



# **Convenience Advertising**

**EVALUATION OF THE CONVENIENCE  
ADVERTISING STRATEGY FOR AIDS  
MESSAGES ON IRISH UNIVERSITY CAMPUSES**

Dr Stephen Mugford

Dept of Sociology  
The Faculties  
Australian National University  
Canberra  
AUSTRALIA

June 1999 *1999*

9106003

*uploaded 20.12.02*

## Summary

This report covers a detailed study of almost 367 students (almost all 17-25) on two campuses (UCD, NCAD) in the Republic of Ireland. On both campuses AIDS related posters were displayed in small posters in the toilet areas of union and similar buildings.

Some weeks later, samples of students across the range of courses were given a self completion questionnaire which, in addition to background data, sought recall of the ads, the recency with which they had been seen and the locations splayed as well as material about the use of the target buildings.

The results showed that those students who were exposed to the ads by virtue of regularly using the toilets in those buildings were significantly more likely to recall the ads and report seeing them recently than those not exposed. All relationships were very clear and of considerable magnitude.

The pattern of results closely parallels that obtained with similar advertisements on two Australian campuses. While only two adverts allow more or less direct comparison of the student reaction to content, those comparisons too show very close in the way students rated the comprehensiveness of messages. Some difference was recorded in respect of ease of comprehension, almost certainly reflecting that the Australian adverts, aimed in a cultural context that is more amenable to blunt messages, were direct and accessible. Interestingly, differences were also recorded with respect to usefulness, with the Irish students saying the material was more useful than the Australian students despite that fact that the messages were less transparent. This suggests that perhaps there is relative dearth of AIDS related material that these students are exposed to.

Taken together, the results display the strongest case for the efficacy of this simple advertising strategy for effectively narrow-casting to target groups.

## Introduction

This report details an analysis of responses from 367 students (352 in the range 17-25 years) at two Irish university campuses - UCD, NCAD - to a questionnaire designed to ascertain the utility of the "convenience advertising strategy".

## Convenience Advertising

The report provides an evaluation of the advertising strategy known as 'convenience advertising', the key features of which are:

- convenience advertising is a method designed to carry focused messages to specific target groups in a highly effective manner. It can be contrasted with mainstream advertising, which uses TV, radio or billboards to display messages, by pointing out that these strategies broadcast while convenience advertising narrowcasts;
- convenience advertising uses small posters displayed on doors or walls in toilet cubicles and related bathroom areas in public or semi-public locations. Such locations might include particular entertainment venues (bars, clubs and so on), buildings used for educational or business purposes (universities, hospitals and so on) or multiple residential accommodation (university dorms or halls, barracks and so on.) Because the nature of users can be determined within specific parameters (age, occupation, sex and so forth) messages focused at that particular group can be developed;
- convenience advertising uses the particular nature of the area in which it displays its messages to ensure that attention is paid to the message. In cubicles, a transient population carries out simple bodily functions requiring little conscious attention. For a few minutes, therefore, they are a 'captive audience' with little to pay attention to other than graffiti. Messages in such locations have high visibility and potential salience. Displayed above urinals there is a similar attention getting feature, partly because of social norms that require inattention to one's proximate neighbours. (In this respect, convenience advertising parallels adverts in crowded buses or commuter trains, where civil inattention to fellow passengers mean that people "Watch this space".);

- convenience advertising is a particularly effective method for delivering information when the target group, location and nature of message can be integrated. For example, two independent sociological studies on Australian university campuses (one in a residence (Mugford, 1989), one using teaching and facilities buildings (Mugford, 1990)) demonstrated that among those exposed to the adverts, there was an extremely high rate of recall of having seen them, of the locations in which they were displayed and of the messages they contained. These studies, in which AIDS related messages were targetted at a young and potentially sexually active population, were carried out by the author. Some of the key findings included:

The overall result of greatest significance is that ... 84% [of respondents] identified having seen at least one ad in the college in the previous week. Moreover, of those at higher risk of AIDS (such as those more likely to have sex and or less likely, to use condoms) reported exposure was, if anything higher rather than lower. ... the combination of the high level of recall plus the trend towards the more at risk registering the ads is encouraging and does suggest that, at least within a population of this nature, there is good reason to believe that the strategy is generally successful at the most basic level. **That is, those who most need to see the messages see and register them when delivered in this format.** (Mugford, 1989.)

