

## **The Efficacy of Religious Outdoor Advertising in the Southern United States**

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### **Abstract**

This study examines the efficacy of outdoor religious messages. In other words, does exposure to roadside advertisements displaying religious messages, particular church services or prayer, increase one's intent to attend church services or to engage in active prayer? Three hundred thirty-five undergraduate and graduate students from a medium-sized southern university (in the United States) took part in the study's experiment (Seventeen students did not complete the experiment so their responses were eliminated). One hundred sixty-five students were placed in a control group. The remaining 153 students were placed in a treatment group. All participants answered the same pretest and posttest questionnaires on a computer screen. In addition, they observed a variety of outdoor advertisements (on the computer screen) after the pretest questionnaire and before the posttest questionnaire. The control group was exposed to 14 non-religious messages while the treatment group was exposed to 14 religious and non-religious messages. The results showed a ceiling effect on its participants. Essentially, most were religious to begin with which left little room for them to increase their religious habits. As the study showed, most participants did not change their responses from pretest to posttest after exposure to the outdoor ads.

**Keywords:** Religion, Outdoor Advertising, 'God Speaks Campaign,' Southern United States

Religion and advertising are typically not held in the same mixture or context. However, they are becoming almost hand-in-hand when promoting church services, philosophies, and concepts or ideas. “What Would Jesus Do?” bracelets, “Jesus is the Real Thing” t-shirts, and “God is My Co-Pilot” bumper stickers are just a few of the countless novelty items which have popped up in Christian bookstores, truck stops, and airports nationwide. Peyser (2001) observes that global religious entertainment (music, books, videos, movies, etc.) accounts for \$3 billion in sales. Quoting religion editor Lynn Garrett, Harrison (1997) echoes that by writing, “Religion books are the fastest growing adult trade book category” (p. 23).

Regarding the relationship between religion and advertising, Colson and Pearcey (1998) claim, “The people who developed the art of modern advertising in the early part of this [20<sup>th</sup>] century were largely Christians, often sons of clergymen, who imported the methodology of religious revivalism into the commercial arena” (p. 80). Cooperman (2004) maintains, “Organized religion is becoming a commodity. We package ourselves carefully for new buyers, emphasizing the selling points that will meet their market researched needs” (p. 18). Harrison (1997) notes, “More and more ads are drawing on the rich possibilities of religion and spiritual themes and schemes. From cars to beverages, and health care to sports teams, we see signs and portents that Madison Avenue has jumped on the spiritual bandwagon” (p. 22).

Outdoor advertising has become an instrumental vehicle in conveying religious messages to the public. Roadside ads or subway posters promoting inspirational ideas or specific church services have captured the eyes of many drivers or passengers. A man stands on a street corner in Pulaski, Tennessee, carrying a hand-made poster that reads, “Be Thankful. Attend Church on Sunday;” a painted sign off Interstate 65 near Prattville, Alabama, reads, “Go to Church or the Devil Will Get You;” another roadside poster panel near Norwood, Georgia, reads, “Need God.com;” and, the list goes on. Individual churches use their front lawn marquees as attention grabbers: “Give God Full Custody, Not Just Week-End Visit,” “You Give God the Credit, Now Give God the Cash,” and “Happy Hour 11-2 Every Sunday Morning,” (Griffin, 2004, p. F1) are just a few examples. Quoting the Reverend Al Perkins, a Montgomery, Alabama, Episcopal priest, Griffin notes, “It’s [a church marquee message] a form of advertising, and a form of invitation. It says that we’ve got a sense of humor, come see us” (p. F1).



## The “God Speaks” Campaign

In 1998, a man who demanded his identity not be revealed, walked into the Smith Advertising Agency office in Ft. Lauderdale, Florida, and wrote a check for \$150,000.00 for ad executives to create a non-denominational campaign promoting God and church attendance (Rosenberg, 1999). The agency came up with signs, displaying 18 different messages to promote religious values. Among the messages were “We need to talk—God,” “Let’s meet at my house Sunday before the game—God,” and “Keep using my name in vain, I’ll make rush hour longer—God” (GodSpeaks.com). In 2009, the 18

billboards were removed and were replaced with nine new messages, including ones that read, “The real Supreme Court meets up here—God,” “One nation under me—God,” and “All I know...is everything—God” (GodSpeaks.com). Veenker (1999) notes, “[The] billboard campaign [was designed] to reach people who had stopped attending church” (p. 10).

