outbrain + **TheContillery**

GUIDE

Auto Pit Stop

Global Insights to Speed Up Your Digital Campaign Results

What's Inside

1. Introduction

Pit Stop Overview

Buying a car is one of the biggest investments someone will make in their life. As with all complex decisions, it requires a lot of research, thinking, and planning on behalf of the consumer to define your brand as the best choice.

The purchase journey for this segment today requires multiple consumer interactions through digital touchpoints: car buyers visit 4.2 websites on average, and consume 11.4 pieces of online content before walking into a dealership.

Simply put, buying a car isn't the same as it used to be. In response, auto brands need to fully embrace a digital strategy in order to continue to reach and engage potential customers. Online advertising is not only key to bringing in these leads, but also driving consideration to move consumers through the marketing funnel.

Aware of these challenges, **Outbrain** partnered with **TheContillery** to provide data-driven insights for a successful recommendation campaign using best practices and the most impacting visuals.
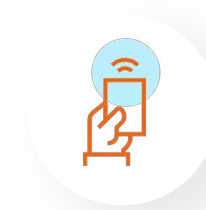
Join us as our passenger for this ride through the best of the open web.

Warming up the engines

As an industry expert, you know that an innovative mindset is key to responding faster to changing customer demands and market opportunities.
We highlight below the most relevant statistics shaping the industry today, as it shifts gears and accelerates toward a digital world.

92%[1] of car buyers research online before they buy, and visit an average of **4.2**[2] websites in the process.

Consumers engage with **11.4**[3] pieces of content prior to making a purchase.

80%[4] of car shoppers are now open to an online vehicle purchase: a **50%** increase from pre-COVID numbers.

74%[5] of car buyers who leverage online videos to inform their purchase watch branded video content in the process.

Global car sales are expected to grow to roughly **71.4 million automobiles in 2021**, up from an estimated **63.8** million units in 2020.

According to S&P Global, electrification remains the industry's pivotal challenge over the next five years, with Europe and China aiming for **20%** of light-vehicle sales to be electric vehicles by 2025.

Now, let's take a look at how car buyers are engaging with auto content across Outbrain's recommendation platform.

Interest throughout the year

CTR remains consistent

Despite the early challenges at the start of the pandemic, car buying is returning to a positive outlook. Our platform data shows that the period between Q4 and Q1 is the best time for auto marketers to run successful campaigns based on CTRs.
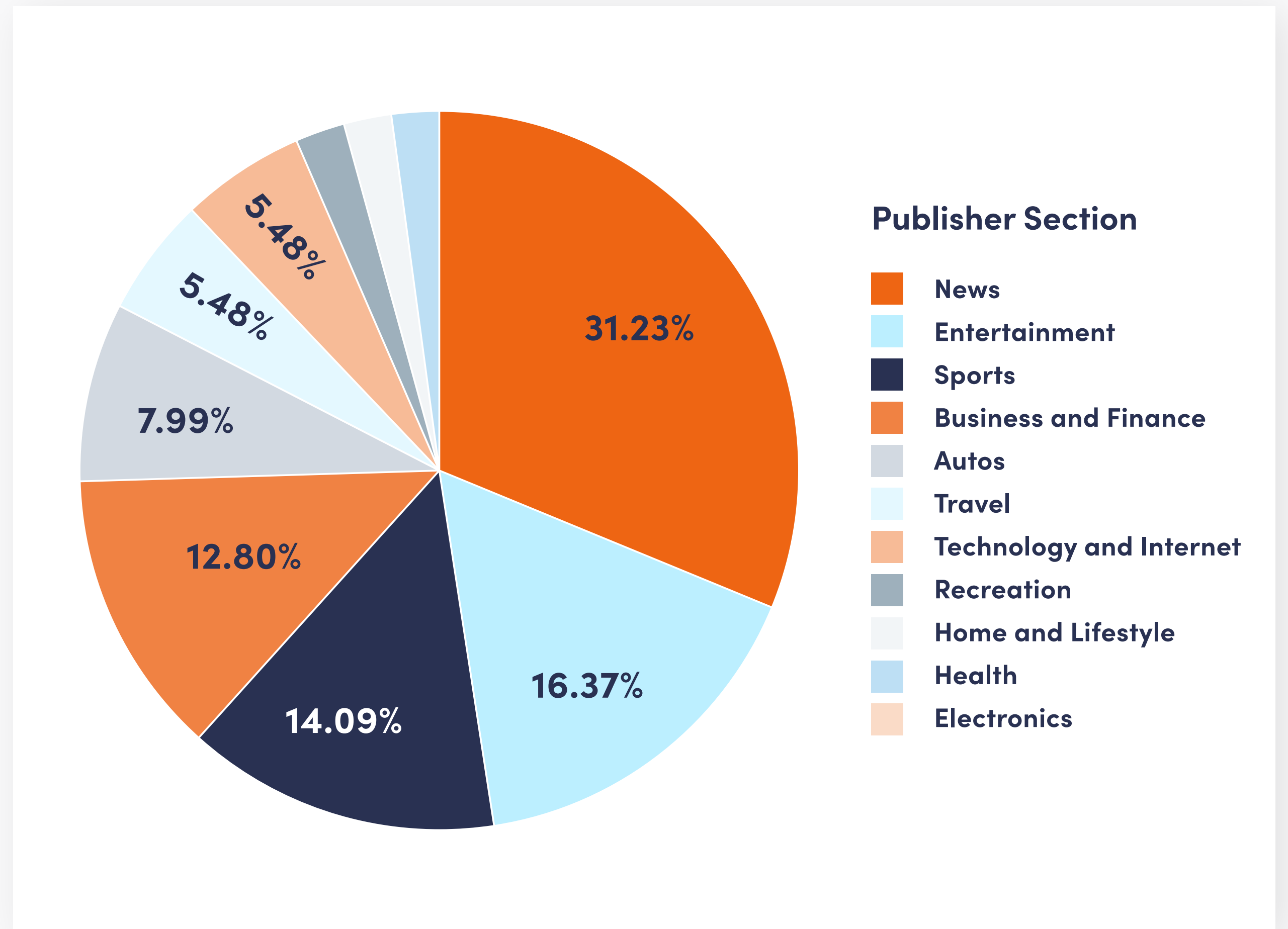