The pattern that consistently emerges ... is that the utility and relevance of the ads is rated higher than expected (on assumptions of random association) by those who are at real risk (multiple partners) but do not always use condoms For those who are not at risk or are at risk (multiple sexual partners) but consistently use condoms the rating of utility and relevance of the ads is lower than would be expected on the assumption of random association. **That is to say, these responses indicate that to some extent the posters themselves are reaching the target group.** (Mugford, 1989.)

The data ... indicate that the convenience advertising strategy is extremely effective in reaching the target audience and leading to high recall of the messages. In all cases, the level of recognition of the ads, the recency with which they were recalled as being seen and the accuracy of the recall of the location in which they were displayed speak of any extremely effective strategy. [...] The results clearly demonstrate the capacity to 'narrow cast' specific messages tailored for a given clientele. This is better than broadcasting to a wide range of potential audiences, risking either offence or irrelevance to many while being too bland for those particularly in need of the message. (Mugford, 1990).

In this study, the focus of attention was on whether similar patterns of results would be found if the technique was employed in another country, not dissimilar in some important aspects (both modern, liberal democracies with developed economies) but with some historical and cultural differences. In particular, the Republic of Ireland is less secular than Australia and exhibits less religious diversity, with the Roman Catholic church occupying a very significant place in daily Irish life in a manner unparalleled in Australia.

Since the tenets of that church have previously frowned upon the use of condoms because of their primary role in contraceptive practices, AIDS messages in Ireland necessarily operate in a different context. It is, for example, *a priori* possible that such messages would be less well received in the Irish context, and hence the technique less valuable - at least for this type of use.

## **Method**

A survey method was employed for this study, using a self completion questionnaire. Classes were selected which covered the range of disciplines at each campus and students were asked (but not required) to complete the questionnaire during the lecture periods.

Students were asked a variety of basic socio-demographic questions as background, while the core of the questionnaire consisted of a series of questions concerning the 6 AIDS related ads which had been displayed in toilet sites in the two campuses followed by brief questions which were designed to ascertain whether the respondents had been exposed to the ads by virtue of regularly using the relevant facilities.

## **Data Analysis**

### *Part 1. General description of the samples*

The sample obtained was, as would be expected, overwhelmingly young. It was also more female than male - the ratio of males to females was 35:6. A similar ratio was obtained on one of the two Australian campuses in an earlier study, and reflects a variety of factors - differential sex ratios in some subjects, higher compliance to lecture attendance norms by female students and (probably least important here) greater willingness of females to cooperate in survey research.

Linked to the youthful nature of the sample, the respondents were mainly first year students (280, 76%), consisted overwhelmingly of full time students (361, 98%) and few were married (19 married or de facto relationships, 5%).

There were 287 Roman Catholics (78%), 20 (5%) from various others christian denominations and 48 (13%) professed no religion.

The range of political support was large, with Don't know the main response (111, 30%), leading by several lengths from Fianna Fail (60, 14%); Greens (56, 15%), Fine Gael (9%) and Labour (7%), with other groups drawing 5% or less. Whether the very high uncommitted vote is a function of youth, or whether it is political reticence in a survey context is hard to judge for someone unfamiliar with Irish mores.

Questions were asked about sexual preference and IV drug use, but as would be expected, the numbers answering in other than mainstream ways was so small as to be less than error estimates and are therefore ignored. For all practical purposes, the sample is heterosexual and non injecting. This is relevant because it follows that the respondents are not in high risk groups.

Recognition of the adverts was a key dependent variable. In this study, the number of people who recognised each ad was highly variable. For example, Ad #1 (What is AIDS?) was recognised by 207 respondents (58%), not by 150 (42%), with 10 missing data. This was the highest recognition rate, followed, in descending order, by ad #2 (It's not who you are ... this is how HIV spreads) which was recognised by 43% and not by 57%; then by ad #6 (It's not on ... if that's not on) 41%:59%; ad #5 (If you go to bed with someone ...) 36%:64%; ad #4 (It's not who you are .... these are high risk behaviours) 31%:69%; and last ad #3 (what puts people at risk ... ) 29%:71%.