Because of its popularity in Florida, local branches of the Outdoor Advertising Association of America donated board space in all 50 states as part of their annual public service campaigns. The campaign became known as “God Speaks” and more than 50,000 roadside posters eventually appeared across the country (Charisma News Service, 2000). It also was recognized by the OAAA as the second most popular roadside public service campaign in history, just behind the Foundation for Better Life’s “Pass it On” campaign and surpassing the Crash-Test Dummies and Smokey Bear (Moller, 2004). Lancendorfer and Reece (2004) presented a case study on the “God Speaks” campaign and found that “attitudes toward God, attitudes toward religion, and church attendance behavior remained relatively unchanged from what they were before the “God Speaks” campaign began...Thus, one could conclude that the campaign did not influence attitudes or behaviors” (p. 6).

While Lancendorfer and Reece were unsuccessful in their attempts to reach someone associated with the “God Speaks” campaign, this researcher had better luck. Dean Kautmann (2004), the web coordinator for GodSpeaks.net, says, “One lady wrote that her trucker son had accepted Christ after seeing one of the billboards. He died within weeks of this in an accident in his truck. The lady wrote to thank us because she had peace in knowing that her son was in heaven...Bad or good, those billboards got people talking about God again.”

Still, some negative comments have sparked from the campaign. Rosenberg (1999) writes that there are those who consider the signs blasphemous, while others complain, “How dare you speak for God?” (Kautmann, 2004). Asked how long the “God Speaks” outdoor advertisements will stay up in various parts of the country, the OAAA’s Moller replied, “We might see them in some places 50 years from now. The individual local companies have the posters in their possession and they can display them whenever they want. These [“God Speaks”] posters have messages that are timeless.”

### **Who Attends Church?**

While 53 percent of Americans consider religion to be important in their lives (Religious Tolerance.org, 2003), 76 percent of adults in the United States claim to be Christians, over three-quarters of that figure being Protestant and less than one-quarter Catholic (Religious Tolerance.org, 2003, see Table 1). Forty-three percent of U.S. residents actually attend church services (excluding weddings, baptisms, christenings, and funerals) at least once a week (Religious tolerance.org, 2003) .

ABC News/Beliefnet (Sussman, 2002) randomly selected slightly more than 1,000 adults by telephone and asked them their religious habits. The organization found that 60 percent of people aged 65 and older attend church weekly while less than 30 percent of people aged 18 to 30 worship at least once a week. ABC News/Beliefnet discovered that church attendance is higher in the southern U.S. than in any other region. The report showed 52 percent of Baptists (the largest protestant denomination) attend church weekly. Almost 70 percent of Baptists reside in the South. Also in the South, the poll’s results found that 44 percent of women attend church weekly, compared to 32 percent of men. A similar study conducted by the Hartford Institute for Religious Research found that 50 percent of U.S. congregations have fewer than 100 people regularly (at least once a week) attending services (Carnes, 2001).

Citing the American Religious Identification Survey results, Grossman (2002) found that 14 percent (or close to 30 million) of Americans claim to have no religion. Five of the six states with the highest percentage of residents claiming no religion are in the western U.S. The Gallup News Service found that African Americans attend church services more than white Americans and that members of evangelical non-Catholic Christian denominations and

Mormons attend church more than “those who identify with traditional mainline Protestant denominations” (Newport, 2007, p. 1).

Table 1: Breakdown of Religious Affiliations in the United States

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76.5 % of American adults claim to be Christian (52% Protestant, 24.5% Catholic)  
14.1 % of American adults do not follow any organized religion or have no religious affiliation. This number also includes Agnostics and Atheists.  
1.3% of American adults are Jewish.  
0.5% of American adults are Muslim or are followers of Islam.  
0.5% of American adults are Buddhist.  
0.4% of American adults are Hindu.  
0.3% of American adults are Unitarian Universalist.  
0.1% of American adults are Neopagan. This number includes Druids and Pagans.  
0.1% of American adults represent the many more small religions not listed in this figure.

\*\* Over 50,000 American adults were surveyed about their religious affiliations in 2001 by The Graduate Center of the City University of New York.

(Cited in Religious Tolerance.org. Retrieved from  
<http://www.religioustolerance.org/us-re11.html>)

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## **Hypotheses**

The literature has shown that Lancendorfer and Reece (2004) concluded the “God Speaks” outdoor advertisement campaign did not result in an increase in church attendance behavior. The results of other studies such as those conducted by Grube and Wallack (1994) and Fleming, Thorson, and Atkin (2004), have indicated intents to act based upon exposure to advertising. This study examines the increased efficacy of outdoor advertising (signs promoting particular worship services and those displaying religious messages) and how it relates to the intention of church attendance. Examining these findings as examples, the following hypotheses are posed:

H1: Exposure to outdoor religious messages will lead to an increased intent to attend church services.

