between attention and brand outcomes:

Havas, Lumen and Brand Metrics

What 9,000 brand lift studies teach us about Attention and Memory

Dr. Grace Kite / Magic Numbers for JICMAIL

The lots of littles route to modern brand building

Karen Nelson Field phd / Eatbigfish / Peter Field

The eye watering cost of dull media

Despite the different methodology used in these studies, they all present clear evidence that attention drives brand outcomes. With greater academic rigor behind the value of attention than ever before, this paper explores how the power of attention is being harnessed across Havas and what all advertisers and planners can learn from these insights.

Attention: The Key to Brand Building

While conventional wisdom has always held that ads need to get attention to work, recent work makes this truth explicit. Lumen, Brand Metrics, and Havas' analysis of 9,000 brand-lift studies concluded plainly that "Attention & brand outcomes are closely correlated.

In other words, the more time people actually spend looking at an ad, the more it moves the needle on awareness, consideration, preference and purchase intent. Across billions of measured impressions, these researchers found that total attentive time is a "key determinant" of brand lift. In fact, they emphasize that shifts in brand metrics are driven by attention time rather than mere viewability or noticeability. In short, every study agrees: boosting real attention beats aiming for cheap reach.

At Havas, we've embedded attention into the heart of our Converged planning philosophy. Our proprietary Attention Design tool enables planners to allocate media budgets not just by reach, but by attentive reach, optimizing for both scale and quality of engagement. This ensures that every media dollar is working harder to drive brand outcomes. Our collaboration with Lumen and Brand Metrics has also led to the development of Attention Goals, a planning framework that links attention levels to specific brand KPIs like awareness, consideration, and intent, allowing tailored strategies by category and campaign objective.

Attention and Brand Outcomes

All three reports underscore that attention = impact. The Havas/Lumen study provides hard data: as aggregate attention rises, so do brand metrics. This analysis found that even small increments of attention can move the needle if repeated often enough.

For instance, 10 banner exposures (each capturing a fraction of a second) can add up to ~7 seconds of total attention, generating significant lift. Likewise, “shifts in brand lift measures” were found to correspond to actual seconds of attention. In our terms: ads have to be seen long enough to stick in memory.

Karen Nelson-Field’s Amplified Intelligence research echoes these findings: ads that fail to cross a critical attention threshold simply don’t build memory. Karen found that roughly 2.5 seconds is a proven cut-off for memory formation; if an ad engagement is shorter, it likely yields little lasting impact. The studies agree that attention time predicts brand outcomes much better than raw views.



**Active attention
is especially key:**

**Amplified quantifies that “Active Attention”
(looking directly at an ad) is about 7× more
predictive of real results than passive exposure.**

In practice, this means we should care less about how many ads are merely “in view” and more about how many seconds people actually look at them.

Frequency and the Power of “Lots of Littles”



Another clear theme is that multiple exposures accumulate. With most ads grabbing only fleeting glances of attention, these studies show the value of frequency. The Lumen analysis found that, “frequency drives attentive reach and aggregate attention time”. In plain terms: the more times we show an ad, the more total attention we can generate. This data suggests that buying several short, engaging spots often beats a single long one, especially for awareness.



In fact, the sweet spot for awareness/consideration seems to be about 2–5 seconds of total attention spread over multiple impressions.

Lumen discovered that 5 ads each viewed ~1–2 seconds can outperform one ad viewed 5 seconds once.

The “Lots of Littles” perspective (JICMAIL/Magic Numbers) strongly confirms these findings, stating, “seeing lots of ads is a perfectly good substitute for lack of attention to any one ad.” In other words, repeated small touches of attention can make up for not having one blockbuster moment. Their research shows that a handful of ~2-second exposures can raise awareness similarly to a few longer views. These findings support classic advertising wisdom, with one study even citing 1960s research that frequent low-attention exposures still move brand perceptions if repeated.

However, while many small ads can work, there’s a balance. The Lumen research warns that one can “salami-slice attention too thinly”. If impressions are too brief, each gains no effect. Their data suggest the middle approach is best: several exposures each garnering at least 1 second of attention, totaling a few seconds per person. In practice, this means planning enough reach and frequency so most viewers cross the 2–3 second attention threshold. When they do, brand lift follows.

Havas’ Converged tools are designed to harness the power of cumulative attention. The Meaningful Media Planner ranks over 150,000 global media properties across Display, Video, CTV and more, based on their ability to deliver attentive seconds, not just impressions. This allows us to plan for frequency and attention in tandem, ensuring that even short exposures add up to meaningful brand impact.

Crafting for Attention: Channels, Creative and Context

Attention doesn't just depend on frequency, the 'where' and 'how' matter too. All studies emphasize matching creative to context and leveraging multiple channels. As the JICMAIL/Magic Number team puts it, "variety in media is a feature, not a bug." In today's fragmented landscape, using a mix of channels can actually boost attention and memory.

Their study cites evidence that "omnichannel campaigns that are 'connected' get 40% more attention and are 20% more memorable".

