

Do ads really count?

RATNA BHUSHAN



The survey emphasises that car advertising is hardly a reckoner when it comes to determining purchase decisions.

Car. Status symbol – object of desire – dream on four wheels. While cars do mean all this and perhaps a lot more to their owners (or potential owners), here's a double take for car makers. Car advertising is hardly a reckoner when it comes to determining purchase decisions, a point emphasised in this survey.

The study reveals that, surprisingly, car ads do not really change the way consumers feel about the brand. So much so that close to 40 per cent of the people surveyed were of the opinion that advertising is not really necessary in a category such as cars. An almost equal number of respondents (39 per cent) were unable to recall even a single car ad. This, despite each of the respondents having either purchased a car recently, or intending to buy one shortly.

Sanjay Garg, General Manager, Enterprise Nexus, offers an explanation, "Basically, the two key influencers when it comes to car purchase decisions are product and price. If the product and pricing are

all wrong, then no amount of advertising will be able to influence purchase decisions. A car is, after all, a highly complex consumer durable; it's a lifetime purchase." Garg, however, does not deny the importance of advertising. "Advertising places the brand in the consumer's consideration set. Given the high level of competition, car marketers cannot disregard the importance of advertising. It's necessary to remain top-of-mind and create a positive perception, which explains high ad spends within the category," he says.

And as a Maruti spokesperson says, "Advertising for specific car brands may not have been recalled *per se*, but it's a fact that advertising does shape brand perceptions to a large extent." Agrees A.P. Gandhi, President, Hyundai Motor India Ltd. "There is no doubt that it plays a big role, especially in India where competition is high and you need to advertise to establish your USP," he says.

In Hyundai's case, he says, it was the initial advertising with a



celebrity, Shah Rukh Khan, that actually swung the balance in its favour. Hyundai was introducing a new car, an unknown entity, and the teaser ads that introduced the company enabled the brand to have a high recall value, adds Gandhi. A point endorsed by the survey findings.

Referring to the survey where almost 40 per cent have said that car advertising was not necessary, Gandhi strongly disagrees with this finding. Ads are necessary, no doubt, he insists, but they alone cannot sell a cars as there are many other factors that prompt purchase such as word-of-mouth, technology, after-sales service, product experience *et al*, which influence purchase. "Ads need to be backed by a good quality product and have to deliver the promised experience. It's a combination of everything," says Gandhi.

Bollywood reigns

The 60 per cent of the respondents who did manage to recall the advertising of some car brands

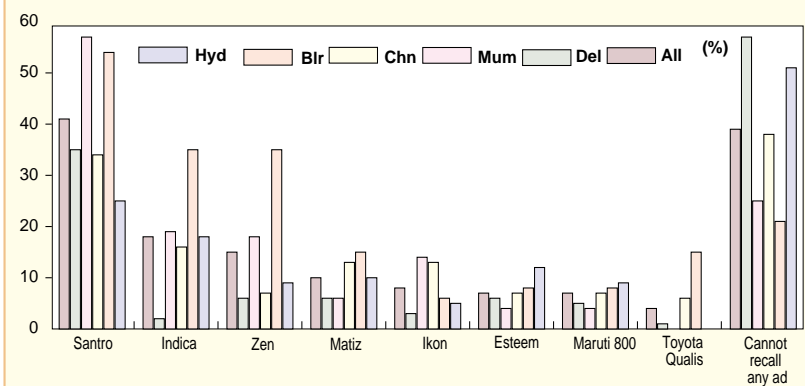
threw up a mixed verdict. Hyundai's 'zip drive' Santro has been rated top of the charts. Santro's advertising was rated with the highest recall, with 34 per cent of the respondents voting in favour of the brand's advertising. Clearly, Bollywood reigns. For Hyundai Motors, it appears to have been a buck well spent, with Shah Rukh Khan managing to connect with the target audience and work well for Santro's advertising. The Bollywood star has emerged as the single most recalled element in Santro's advertising.