H2: Exposure to outdoor religious messages will lead to an increased Intent to engage in active prayer.

### **Method**

Similar to Ducoffe's (1995) laboratory experiment, this research randomly selected 335 undergraduate and graduate students from a medium-sized southern university to take part in a pretest/posttest laboratory experiment (with a pretest and a posttest questionnaire) to test this study's hypotheses. The researcher queried 22 of that university's professors (representing multiple disciplines—accounting, business, criminal justice, Earth science, education, English, history, journalism, kinesiology, nursing, psychology, and speech) if they could ask their students if they would be willing to take part in a voluntary study on advertising. Those students who agreed to participate were then directed to come to specified computer laboratories on campus. The students were assigned specified times to enter the labs which typically sat between 20 and 25 students each. Once the students arrived at the computer labs, the researcher handed them forms which asked for the participants' consent to participate. The forms (which were signed by the students) mentioned that the experiment was voluntary and that the students could stop at any time during the project. On the top of each form was a random registration control number (which had no significance to the study) which the students were required to enter via the computer terminal once the experiment began. Each student had a different number. In addition, either the words,

“Study Group One” or “Study Group Two,” were written below the control numbers on the consent forms (Study Group One represented the control group and Study Group Two represented the treatment group). The students were not aware in which study group they were placed until they were handed their consent forms. Every effort was made by the researcher to avoid having two students in the same experimental group seated next to each other. Once the students read and signed the consent forms, they answered a 22-question online pretest survey on advertising. The questionnaire appeared on the students' computer terminals. Each student, regardless of study group placement, answered the same questionnaire. The survey was similar to that utilized by Mojsa and Rettie (2003) and by

Lancendorfer and Reece (2004). However, some modifications were made in this study's questionnaire. Instead of using Internet and TV advertising (Mojsa and Rettie, 2003) or strictly religious behaviors (Lancendorfer and Reece, 2004) as their themes, this survey utilized outdoor advertising as its primary focus. The questionnaire employed a five-point Likert-type scale anchored by 1 "Strongly disagree" and 5 "Strongly agree," much like that used by Hernandez et al. (2004), Lancendorfer and Reece (2004), and Mojsa and Rettie (2003).

Once the participants submitted their pretest questionnaire answers via the computer terminal, they observed a series of outdoor advertisements. The messages were projected onto a screen via a PowerPoint presentation and a new sign was changed every five seconds. The sizes of the ads were edited and cropped through the use of Photoshop software. The participants in Study Group One (the control group) viewed 14 non-religious ads. The signs (photographed by the researcher) featured messages promoting of products and services from beer to nearby motels and restaurants to a novelty sex store.

The participants in Study Group Two (the treatment group) viewed 14 outdoor Ads. The messages were projected onto a screen via PowerPoint and a new sign was changed every five seconds. Some of the ads featured products such as hamburgers, milk, and beer, while other ads in the group displayed religious messages such as those promoting individual church services and prayer. All but two of the signs in this group were photographed by the researcher. Two of the signs displayed messages from the "God Speaks" outdoor advertising campaign (Godspeaks.org, 2004) and were manufactured using Photoshop software. The sizes of all of the ads were edited and cropped through the use of Photoshop software.

Once the students completed viewing the ads, they answered a posttest questionnaire. This survey, projected on the computer terminal screens, duplicated questions used on the pre-test survey instrument and added similar questions and queries modified from Ducoffe's (1996) survey, such as those dealing with entertaining, irritating, useful, pleasing, enjoyable, deceptive, and exciting variables. The additional questions used in the posttest survey were geared to distract the participants from any knowledge of this study's focus. This is similar to Rahn's and Hirshborn's (1999) modifications of questions from their pretest and posttest surveys.

Chi-square statistical tests were conducted for acceptance or rejection of the study's hypotheses. SPSS Version 21 for Macintosh OS X computer software was used to tabulate the data.

The following question was used to test Hypothesis 1:

1. I should attend church services more often.

The following question was used to test Hypothesis 2:

2. Should pray more often.

## Results

A total of 335 undergraduate and graduate students from a medium-sized southern university participated in the study. However, 17 students did not complete the survey, so, their results were eliminated. As a result of this, survey answers from the remaining 318 participants were analyzed.