Source: Internal Data – Outbrain, 2021
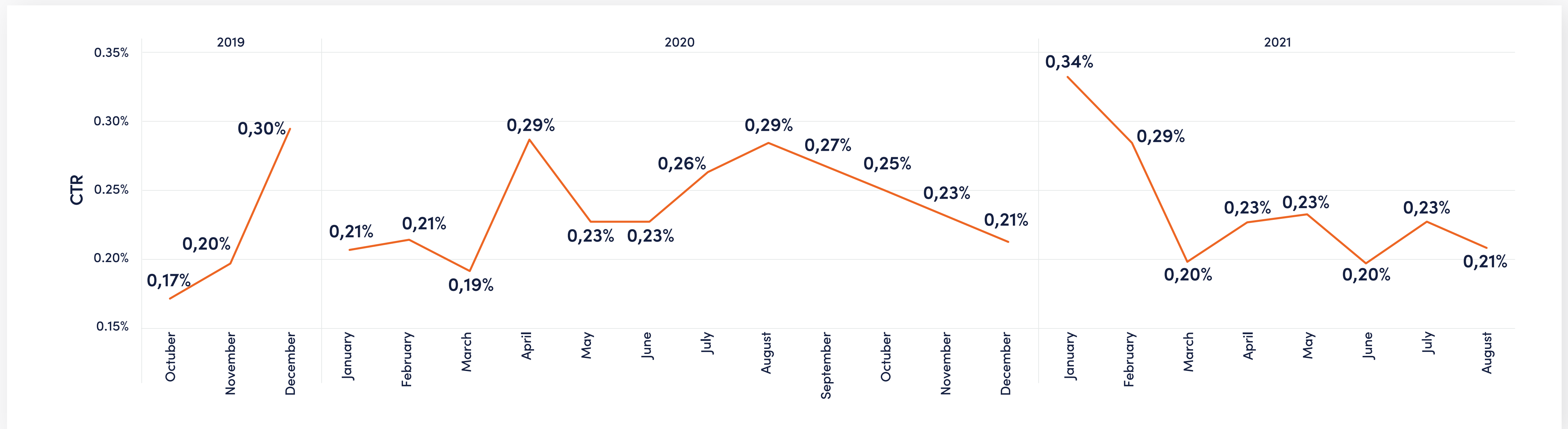
Conversions by Publisher Section

News is the top section that leads traffic to auto content

Contextual advertising is making a comeback in the digital advertising ecosystem as a privacy-compliant solution for marketers to reach their target audience.
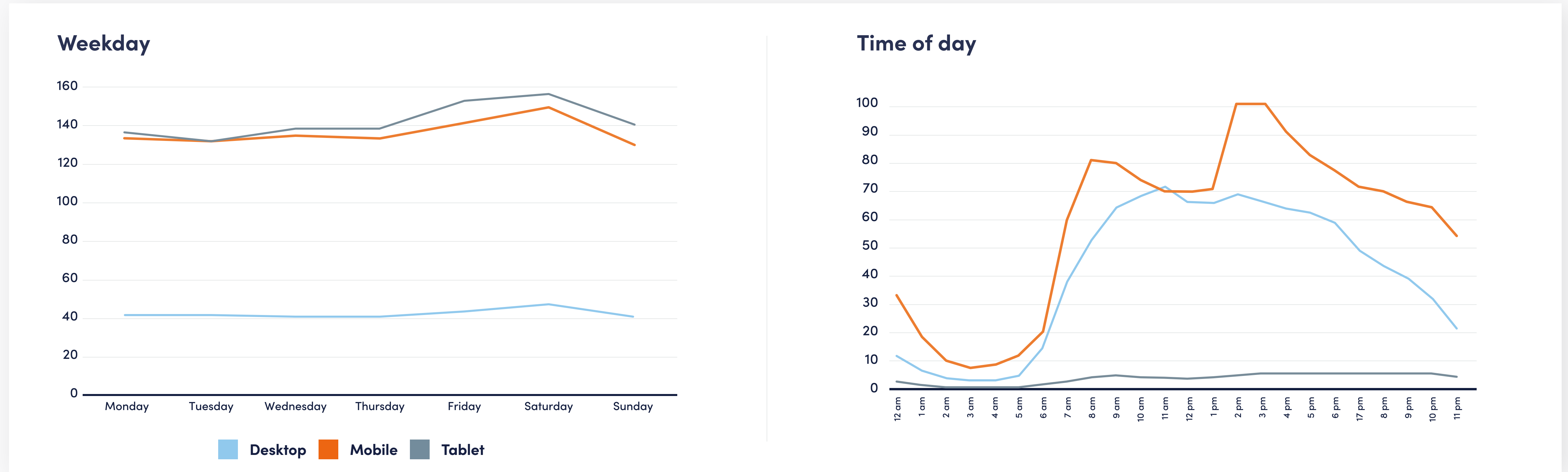
Outbrain's proprietary algorithms are powered by 14+ years of AI technology and informed by 1 billion+ signals per minute, which means going much further than identifying or matching relevant keywords on a page. By combining this data with a user's interest profile, we provide value to the consumer when the context is right.