The key independent variable examined measured is exposure to the ads. Such exposure presumably results when students frequently use the places where the ads were displayed - the relevant toilet blocks on the two campuses. The data was examined to see what the distribution was on these variables. Two findings were important. First the answers to the questions concerning building use and toilet use were very highly correlated - the numbers frequently using the building but not the toilet was small, as was those who reported frequently using the toilet on those infrequent occasions they went to the buildings. Secondly, when complex measures derived for building and toilet use were compared with simple ones - toilet use alone - the latter showed equally strong fit with the dependent variables as the former. For simplicity's sake, therefore, the simple measure was used.

Thus 'exposure' was calculated as a binary variable, such that those reported as 'low' on the variable were those who reported that they rarely or never used the toilet facilities in any of the relevant buildings where ads were displayed and those 'high' usually or fairly often used them. Where there were three buildings involved, the answer is a composite of the three equivalent answers.

Overall, 227 (64%) were ranked as high in exposure to the ads while 126 (36%) were ranked as low in exposure (14 missing data).

Clear relations between exposure and recognition were found for all ads in the preliminary report and in this report those relations are examined in more detail.

Part 2. Detailed analysis of the sample

Starting with the questions of ad recognition, the proportion who recognised each advert is summarised in Table 1.

	Ad #1	Ad #2	Ad #3	Ad #4	Ad #5	Ad#6
Recognised	58	43	29	31	36	41
Not Recognised	42	57	71	69	64	59



Unlike earlier findings with the Australian study, there are substantial level of correlations between the ads. That is, those who recognised (say) Ad 1 are more likely to be numbered among those who recognised Ads 2 or 6 (the other high recognition ads) than among those who did not. All the correlations are positive and the magnitude of the association is moderate (around 0.4 on average). Nonetheless, it is important to treat each advert as a separate matter, not assume that what will be true of one will be true of another.

For each advert, two principal factors were examined - whether the respondent recognised the ad and, for those that did - how recently they had seen it. The data were examined to answer the following questions:

- was there a difference in recognition, level depending upon exposure?;
- was there any evidence that those with high exposure recalled seeing the ads more recently?

### *2.1 Difference in recognition*

As we noted above, there were clear differences in the extent of recognition of each advert, with the first and third reporting extremes of high and low levels of recognition and the other four in between. When we turn to table 2, we find that this pattern interacts with exposure. For two extreme cases where recognition is low (ads #3, 5) the relationship between exposure and recognition is in the predicted direction (more exposure, more recognition) but the magnitudes are smaller and in one case the relation is not significant. For the other four, however, which are better tests because the distribution is less extreme, the results are extremely clear cut. Differences are large in magnitude, in the expected direction and highly statistically significantly different.

Table 2: Recognition of Ads by level of exposure to ads (Col %)

Exposure Level (H – Hi, L – Lo)	AD Number											
	#1		#2		#3		#4		#5		#6	
	H	L	H	L	H	L	H	L	H	L	H	L
Recognised	78	46	53	23	66	51	39	17	38	31	49	25
Didn't recog.	22	54	47	76	34	49	61	83	62	69	52	75
Number	222	122	218	120	212	116	212	116	214	117	217	116
Sign. Level <sup>1</sup>	*		**		*		**		+		**	

<sup>1</sup>Significance Levels are - \*\* Cols sign. diff. at the .001 level; \* Cols sign. diff. at the .05 level; + Cols differ in the expected direction, but at greater than 0.05.

2.2) *How recently were ads seen?* If those exposed to ads via convenience advertising were recalling the messages from the toilet posters, they should say that they saw the ads more recently than others. Data on this is shown in Table 3 (next page).

Once more, the pattern of results is clear and in the expected direction. All column pairs shows differences in the first row, with those exposed saying that they had seen the ads in the last week, while those not exposed said they had seen them longer ago than that (which may mean they saw them in the toilet areas but not recently because they don't use them often). Nonetheless, only the first column is statistically significant, although the last column pair is close to conventional levels of significance (p is about 0.1).

Table 3: Recency of Seeing the Ads by level of exposure to ads (Col %)

	AD Number					
	#1	#2	#3	#4	#5	#6
Exposure Level (H – Hi, L – Lo)	H L	H L	H L	H L	H L	H L
In the last week	66 41	56 41	48 45	46 33	46 32	52 32
In the last month	18 35	31 41	28 28	33 54	29 40	32 52
More than month	16 24	14 19	25 21	21 13	25 30	16 16
Number	158 46	124 32	80 29	87 24	91 40	111 31
Sign. Level <sup>1</sup>	*	+	+	+	+	+

<sup>1</sup>Significance Levels are - \* Cols sign. diff. at the .001 level; + Cols sign. diff. in the expected direction, but at greater than 0.05.

