



قياس استخدام وتلقي الحجاج والمعتمرين للتوعية من خلال الشاشات الإلكترونية في المنطقة

المركزية كمصدر للمعلومات

أ.د. فضل رحيم خان

معهد خادم الحرمين الشريفين لأبحاث الحج والعمرة

## The pilgrims' Use and Perceptions of the Electronic Billboards (EBBs) as an Information Resource: A Study on the Utility of the EBBs

Prof. Fazal Rahim Khan\*

Dr. Osman Gazzaz\*\*

Dept. of Communication Research and Media Affairs, the Institute of the Custodian of the Two Holy Mosques for Hajj & Omrah Research, the Umm Al-Qura University, Makkah al-Mukarramah, the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia.

### Abstract

The present study has examined the utility of the electronic billboards (EBBs) as a public service announcement (PSA) tool in the Haram Shareef area. Data were gathered from a non-probability sample of the Omrah pilgrims on the use, perceptions, and recall of the EBBs messages. In-depth interviews with informed informants were also used to help interpret the data. Pilgrims attention to the billboards and their recall of the messages were used as factors of billboard utility and effectiveness. On the basis of frequency distribution analysis coupled with simple elaboration through graphical method, the study concludes that despite their potential for high effectiveness the EBBs are not producing much of an impact on the pilgrims, and proffers recommendations on improving their utility as a PSA tool for the pilgrims.

### Introduction

#### *Significance & Rationale of the Study*

Advertising through electronic billboards is part of the outdoor or the out of home advertising market and is one of the fastest growing segments of the media industry in the Western world (Lopez-Pumerarejo & Bassell, 2009; Gambetti, 2010). Advances in technology has seen the electronic billboards (EBBs) become a useful tool of getting commercial and public service messages across to a target audience in areas that are crowded or highly frequented. Hence, in the West, the electronic billboards are now a common occurrence in the market places, the shopping malls, and on the busy roads. This, in itself, is an ample testimony to their effectiveness as message carriers. In view, perhaps, of their potential utility as a publicity and information dissemination tool, the Saudi authorities have set up digital billboards at prominent locations in close vicinity of the King Abdul Aziz & the King Fahd Gates of the Masjid al-Haram Shareef. These billboards mainly carry religious messages and public service announcements.<sup>10</sup> Prima facie, the effectiveness assumption of the billboards may well

\*PhD, UW-Madison, USA.

\*\*PhD, Univ. of Leicester, UK.













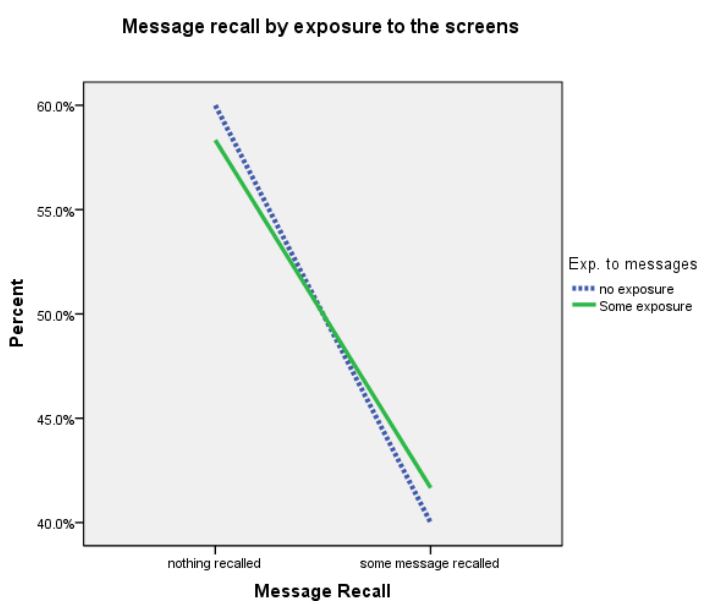




language of the billboards text need to be diversified to include other languages. The variable “pilgrim group” is, in fact, a surrogate for the language proficiency of the pilgrims. And the language proficiency is important if we consider the fact that the language of the billboards primarily was Arabic and secondarily English. This clearly implies that the variable “pilgrim group” might be a suppressor variable in the exposure-recall relationship suppressing it from showing up in the sample. This fact requires that the effect of the variable “pilgrim group” shall have to be partialled out or controlled for validly establishing the relationship in the sample.

Figure 3 provides a first order partial for the effect of the billboard exposure on the pilgrims’ billboard recall with the pilgrim group being a control variable. Now we see a very clear effect of the billboard exposure on recall in the “other pilgrims” category (cf. Figure 3). In the “other pilgrims” panel, a higher proportion of the “some exposure” group recalls message as compared to the “no exposure” group. Thus, the exposure is interacting with the “pilgrim group” variable; i.e., the language of the message to produce an effect on the message recall. This contingent role interpretation of the text language becomes visible from the absence of any effect of the exposure on message recall in the “Urdu speaking” group of Figure 3. This means that depending on the language of the text, or the group a pilgrim belongs to , the exposure does have an effect on message recall in the sample.

**Figure 1**



**Figure 2**