For auto buyers, the majority of conversions come from content discovered on **News pages** (31.23%) followed by ads displayed in **Entertainment** sections (16.37%).

Source: Internal Data – Outbrain, 2021

Publisher Section

- News
- Entertainment
- Sports
- Business and Finance
- Autos
- Travel
- Technology and Internet
- Recreation
- Home and Lifestyle
- Health
- Electronics

31.23%
16.37%
14.09%
12.80%
7.99%
5.48%
5.48%
5.48%

Strategy by device matters

While interest in auto content is consistent throughout the week, consumption is highest on Saturday across all devices.
Peak consumption differs by device depending on the time of day: for mobile between 3–4 pm, and for desktop at 11am.

Weekday

Time of day

Desktop   **Mobile**   **Tablet**

Source: Internal Data – Outbrain, 2021

TheContillery
THE DISTILLERS OF ENGAGING CONTENT

2. The New Era of Creative Intelligence

Decoding visual engagement

In our mobile-centric world, images are the currency of effective communication. For maximum benefit, brands should know how to best leverage their creatives.

Standing out in a world saturated with content is a major challenge for brands. A team of neuroscientists from MIT has discovered that the human brain processes entire images seen by the eye in as little as 13 milliseconds (1).

As brands have a fraction of a second to capture the attention of their audiences, this chapter highlights how to tackle the ever-growing challenge of visual engagement with AI's help.

(1) "In the blink of an eye", MIT News Office, January 2014

Methodology

The world has mastered the art of analyzing data to gain insights, but what about analyzing visual content through the prism of data science?

By allowing computers to gain in-depth understanding from the content of digital images, computer vision technology is changing the conventional wisdom that creativity can't be modelized, evaluated, or learned.

For this study, TheContillery considered an image as a dataset made up of 1 million pixels. The proprietary computer-vision technology learns thousands of criteria to precisely detect and describe the visual attributes of an image: car type, scene type, background, vehicle display and framing, car color, car and background color associations and harmonies, contrasts, car body reflection, presence of people, car dynamics, granularity of materials, depth, etc.

Image analysis using Artificial Intelligence

Each image is described on 400+ dimensions

Scene
On the road

Dynamic
Driving

Position
Front 2 third view

Car lights
On

Car reflection
Avarage

Car volumes
Avarage

Light
Sunrise

Background
Sky, cloudy, landscape

Rendering
Colors filtered

Car color
Metallic Grey

Car Contrast
Moderate

...

Based on the TheContillery™ property computer vision technology

As soon as visual attributes are materialized, it becomes possible to link them with performance data associated with these images. By doing this on thousands of Outbrain automotive campaigns, **TheContillery uncovered visual attributes that are positively and negatively influencing ad performance.**

How do we learn visual attributes that are driving performance?

Linking creative descriptions with performance data...

Impressions
Click through rate
Engagement

...at scale...

Thousands of creatives

Trillions of impressions

20+ countries

300+ car models

...to learn and predict optimal creative scenarios

Overperforming Creative Scenarios

Underperforming Creative Scenarios

The first image categorization to consider is the "theme" of the visual. The theme summarizes the scene presenting the vehicle or USPs of the vehicle.
Once a theme is chosen, hundreds of creative options remain possible regarding the car color, car display, type of background, color filters, scene light, contrasts, granularity of materials, etc.

All choices made on these 400+ creative dimensions will have an impact on ad performance and must be properly applied to maximize campaign ROI.

The following section illustrates the type of insights delivered with visual intelligence, and the rationale it brings when it comes to making concrete creative decisions leading to high engagement and performance of media campaigns.

Identifying top-performing creative scenarios across markets, model types and brands