Table 2 shows the breakdown of gender in this study was 223 females and 95 males. Thirty-one percent of those students were undergraduate juniors; 28 percent were undergraduate seniors; 19 percent were graduate students; 13 percent were undergraduate sophomores; and, nine percent were undergraduate freshmen. The ethnicity breakdown was 59 percent whites, 29 percent African Americans, seven percent Asians, two percent Hispanics, and three percent others. Of all the participants regarding their beliefs on whether they consider themselves religious, 78 percent agreed or strongly agreed they were religious while ten percent either disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement. The breakdown in church attendance among the participants was 42 percent who said they attend church services at least once each week; 24 percent who attend church services once a month; 14 percent who attend church services five to ten times a year; ten percent who attend church services one to four times a year; and, ten percent who said they never attend church services. The breakdown in religious prayer engagement showed 80 percent said they engage in religious prayer at least once each week; eight percent engage in religious prayer once a month; four percent engage in religious prayer five to ten times a year; four percent engage in religious prayer one to four times a year; and, four percent said they never engage in religious prayer.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics of Control and Treatment Group Participants

Gender

Females—223 (70.1%)

Males—95 (29.9%)

Academic classification

Freshmen—27 (9%)

Sophomores—40 (13%)

Juniors—99 (31%)

Seniors—89 (28%)

Graduate Students—61 (19%)

Ethnicity

Whites—188 (59%)

African Americans—92 (29%)

Asians—23 (7%)

Hispanics—6 (2%)

Others—8 (3%)

Consider themselves religious persons

Strongly agree—115 (36%)

Agree—132 (42%)

Neutral—38 (12%)

Disagree—19 (6%)

Strongly disagree—12 (4%)

Church attendance habits by study's participants

At least once a week—134 (42%)

Once a month—77 (24%)

Five to ten times a year—44 (14%)

One to four times a year—32 (10%)

Never—31 (10%)

### Religious prayer engagement habits by study's participants

At least once a week—255 (80%)  
Once a month—26 (8%)  
Five to ten times a year—13 (4%)  
One to four times a year—11 (4%)  
Never—13 (4%)

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Hypothesis 1 predicted that exposure to outdoor religious messages will lead to an increased intent to attend church services. Eighty percent of the control groups participants agreed or strongly agreed they were religious people in the pretest. However, that number decreased to 76 percent in the posttest (after exposure to non-religious outdoor ads). The survey question, “I should attend church services more often,” was used to test this hypothesis, utilizing a chi-square cross tabulation. In the pretest, 48 control group participants strongly agreed they should attend church more often. Yet, after exposure to the non-religious outdoor ads, that figure dropped to 43, the number of participants strongly agreeing they should attend church services more often. Seventy-three of the control group participants agreed they should attend church more often in the pretest. That number rose to 77 in the posttest.

While six control group participants strongly disagreed they should attend church services more often in the pretest, the number rose to eight in the posttest. Fifteen participants disagreed they should attend church services in the pretest, whereas 17 disagreed to the statement in the posttest. Table 3 indicates the results showed a significant difference between the pretest and the posttest ( $\chi^2[16, N = 164] = 365.175, p < .001$ ).

Table 3: Hypothesis 1: Exposure to Outdoor Religious Messages Will Lead to an Increased Intent to Attend Church Services (Control Group Results, N = 165)

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(Posttest)

Q 19—I should attend church services more often.

		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Total						
(Pretest)						
Q 12—I should	Strongly disagree	6	0	0	0	0
6						
attend church						
services more						
often.						
	Disagree	1	11	2	1	0
15						
	Neutral	1	4	15	1	1
22						
	Agree	0	2	2	63	6
73						
	Strongly agree	0	0	0	12	36
48						
	Total	8	17	19	77	43
164						

Note. One participant did not answer the post-test question. The chi-square results for the control group on Hypothesis 1: ( $\chi^2 [16, N = 164] = 365.175, p < .001$ ). Significance =  $p < .05$ .

In the pretest of the treatment group for Hypothesis 1, 81 percent of the participants agreed or strongly agreed they were religious people. That number dropped slightly to 79 percent in the posttest (following exposure to a mixture of religious and non-religious outdoor ads). The survey question, “I should attend church services more often,” was used to test this hypothesis, utilizing a chi-square cross tabulation. In the pretest, 44 of the treatment group participants strongly agreed they should attend church services more often while the number rose to 47 in the posttest. Seventy participants agreed they should attend church services more often in the pretest whereas 67 agreed to the statement in the posttest. While two participants strongly disagreed they should attend church services more often in the pretest, that number rose slightly to five after exposure to a mixture of religious and non-religious

outdoor ads. Twelve participants disagreed they should attend church services more often in the pre-test. That number jumped to 16 after the participants were exposed to outdoor ads displaying religious and non-religious messages. Table 4 indicates the results showed a significant difference between the pretest and the posttest ( $\chi^2[16, N = 152] = 280.914, p < .001$ ).