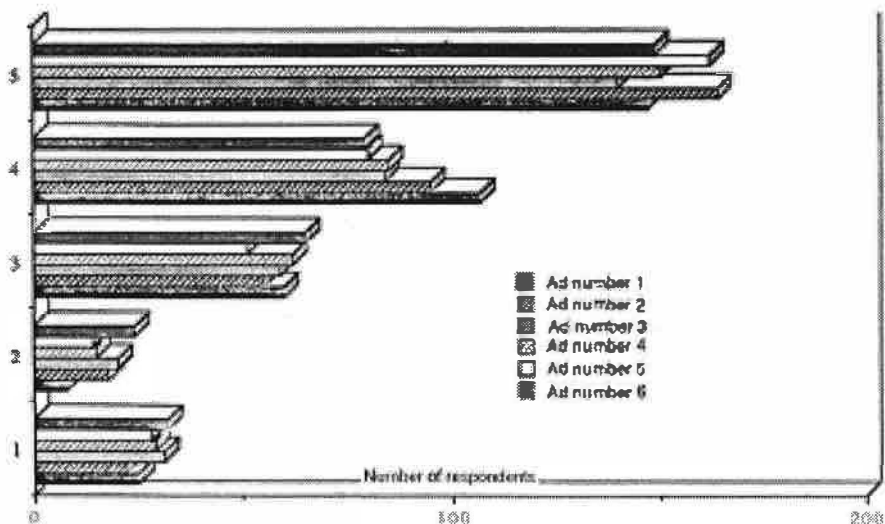
Overall, however, the pattern is identical in direction to earlier studies, and it is reasonable to infer that the data in this show that those exposed to the adverts --call seeing them more recently.

### Reaction to the adverts and comparison with the Australian data

This study fits closely with the results from the similar Australian study, although in that case the sample was much larger (just over twice the size) which meant that cell size in tables was larger and some results consequently higher estimates of significance. The close parallel, however, increases the degree to which we can be confident in the method overall, as well as demonstrating its utility in Ireland, where there are important socio-cultural differences referred to earlier.

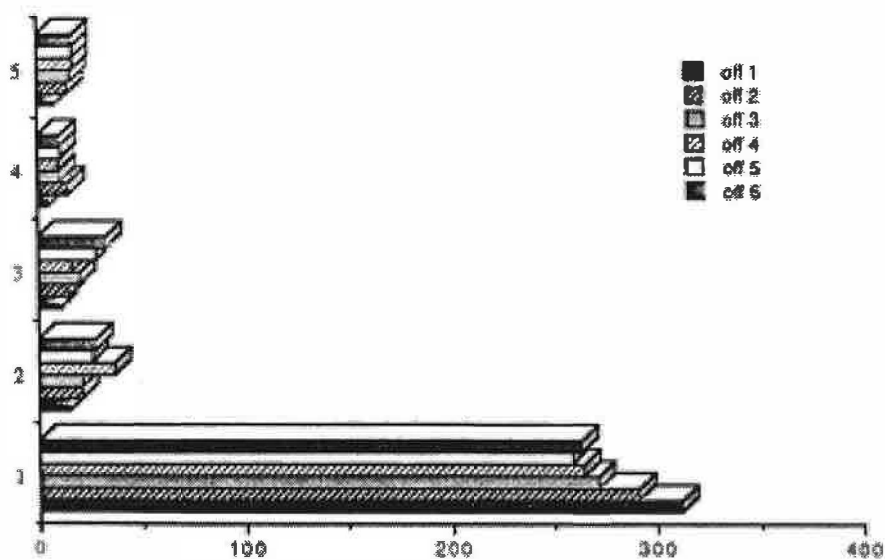
Because of the sensitivity, of this topic in the Irish context, this report explores some aspects of the data a little more fully in this section, looking both at how evaluated the messages in the adverts (a topic not identical with evaluating the method of delivery) as well as making comparison where possible with the Australian adverts and reactions to them from Australian students.

We begin with the question - see figure below - of how easy the respondents found the 6 adverts to understand (rated from 1 - very low in understanding – to 5 very high).