Performance of creative scenarios
by country

Italy
UK
Germany
Japan
France

Overperforming
Vh x Scene class

Underperforming
Vh x Scene class
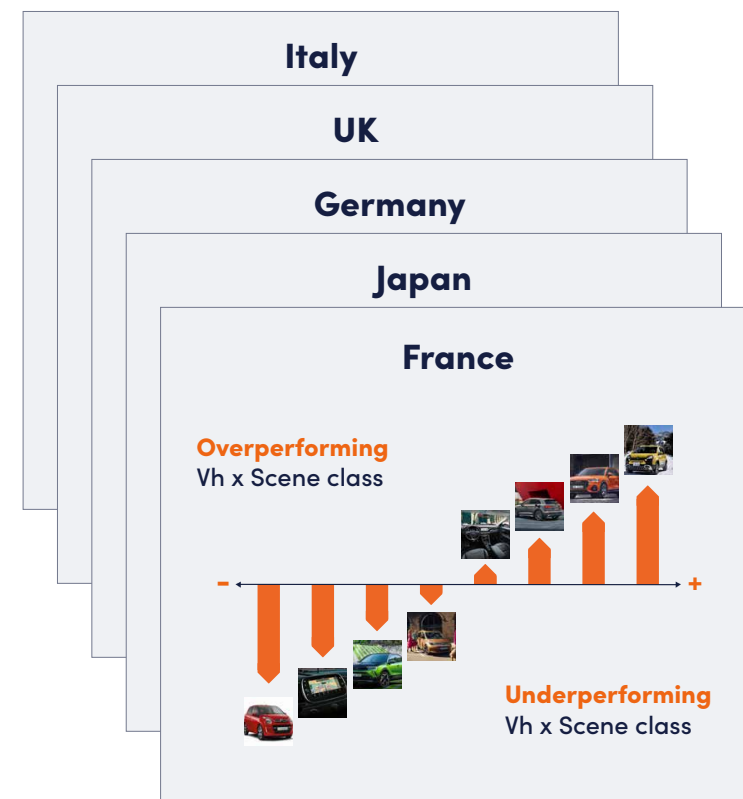
Performance of creative scenarios
by vehicle type

Break
Coupé
Electric
SUV
Sedan

Overperforming
Vh x Scene class

Underperforming
Vh x Scene class

Performance of creative scenarios
by brand

Brand D
Brand D
Brand C
Brand B
Brand A

Overperforming
Creative Scenarios

Underperforming
Creative Scenarios
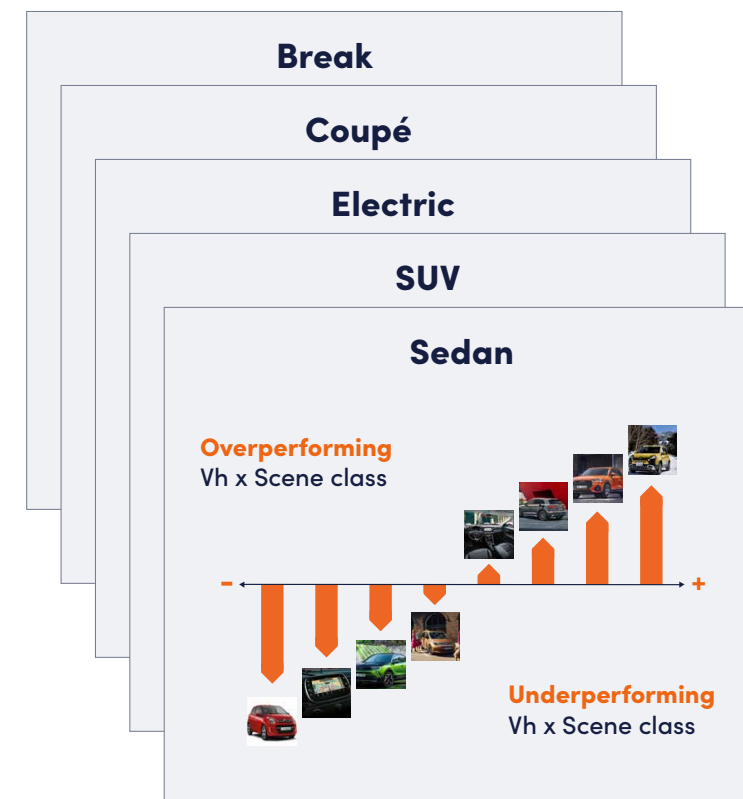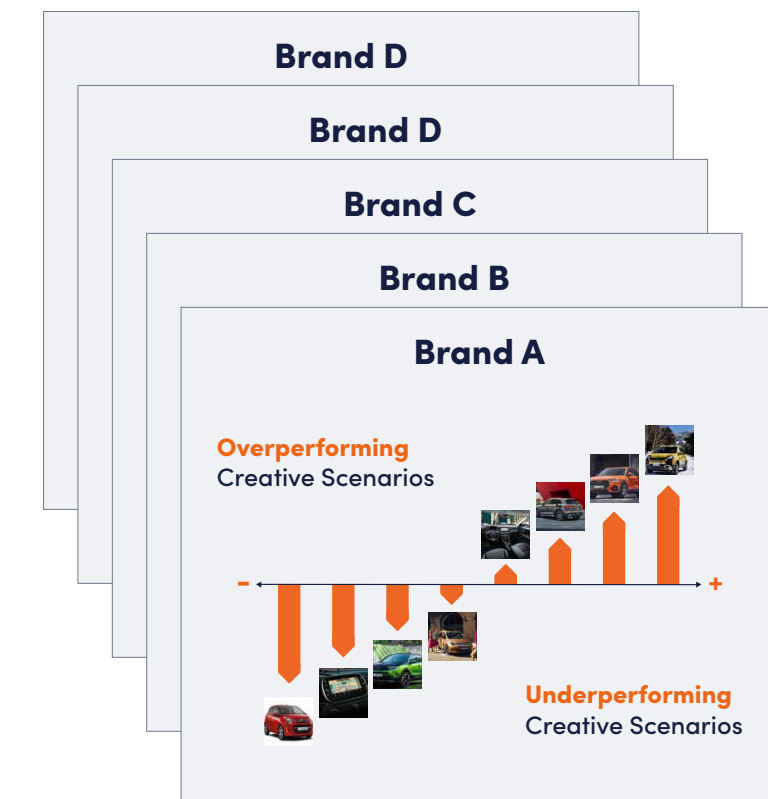
3. Visual Refuelling

# Overview of the most used themes

TheContillery identifies more than 30 varied themes used by automotive brands to advertise their car models.
Out of these creative options, the top 88% of automotive campaigns are using one of the top-10 themes presented below.