Table 4: Hypothesis 1: Exposure to Outdoor Religious Messages Will Lead to an Increased Intent to Attend Church Services (Treatment Group Results, N = 153)

		(Posttest)				
		<u>Q 19—I should attend church services more often.</u>				
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Total						
	(Pretest)					
Q 12—I should	Strongly disagree	2		0	0	0
0	2					
attend church						
services more						
often.						
	Disagree	1	9	1	1	0
12						
	Neutral	2		7	13	3
0	25					
	Agree	0		0	3	57
9	69					
	Strongly agree	0		0	0	6
38	44					
	Total	5	16	17	67	47
152						

Note. One participant did not answer the post-test question. The chi-square results for the treatment group on Hypothesis 1: ( $\chi^2 [16, N = 152] = 280.914, p < .001$ ). Significance =  $p < .05$ .

Hypothesis 2 predicted exposure to outdoor religious messages will lead to an increased intent to engage in active prayer. The survey question, “I should pray more often,” was used to test this hypothesis, utilizing a chi-square cross tabulation. In the pretest, 61 control group participants strongly agreed they should pray more often in the pretest while the number dropped to 53 in the posttest. Seventy-three participants agreed they should pray more often in the pretest whereas 77 participants agreed to the statement in the posttest. Five participants strongly disagreed they should pray more often in the pre-test and four participants strongly disagreed in the posttest. Eight participants disagreed they should pray more often in the pretest while 12 disagreed to the statement in the posttest. Table 5 shows this resulted in a significant difference ( $\chi^2 [16, N = 163] = 370.687, p < .001$ ), regarding how the subjects responded to the question before and after exposure to the non-religious outdoor ads.

Table 5: Hypothesis 2: Exposure to Outdoor Religious Messages Will Lead to an Increased Intent to Engage in Active Prayer (Control Group Results, N = 165)

		(Posttest)				
		<u>Q 20—I should pray more often.</u>				
		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Total						
	(Pretest)					
Q 13—I should	Strongly disagree	4	0	0	0	1
5						
pray more						
often.	Disagree	0	7	1	0	0
8						

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18	Neutral	0	3	13	2	0
71	Agree	0	1	3	60	7
61	Strongly agree	0	1	0	15	45
163	Total	4	12	17	77	53

Note. Two participants did not answer the post-test question. The chi-square results for the control group on Hypothesis 2: ( $\chi^2 [16, N = 163] = 370.687, p < .001$ ). Significance =  $p < .05$ .

The survey question, “I should pray more often,” was also used while examining the treatment group participants’ responses for hypothesis 2. A chi-square cross tabulation was used to test this hypothesis. While 58 participants in the pretest strongly agreed they should pray more often before observing the mixture of religious and non-religious outdoor ads, the number dropped to 54 in the posttest. Sixty-two participants agreed they should pray more often in the pretest whereas 65 agreed to the statement in the posttest. Three participants strongly disagreed they should pray more often in the pretest while two participants strongly disagreed to the statement in the posttest. Five participants disagreed they should pray more often in the pretest while eight participants disagreed to the statement in the posttest. Table 6 shows a significant difference ( $\chi^2 [16, N = 150] = 312.226, p < .001$ ) between the treatment group’s pretest and posttest.

Table 6: Hypothesis 2: Exposure to Outdoor Religious Messages Will Lead to an Increased Intent to Engage in Active Prayer (Treatment Group Results, N = 153)

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(Posttest)

Q 20—I should pray more often.

		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agree	Strongly agree
Total						
(Pretest)						
Q 13—I should	Strongly disagree	2		0	0	1
0	3					
pray more						
often.						
	Disagree	0		4	1	0
0	5					
	Neutral	0		4	15	4
1	24					
	Agree	0		0	4	52
4	60					
	Strongly agree	0		0	2	8
48	58					
	Total	2		8	22	65
	53					150

Note. One participant did not answer the pre-test question. Two participants did not answer the post-test question. The chi-square results for the treatment group on Hypothesis 2: ( $\chi^2 [16, N = 150] = 312.226, p < .001$ ). Significance =  $p < .05$ .