One among the micro-level elements recalled was the spot showing Shah Rukh zooming along in a zig-zag pattern in a Santro, with a pretty young thing seated next to him. Other gimmicks that Shah Rukh carries out with aplomb – chasing kidnappers and saving the damsel in distress, manoeuvring the car through a traffic jam, thanks to its prominently displayed power steering, parking with ease in a tight slot - have worked for the brand. And yes, the star's *ghuma*

Bollywood star Shah Rukh Khan has emerged as the single most recalled element in the Santro ad, which is also the ad with the highest recall.



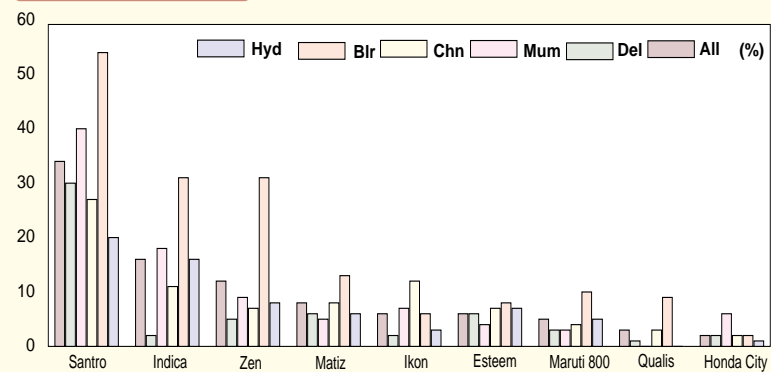
How many actually recalled car ads



In some cases column totals may not add up to 100 per cent as multiple responses were elicited from respondents.



Favourite ads (Top 9)



In some cases column totals may not add up to 100 per cent as multiple responses were elicited from respondents.

diya sabko punchline also figures among the elements recalled, but only in Mumbai.

On the downside, while the storyline for Santro's advertising has been recalled only in Delhi and Bangalore, only respondents from Bangalore recalled the 'complete family car' punchline.

Following, at a considerable distance, were the other brands of small cars. The only ones that have etched some degree of brand recall, on the advertising front, were Tata Indica (18 per cent), the Maruti Zen (15 per cent), and Daewoo's Matiz (10 per cent).

The 'world car' positioning of the Maruti Zen has been taken in only by respondents of Bangalore. One Zen commercial which features the executive heading back home from the workplace and

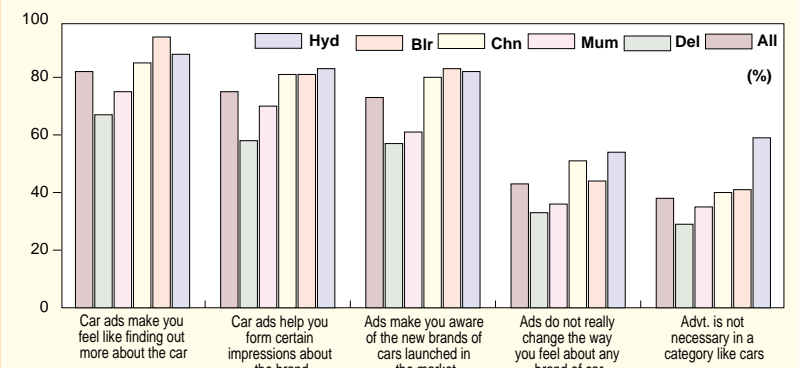
arriving home in quick time, shows healthy recall in Delhi (50 per cent) and Bangalore (28 per cent). A whole lot of respondents confused the Zen 'world car' commercial with the Esteem and the Maruti 800 commercials.

The Matiz commercial has not been able to cut much ice with the respondents, with very few recalling any specific elements of the advertising. While the 'complete family car' positioning was recalled in Chennai the most, the commercial showing different models and power steering registered considerable recall only in Delhi and Mumbai.