Image categorization based on the "theme" or "subject" of the visual - extract of the most used visual themes

Theme	Description	Theme	Description	Theme	Description
Lifestyle 15%	Car shooting with people in a scene of everyday life.	**On the road 13%**	The car is presented driving on the road.	**In the city 11%**	The car is shown in a city with buildings in the background.
In front of a building 10%	The car is presented in front of a building.	**Catalog 9%**	Car is showcased on a blank and neutral background as a single element	**Interior view 8%**	Presentation of the car interior: console, wheel drive, dashboard, etc.
Charge port 7%	Electric or hybrid car is plugged on a charging station.	**Outdoor 7%**	The car is presented outdoors in open and empty space.	**Range and comparison 5%**	Two or more cars, varying in models or colors, are displayed.

XX% of creative ads belong to this scene type

Behind this cross country average, we can see from the table below that countries like Germany, Israel or Japan present a different mix.

Most frequently used creative themes by country, as a % of campaigns
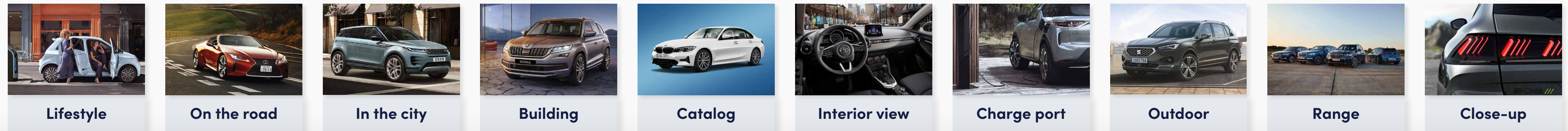
	Lifestyle	On the road	In the city	Building	Catalog	Interior view	Charge port	Outdoor	Range	Close-up
BE	11%	12%	12%	12%	8%	9%	6%	7%	5%	3%
DE	14%	11%	8%	11%	9%	6%	7%	7%	8%	3%
ES	20%	13%	6%	7%	7%	11%	11%	8%	7%	3%
FR	20%	12%	8%	7%	5%	12%	13%	4%	3%	4%
IT	18%	12%	10%	15%	7%	2%	7%	3%	4%	1%
JP	17%	10%	8%	5%	18%	9%	2%	4%	9%	2%
IL	8%	18%	14%	8%	1%	11%	6%	7%	7%	1%
Global	15%	13%	11%	10%	9%	8%	7%	7%	5%	3%

But usage and performance are not always on the same page.
Let's take a look at usage vs performance for the SUV category:

Larger bubbles indicate higher usage of this type of theme on the native advertising campaign running on Outbrain. The trend suggests that the most used theme is also the lowest-performing one for SUV vehicles, while in-nature visuals are not well explored and could bring better results to your campaigns.

Want this analysis for other car models?

REACH OUT TO OUR TEAM AND SCHEDULE A WORKSHOP
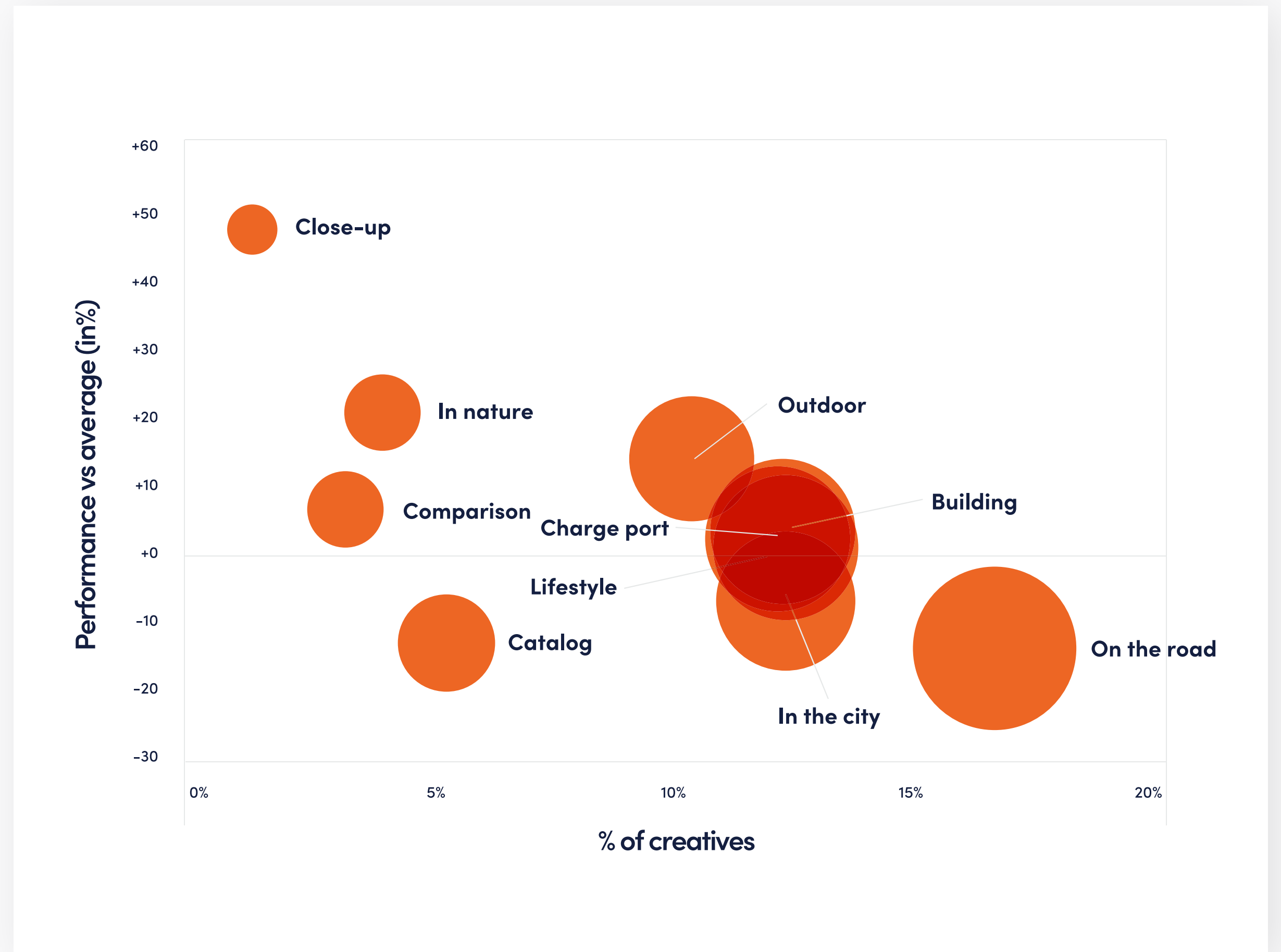
Creative choices have a huge impact on campaign performance

