

Questions and Answers for:
**Experimental Evaluation of the Impact of Distraction on Consumer Understanding of Risk
and Benefit Information in Direct-to-Consumer Prescription Drug Television
Advertisements**

What is this study about?

Current regulations require that direct-to-consumer (DTC) television ads for prescription drugs present the most serious and frequent side effects of the drug in *at least* the audio portion of the ad. This section is often referred to as the *major statement*. Aspects of the ad, such as the visuals, may influence how people understand information about the drug's risks. This study examined how the ad's visuals might influence people's understanding of the risk information from the audio portion of the ad.

We looked at three possible factors that could make it harder or easier to understand the risk information: repeating the risk information in words written at the bottom of the screen (superimposed text), visuals that were happy in tone (affective tone), and visuals that reinforced the risks or the benefits (consistency). We tested whether these factors helped or did not help people understand risk information in the ad.

Why did FDA do this study?

Both health care professionals and consumers have expressed concerns to FDA about visuals that are shown when the major statement is spoken in an ad, especially as it relates to ensuring balanced communication of risks compared with benefits. This study was designed to investigate some advertising factors that could influence consumers' understanding of the drug's risks.

What kind of study is it?

FDA conducted an experiment, randomly assigning participants to test conditions. This method allows us to make causal conclusions about the findings. Each consumer viewed one ad for a fictitious drug for high blood pressure, Zintria, amidst a pod of four ads and answered questions about it during the 20-minute experiment.

Who participated in this study?

Participants were 2,134 members of an online panel who were 40 years or older.

What did you find?

We found that presenting risk information at the same time in text and in audio improves consumers' understanding of the risk information. We did not find support for the idea that consumers' understanding of the risk information is influenced by the emotional (affective) tone of visual images or the consistency of the visual images with the risk information on the screen during the major statement.

What does this mean?

This study, consistent with prior research, demonstrates that having the risk information written on the screen and spoken at the same time is a clear way to enhance the understanding of the risk information.

The study did not show evidence that emotional (affective) tone or the consistency of the visual images with the risk information influenced understanding of the risk information. We believe this could have been because the way the study was implemented may have prevented the study participants from seeing a clear distinction between ads with different emotional tones. We hope to conduct a follow-up study that will address some of these implementation issues.