The good news for Indica is that its 'more savings per car' commercial has been recalled. The bad news is that it is the only element of the advertising that respondents



How car ads are perceived



In some cases column totals may not add up to 100 per cent as multiple responses were elicited from respondents.

Elements recalled from Indica ad %

Elements recalled	All	Del	Mum	Chn	Blr	Hyd
More savings per car	49	-	9	18	90	45
Power steering shown	5	-	25	-	-	-

Elements recalled from Matiz ad %

Elements recalled	All	Del	Mum	Chn	Blr	Hyd
It's a complete family car	12	-	18	29	4	6
Different models shown	10	36	27	-	8	-
Power steering shown	7	27	27	-	-	-
Spice car	7	-	-	-	24	-
Liked the look of the car	4	9	-	4	8	-
Some children sitting on top of the car & playing cards	4	-	-	13	4	-

Elements recalled from Zen ad %

Elements recalled	All	Del	Mum	Chn	Blr	Hyd
Man goes back home from office and reaches home early in a Zen	19	50	3	-	28	13
It's a complete family car	15	-	25	8	17	-
A world car	12	-	-	-	25	-
Different models shown	5	-	13	-	2	7
Mera Sapna Meri Maruti	5	-	22	-	-	-

Elements recalled from Santro ad %

Elements recalled	All	Del	Mum	Chn	Blr	Hyd
Shah Rukh Khan drives the car in a zig zag pattern, with a girl in passenger seat	16	10	12	8	29	19
It's a complete family car	15	5	4	5	44	9
Shah Rukh chases the kidnappers in his Santro and saves the girl	15	15	-	10	38	2
Shah Rukh Khan drives the car	12	31	4	17	10	5
Shah Rukh Khan drives the car in a big traffic jam	10	16	11	12	4	9
Power steering is shown	9	16	16	2	-	9
Shah Rukh Khan is shown driving the car in less space / cramped road	7	30	4	2	-	7
Ghuma diya sabko	6	-	21	-	-	-
Smooth driving is mentioned	5	20	-	-	2	7
Girl sitting inside tells Shah Rukh Khan that they must go fast / early	5	16	-	-	3	9
Shah Rukh Khan drives very fast	5	10	4	10	3	-
Talks about easy parking	5	2	1	-	13	9

seem to remember, that too only in Bangalore and Hyderabad.

Old workhorse Maruti 800, for its near-generic status and fairly consistent advertising, has been given negligible preference on the advertising front. On an all-India basis, only seven per cent of the respondents recalled the advertising for the Maruti 800.

Toyota Qualis' advertising figures at the bottom of the list, with respondents from Mumbai and Hyderabad not recalling the advertising at all.

Interestingly, only the small cars have figured among the ads with high recall, and the Ford Ikon and Maruti Esteem are rated after Santro, Indica, Zen and Matiz.

What is also interesting is that respondents across different cities have given diverse verdicts. For example, respondents in Mumbai and Bangalore were able to recall at least one car ad. People in Delhi and Hyderabad come across as less proactive on this front. Close to 50 per cent of the respondents interviewed in Delhi and Hyderabad were unable to recall even a single ad campaign for cars.

Size does not matter

Size does not matter. Neither does gender. The respondents have shown unanimity in terms of pattern of ad recall. A luxury car owner, for example, is as likely to recall a Santro ad, as is the owner of a small car. And surprisingly, men and women seem to agree on their choice of car advertising. For example, while 42 per cent of the men recalled the Santro ad, almost as many women (37 per cent, to be precise), mentioned the same ad as the highest on brand recall. And for the 19 per cent men who recalled the Indica ad, there were 14 per cent women rooting for the same. Men and women have shown identical rating patterns for the Zen and Matiz too.

Perhaps it is time for car companies and their respective ad agencies to set their creative juices flowing afresh. ■

Pic: Paul Noronha



Pic: A. Roy Chowdhury