We see extremely high disparities in performance among the visual themes described above.
On average across countries, the top-performing image themes deliver 2 to 3-times higher CTR than the least performing themes.

REACH OUT TO OUR TEAM TO UNVEIL THE SCENE TYPES

Main scene type performance vs. average country performance in %

– Summary of analysis in 12 countries –

Most performing scene types

2,2 times spread in CTR

Least performing scene types

Scene type performance in CTR vs. country average

Scene Type 1	Scene Type 2	Scene Type 3	Scene Type 4	Scene Type 5	Scene Type 6	Scene Type 7	Scene Type 8	Scene Type 9	Scene Type 10	Scene Type 11	Scene Type 12	Scene Type 13	Scene Type 14	Scene Type 15	Scene Type 16	Scene Type 17
+31%	+13%	+9%	+6%	+5%	+5%	+4%	+1%	–1%	–4%	–8%	–10%	–16%	–20%	–25%	–33%	–40%

Impact of visual type selection on campaign performance – creative theme performance vs. average performance in the country , in %.

One size does not fit all

Theme performance might vary significantly across countries, as described below.

	Germany		France		Italy		Japan	
	+ Positive impact	**–** Negative impact	**+** Positive impact	**–** Negative impact	**+** Positive impact	**–** Negative impact	**+** Positive impact	**–** Negative impact
Creative Theme Performance	Range	Catalog	Charge Port	Lifestyle	Range	Building	Interior view	Building
Car Body Color (*)(**)	Dark colors	Light colors	Blue	White	Red	White	Yellow	White
Positive/ Negative Visual attributes (illustrations)	Trees, forest, nature	Blank background	Car saliency	City	Car saliency	Wall, facade	Natural light	Filtered

(*): this general statement can be adjusted when retaining specific creative options specifically adapted or unadapted to the color of the car. (**): non mentionned colors have a neutral or balanced impact.

If you're interested in getting insights about a specific country, vehicle type or brand... GET IN TOUCH WITH OUR AUTO SPECIALISTS!

One size does not fit all (cont.)

Similarly, visual performance might vary by vehicle type.
Making a good association of models and themes is a key step to optimize campaign performance.

	SUV		City Car		Hatchback	
	+ Positive impact	**−** Negative impact	**+** Positive impact	**−** Negative impact	**+** Positive impact	**−** Negative impact
Creative Theme Performance	In Nature	On the Road	Lifestyle	Catalog	Lifestyle	Range
Car Body Color (*)(**)	Yellow	Red	Red	Dark	Bright colors	White
Positive/Negative Visual attributes	Dirt roads	Vehicle side view	Asphalt	Street art	Facade	Blank background

(*): this general statement can be adjusted when retaining specific creative options specifically adapted or unadapted to the color of the car. (**): non mentioned colors have a neutral or balanced impact.

Electric and hybrid vehicles

Today, consumer sentiment toward electric vehicles is becoming a real and viable option.
However, it's important to understand if this trend is also reflected in consumer interest when it comes to ads.