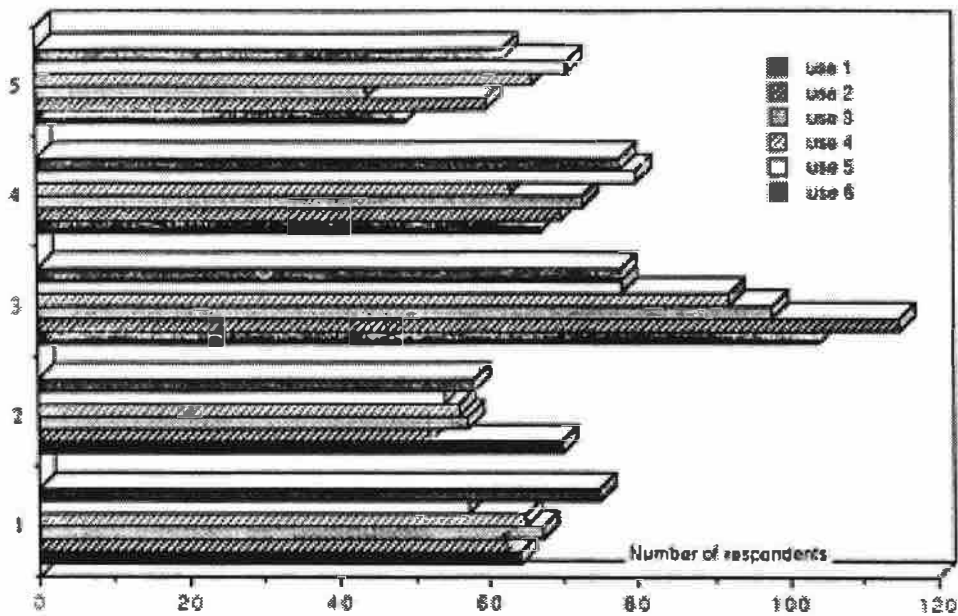
As this figure shows, the overwhelming response is that the messages are easy understand, although there are some variations between the ads.

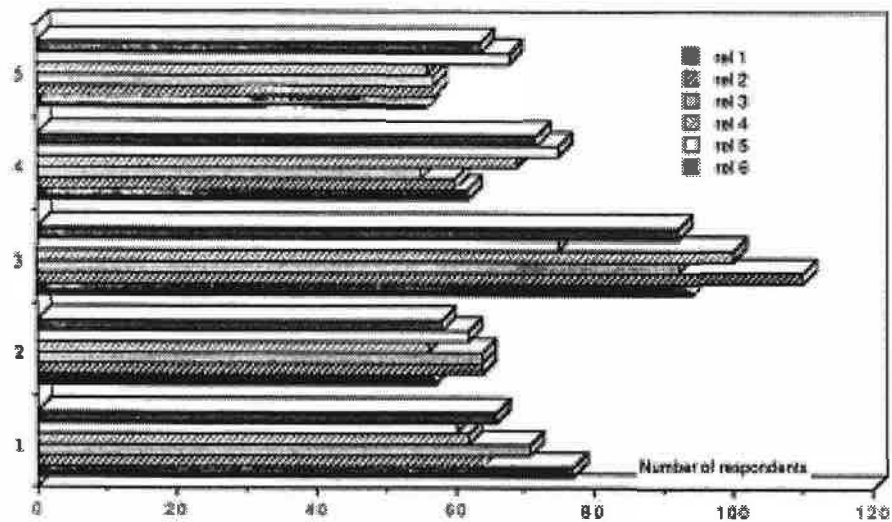
Were these adverts offensive to respondents? As the next figure shows, the overwhelming answer is no (rated from 1 - very low in offensiveness - to 5 – very high).



Other important aspects investigated were whether respondents found the adverts useful (generally they found them moderately useful); relevant to their lives (they did); novel in their treatment of AIDS (to some extent they thought so); and easy to remember (they were easy). Usefulness and relevance of the 6 adverts are shown in the figures on the next page.