In other words, when ads across TV, digital, mail and out-of-home reinforce each other (the "matching luggage" approach), people notice more and remember more.

The research also stresses tailoring ads to their place. For example, bespoke YouTube ads (with custom thumbnails and hooks) were shown to get 4x more attention and +17% brand lift than repurposed creative. Similarly, JICMAIL notes that the right environment boosts attention: ads on a readers' own doorstep or at a cozy living room get much longer looks (one finding showed 26–46 seconds attention for mail in home contexts). The Amplified report also instills this lesson: each medium has a natural attention decay curve, so we should size our ads to fit it. (One of their "Anti-Dull" check questions is: "Are we sizing our ad length to the format's natural attention curve?")

With attention earned through both relevance and resonance, Havas Meaningful Social Matrix (MSM) evaluates social platforms and formats based on their attention performance, helping guide clients toward the most effective creative-context pairings. Whether it's tailoring creative for skippable video or aligning

messaging with high-attention environments, these tools help ensure that every impression has the best chance to stick.

Havas also bring media and creative together through our Converged process, aligning the three Cs that drive attention: Connection, Context, and Creative. This integrated approach ensures that attention is engineered into every stage of the campaign lifecycle—from identifying the right audience and environment to crafting platform-specific creative that captures attention instantly.

Creative must be designed to capture interest instantly in each context. Quick emotional hooks, relevant messaging and high-quality context can grab eyeballs. The payoff of this is significant: one case study rebalanced toward higher-attention channels and creative and saw their campaign hit targets 4 months early, while another achieved 35% more attention and a 9% lift in brand scores. This shows that aligning media mix and creative for attention pays real dividends.

The High Cost of “Dull” Media

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Using large-scale data, Amplified estimates a **\$198 billion annual penalty industry-wide** from underperforming “dull” ad formats.

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This study also highlights a key insight: cheap reach does not equal impact. One damning quote: low-cost platforms “bleed effectiveness” beneath the surface. As noted, “not all impressions are equal because not all platforms gather equal attention. “For example, an out-of-home poster might get many seconds of engaged gaze, while a cheap display ad might flicker by unnoticed. The “Cost of Dull” makes a forceful point that metrics like CPM or even viewability can mislead: paying for a million impressions is useless if 90% of them aren't looked at.

Importantly, Amplified distinguishes active vs passive attention. They find that active attention (eyes on the ad) correlates ~7× more strongly with memory and ROI than passive glances. In practice, this means planners should optimize for genuine engagement, not just served ads. The Amplified team even offers an “Attention Volume” metric (reach × attention time) to capture this. Regardless, the takeaway is sharp: brands need to measure and buy for attention, not just impressions. Otherwise, they pay full freight for partial delivery.

At Havas , we actively help clients avoid the “attention tax” of low-performing media. Our planning frameworks prioritize active attention and attention volume (reach × time), allowing us to identify and eliminate underperforming placements. By integrating attention metrics into our dashboards and audits, we ensure that media plans are optimized not just for cost-efficiency, but for effectiveness.

Consensus and Contrasts

Despite different angles, these studies share strong agreement on key points. All conclude that attention is a better predictor of brand success than raw views. They stress that brands should move beyond “opportunity to see” metrics and focus on engaged exposure. They also all support the power of repetition: more targeted exposures lead to more total attention, which in turn drives awareness. And each paper highlights the importance of creative fit and context: ads must stand out in their environment to register in memory.

Where they diverge is mostly in emphasis and scope. Lumen’s analysis is data-heavy and breaks out strategies by goal: it notes that awareness/consideration campaigns do best with many “good enough” views, while preference/intent might also benefit from fewer but deeper engagements.

The JICMAIL/MagicNumbers piece takes a broader planning view, focusing on media fragmentation and integration across channels (what they call the “lots of littles route”). It brings

in insight from other industry sources (Thinkbox, IAS, Guinness/IPA) about how trust, emotion and context influence attention. Amplified’s study, by contrast, is more alarmist about the costs of neglect: it quantifies industry-wide losses and offers tools (like the Anti-Dull Dial) to diagnose attention leaks.

In summary, the common ground is clear: invest in attention. If there’s a slight tension, it’s over tactics (buy many tiny ads or a few big ones), but even that resolves into nuance. In fact, Lumen’s results and JICMAIL’s narrative align neatly: you can either sum many brief engagements or hit with a few longer ones — both approaches can work if managed well. Importantly, all three remind us to buy attention, not just cheap media. The devil is in the details, but the destination is shared: better brand results through genuine audience engagement.

Practical Takeaways for Advertisers and Planners

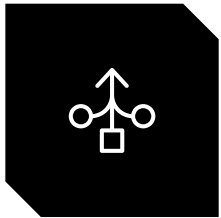
Given these findings, what should advertisers do differently? Here are some action points, with guidance drawn from all three studies:



Measure attention, not just impressions

Look for partners or tools that estimate attentive reach and attention time. For instance, Lumen and Brand Metrics can match predicted attention with survey lift, and Amplified provides biometric-backed attention metrics.