Outlook for EV market share by major region

- US – EV market share
- Europe– EV market share
- China – EV market share
- EV Global share of sales
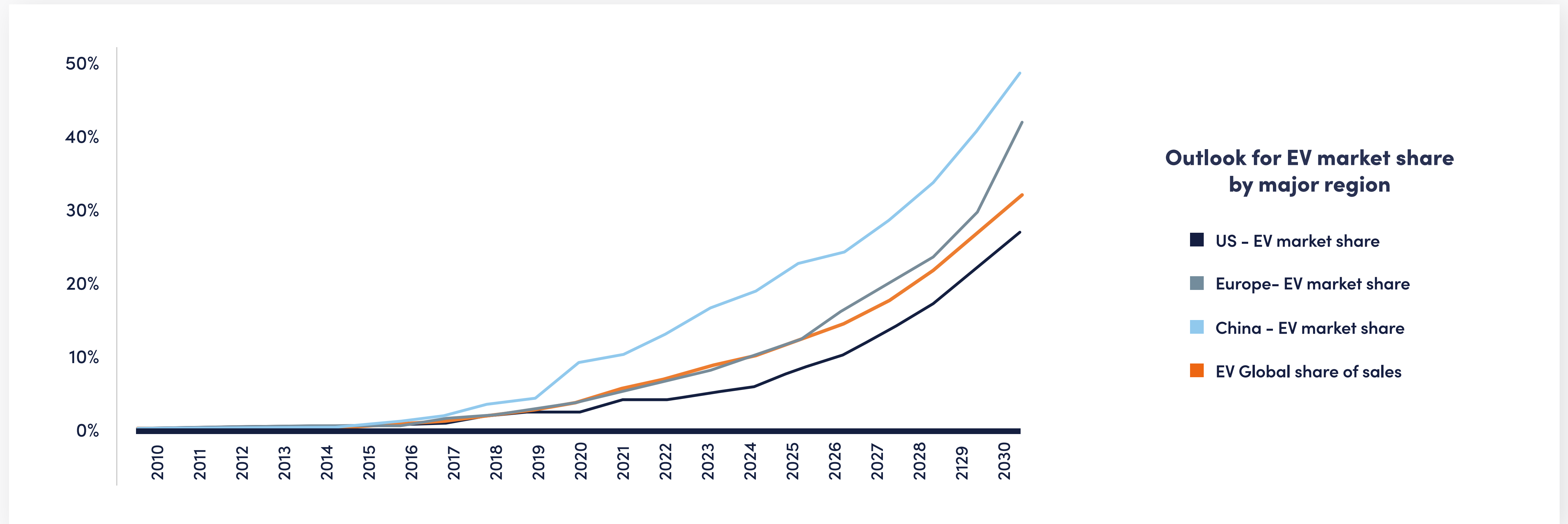
Source: Deloitte analysis, IHS Markit, EV-Volumes.com[17]

On average, ads for electric cars are less performing than ads displaying combustion engine vehicles. This relative underperformance shouldn't be considered a pattern of low interest, as 45% of brands actually show better overall performance with electric vehicle ads compared to other combustion categories.

Most frequently used categories for electrified vehicles:

- Others (6%)
- Range (3%)
- Indoor (3%)
- In the city (8%)
- Catalog (7%)
- Close-up (5%)
- Outdoor (6%)
- Building (7%)
- Interior view (11%)
- On the road (11%)
- Lifestyle (11%)
- Charge port (22%)
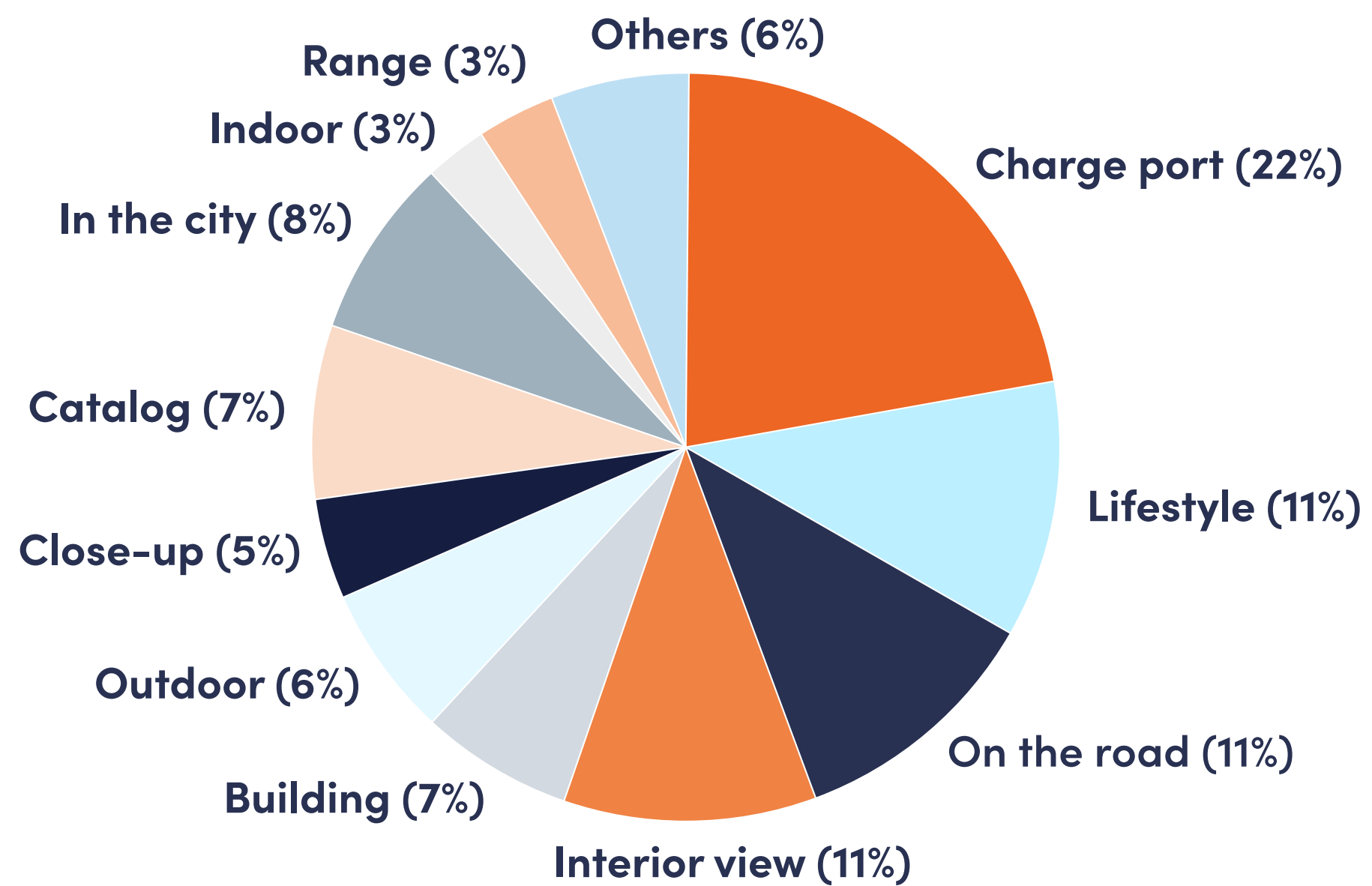
But as we've shown before, usage is not a driver of performance.