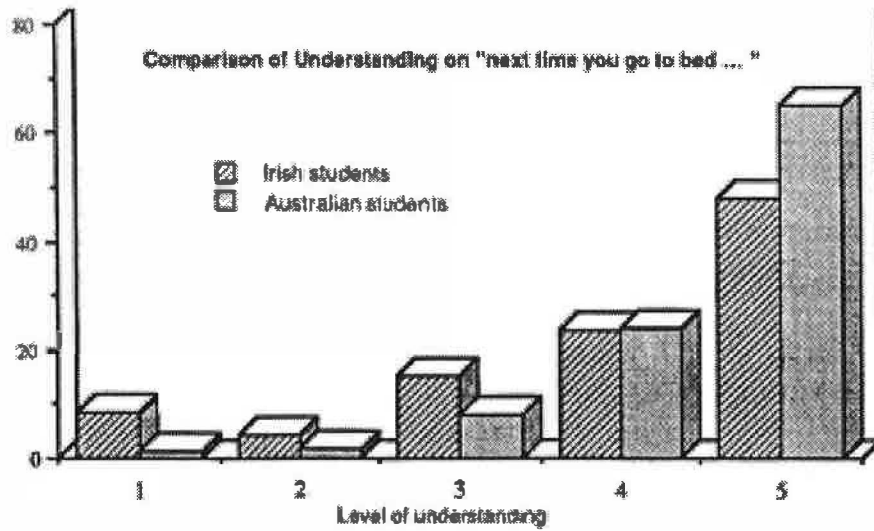
There was, however, for each advert an interesting association between some of these measures, for while the vast majority found them inoffensive and moderately useful, there was a negative association in the table, with the opposite combination (offensive and useless) figuring in the cross tabulations. Obviously, a small minority were basically hostile to the messages, but a large majority found them very useful and acceptable.



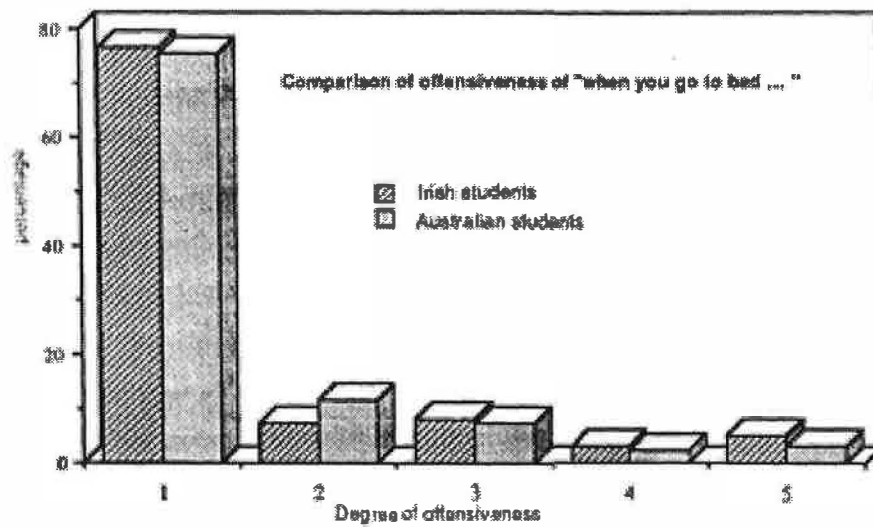


Only two of the adverts allowed comparison with the Australian adverts. Ad number 5, which was seen as one of the best ads in general, being well liked and informative asked "If you go to bed with someone, how many people might you be sleeping with?" The text indicates the risk of transmission in unprotected sex and the fact that one cannot be sure that any partner is not HIV positive. It offers advice about condom use (qualified by such phrase as 'good quality, new correctly used') emphasises the possibility of condom failure and re-iterates that only abstinence and monogamy can really prevent transmission for sure. The Australian equivalent, in tune with a more secular culture, and perhaps one more direct in speech about sexual matters, does not say 'If' but 'When' you go to bed, omits the caveats about the condoms and about monogamy and abstinence. How do the two compare?