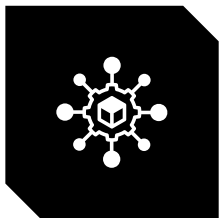
Use these to judge media quality. Remember: many impressions with low attention are virtually worthless.



Optimize frequency to build aggregate attention

Plan campaigns so each person sees your ad multiple times. Data suggests aiming for at least ~2–3 total seconds of attention per viewer. For awareness, it may be best achieved via several shorter ads.

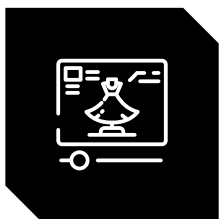
As one study puts it, spreading 3–5 seconds of attention across multiple spots often “balances cost and impact” best. Track the cumulative attention (e.g. how many viewers exceed that ~2.5s threshold) as a KPI alongside reach.



Use an integrated, multichannel approach

Coordinate creative and message across TV, digital, OOH, mail, etc. The evidence suggests cross-channel campaigns get ~40% more attention.

Don’t put all budget in one silo; instead, ensure each channel adds something unique (brand asset reinforcement, different angles) so together they “nudge” brand memory from different directions. But also make them coherent: mismatched ads in different places dilute effect, whereas connected campaigns amplify it.



Tailor creative to the medium

Make each execution “fit” its platform. For example, on social or video use compelling thumbnails and instant hooks; for contextual media (like email or editorial sites), align ad themes with surrounding content to hold attention.

The Cost of Dull report even advises sizing ad length to attention decay (e.g. don’t run 60s ads in a 10s skippable environment). The goal is always to earn the longest view time possible per impression.

Practical Takeaways for Advertisers and Planners

Given these findings, what should advertisers do differently? Here are some action points, with guidance drawn from all three studies:



Avoid “dull” placements

Be skeptical of ultra-cheap impressions or inventory. If a platform consistently shows low attention metrics (Amplified would say it’s in the bottom 10–20% of Attention Volume), consider reallocating. It may feel efficient to buy mass reach at low CPM, but that’s false economy.

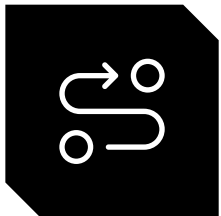
Instead, shift toward formats with higher active attention, even at higher unit cost. As one case showed, optimizing out low-attention inventory led to 30% more conversions and 33% lower CPA. Ask: “Are we buying attentive reach or chasing cheap impressions?” (A key anti-dull question).



Rebalance for attention yield

In practice, this might mean raising your CPM budget share for premium, attention-rich media. For example, several planners have reallocated to high-attention channels (digital video, premium OOH, targeted mail, etc.) and saw big wins: one brand hit its yearly targets 4 months early after such a shift.

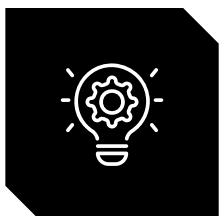
Use any attention data you have to identify underperformers and lift those that drive engagement. One advertiser improved their Distinctive Brand Asset score by 9% within months by moving toward higher-attention formats.



Embed attention in your planning tools

Update your media models and dashboards to include attention metrics. For brand-building campaigns, set goals in terms of “seconds of human attention” or “attention reach” in addition to impressions or GRPs. The Lumen/Havas study suggests even building “attention thresholds” for each goal (e.g. X total seconds for lift in awareness vs. a single 5s exposure for intent).

Similarly, Amplified’s Media Anti-Dull Dial offers a checklist to evaluate your plan from a human-attention standpoint (e.g. “Are we closing the served: seen gap?”). Make attention a routine part of your media audits.



Above all, remember the endgame

Brand memory and growth. These studies remind us that even the best creative won’t work if no one’s looking. As Amplified puts it, dullness is structural – it’s “in the formats you buy, the time-in-view you assume, the attention you overestimate.”

By re-focusing on human attention, we stop paying for “partial delivery”. Every impression costs something, but only those that break through truly pay off.

Practical Takeaways for Advertisers and Planners

Within Havas' Converged Measurement Framework, we evaluate campaigns across four key dimensions:



CONVERGED

How well media and creative are integrated to deliver cohesive brand experiences.

ATTENTIVE

The quality and quantity of human attention earned across platforms.

EFFECTIVE

The impact on brand and business outcomes.

INCREMENTAL

The unique contribution of media to driving business growth beyond baseline performance.

By embedding attention metrics into this framework, we ensure that attention is tracked, optimized, and linked directly to outcomes, making it a true currency of effectiveness.

Sources: Insights above draw directly on Havas/Lumen's "What Do 9,000 Brand Lift Studies Teach Us About Attention & Memory?" (2024), the JICMAIL/Magic Numbers "Lots of Littles" talk (2025), and Amplified Intelligence's "Cost of Dull Media" report (2024), as cited.