### Discussion

Hypothesis 1 predicted an increased intent to attend church services following the exposure of outdoor religious messages. While the results indicated a significant difference between the control group’s pretest and posttest, they showed less of intent to attend church services. In other words, 131 control group participants did not change their answers from the pretest to the posttest. But, of the control group respondents who changed their answers in the posttest (from the pretest) after observing outdoor ads, 11 participants improved their responses while 22 participants answered more negatively. For example, Table 3 showed four people were neutral in their responses to the statement, “I should attend church services more often,” in the pretest. Yet, they changed their answers to disagree in the posttest. In addition, 12 people

strongly agreed to the statement in the pretest but changed to agree in the posttest. The control group participants were not exposed to religious ads but did observe 14 outdoor messages.

Examining Hypothesis 1 for the treatment group, the results also indicated a significant difference between the pretest and posttest. Like the control group, the treatment group showed less of intent to attend church services, even after exposure to a mixture of religious and non-religious outdoor advertisements. One hundred nineteen treatment group participants did not change their responses from the pretest to the posttest. But of the participants who changed their answers in the posttest, 14 students improved their responses while 19 participants answered more negatively. Among them, seven participants answered neutral to the statement, “I should attend church services more often,” in the pretest but disagreed to the statement after they were exposed to a mixture of religious and non-religious outdoor ads. However, nine respondents improved their answers from agree in the pretest to strongly agree in the posttest, as shown in Table 4.

Hypothesis 2 predicted exposure to outdoor religious messages will lead to an increased intent to engage in active prayer. The control group results indicated a significant difference between pretest and posttest and, as seen for Hypothesis 1, more participants who changed their answers between tests responded more negatively. One hundred twenty-nine students did not change their responses from the pretest to the posttest. However, of the participants who changed their answers, 11 improved their responses after being exposed to outdoor ads while 23 participants answered more negatively. For example, Table 5 shows three people who answered neutral in the pretest to the statement, “I should pray more often,” disagreed to the statement in the posttest. In addition, 15 people who strongly agreed to the statement in the pretest changed their answers slightly to agree in the posttest. The control group participants were not exposed to religious ads but did observe 14 outdoor messages.

Examining Hypothesis 2 for the treatment group, the results showed a significant difference between pretest and posttest and, like the control group, more people who changed their answers between tests responded more negatively than positively. One hundred twenty-nine treatment group respondents did not change their answers from the pretest to the posttest. Yet, of the students who changed their responses, 18 answered more negatively while 11

participants improved their answers after exposure to a mixture of religious and non-religious outdoor ads. Table 6 shows, for example, four people who answered neutral to the statement, “I should pray more often,” in the pretest disagreed to the statement in the posttest while eight participants who strongly agreed to the statement in the pretest changed their answers to agree in the posttest.

### **Limitations**

This study has shown some interesting information on the effects of outdoor religious advertising. However, limitations exist. The experiment was conducted in the southern part of the U.S. where church attendance is higher than in any other region in the country (Sussman, 2002). Additionally, 80 percent of the respondents already considered themselves to be religious people before they were even exposed to the outdoor advertisements. At the same time, 42 percent of the participants (undergraduate and graduate school students) said they attended church services at least once a week. That number is 12 percentage points higher than the ABC News/Beliefnet’s poll results of Americans aged 18 to 30 (Sussman, 2002). In addition, 80 percent of the respondents insisted they already engaged in religious prayer at least once a week before observing the ads. Had the study been conducted in another region where religious habits are not as common, perhaps the results would have been different.

The experiment’s posttest was conducted immediately following exposure to the religious and non-religious outdoor ads. Little time was allowed for the participants to absorb what they had just seen before answering the second questionnaire. Had the students been given the second questionnaire several days after observing the messages, the results may have been different. Finally, the participants in this study were college students. Certainly, not a representative sample of a general population. Examining adult participants of all ages would add more to the external validity of this study.

### **Conclusion**

This study has examined the effects of religious outdoor advertising and whether such advertising is crucial in changing the intention of men and women to pray and to attend church services. While most of the experiment’s participants originally considered religion to be important in their lives, exposure to outdoor ads displaying religious messages was not

going to increase their intention to attend church services or to engage in active prayer. The study showed a ceiling effect on its participants. Essentially, they were religious to begin with which left little room for them to increase their religious habits. As the results showed, most participants did not change their responses from pretest to posttest after exposure to the outdoor ads.

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