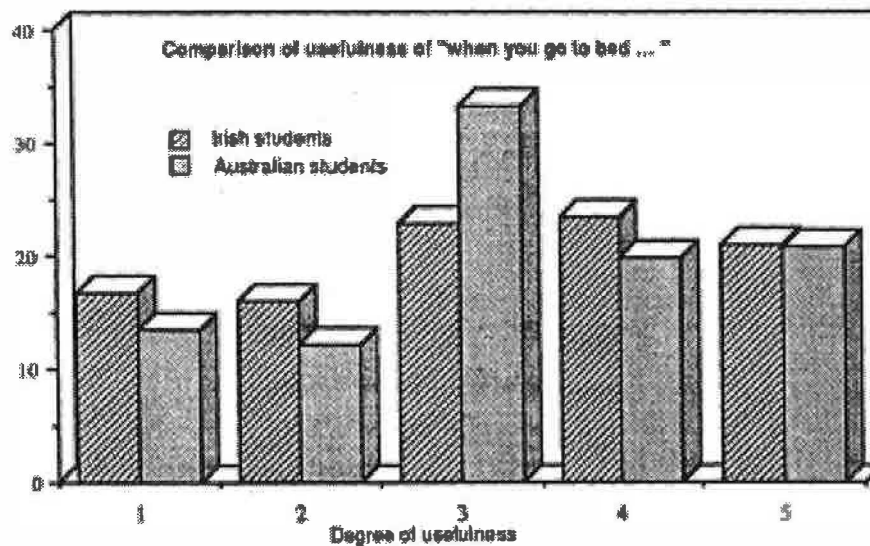
As the next figure makes clear, the Australian version seems to be more readily understood.



On the other hand, while clearer it is no more or less offensive to its intended audience as we see in the next figure.



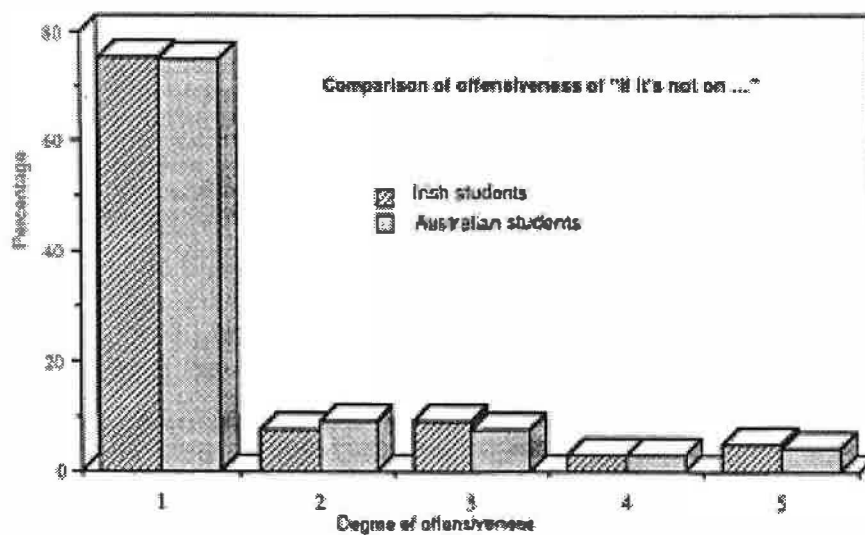
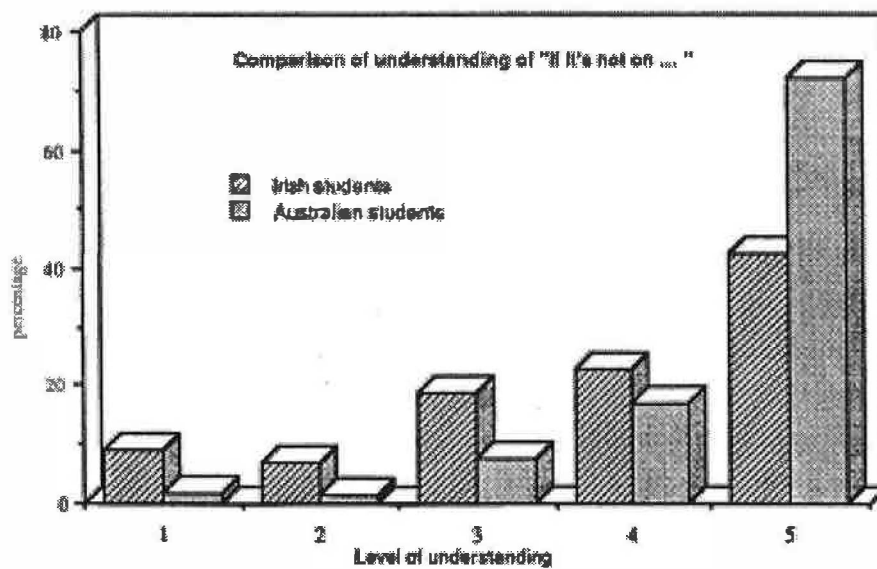
Yet the Irish students also differ in the extent to which they find it useful, with a greater proportion claiming both less and more use, and many less giving a so-so response.

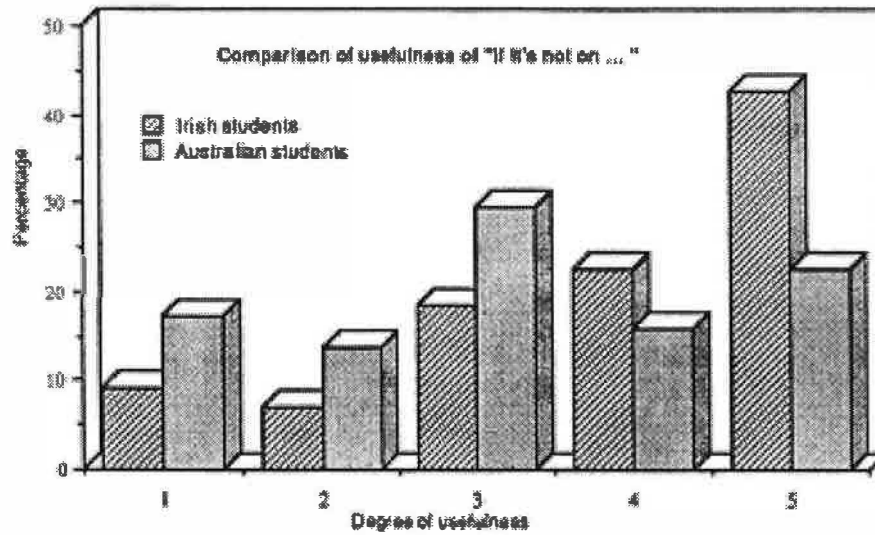


If we examine the other pair of similar adverts, a parallel pattern emerges. Ad number 6 in the Irish study suggested that "It's not on ... if that's not on", with a text that suggested that it (the condom) didn't need to be on in faithful, one partner relations, but that otherwise it (the condom) should be on. It could be said that the language of the ad is slightly murky in comparison with the extremely direct version in Australia from which it was adapted. This shows a cartoon character wearing a huge condom almost like a cape, so that only his feet show out of the base. The entire text reads, "Tell him if it's [the condom] not on, it's [sex] not on." Below, the cartoon character walks forlornly away. Indeed, the slogan. "If its' not on, it's not on" has become very familiar in Australia, even being displayed on bus posters.

As the next three figures show, the Irish version is less accessible, no more offensive, but is perceived as equally or more useful.







The implication here might be (and, from a distance, one can only infer this) that the Irish adverts, while less striking, are still highly effective because they are being used in a context where AIDS knowledge and AIDS discussion remains more restricted than has been the case in Australia. While the method (convenience advertising) is highly effective in both locations, the specific messages may be less striking because the types of message used were familiar from other sources.

## **Conclusion**

The data reviewed here indicate that the convenience advertising strategy is extremely effective in reaching the target audience in an Irish context, much as elsewhere, and leads to high recall of the messages. In all cases, the level of recognition of the ads and the recency with which they were recalled as being seen speak of an extremely effective strategy.

The results clearly demonstrate the capacity to 'narrow cast' specific messages tailored for a given clientele. This is better than broadcasting to a wide range of potential audiences, risking either offence or irrelevance to many while being too bland for those particularly in need of the message.

Moreover, because of the cultural complexities of Ireland, it may be that the method is even more useful there than in Australia. Certainly the messages piloted in this study were well received by our young, educated respondents who reacted very favourably to their exposure to the AIDS messages.

**This is a very clear demonstration of the efficacy of the strategy in another context and confirms the positive evaluation reached in earlier studies.**

## References

- Mugford, S.K. (1989) An evaluation of the convenience advertising strategy: report on the Halls of Residence study. A Report to the Director, AIDS Education and Information Service, Department of Community Services and Health. (15 pp.)
- Mugford, S.K. (1990) Evaluation of the convenience advertising strategy for AIDS messages on two university campuses. A Report to the Director, AIDS Education and Information Service, Department of Community Services and Health. (19 pp.)