Performance vs average (in%)
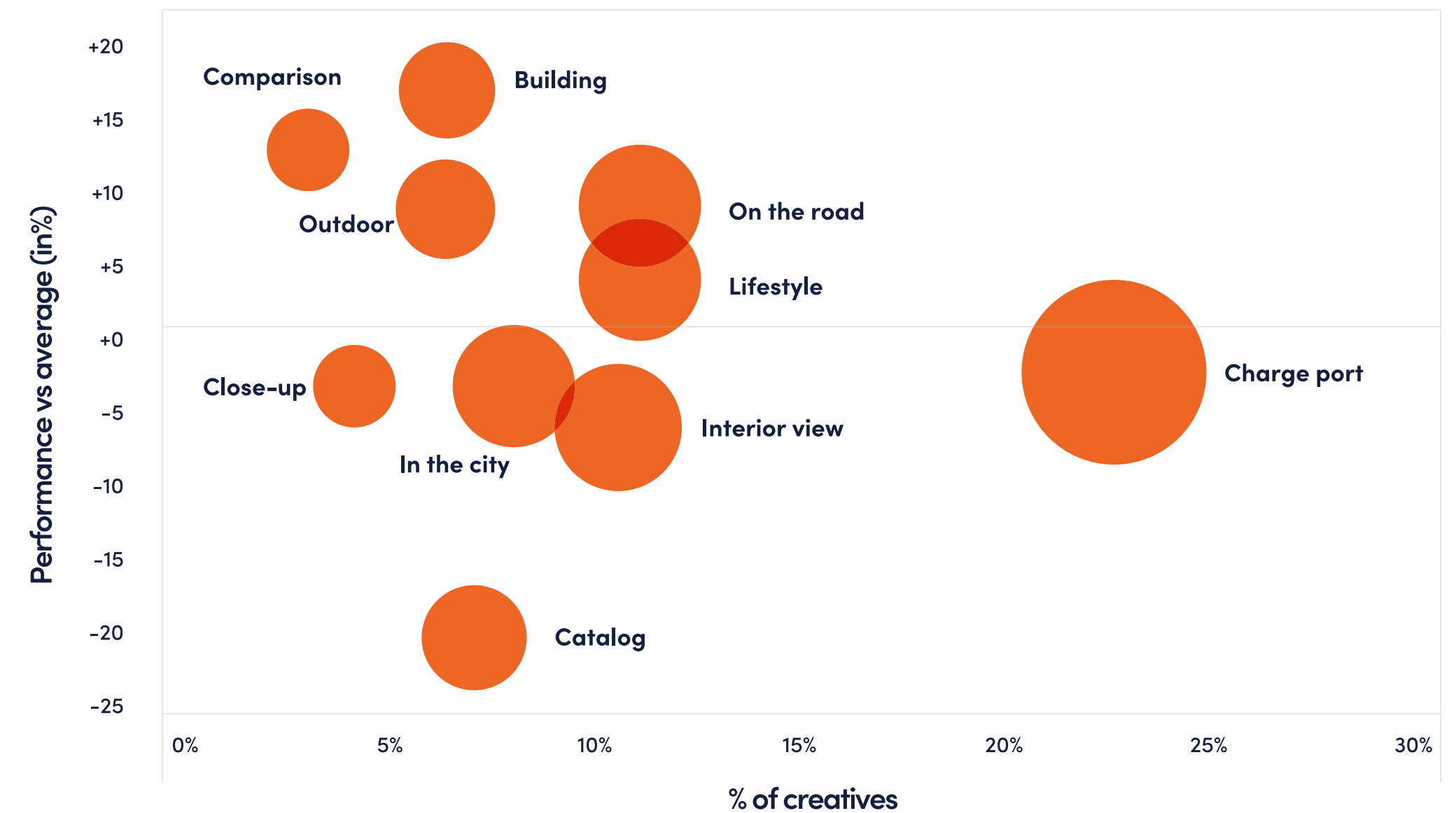
% of creatives

Unlike combustion vehicles – for which most performing ads are without people – electric vehicle ads with people achieve stronger results.

Electric and hybrid vehicles

	+ Positive impact		**–** Negative impact
Creative Theme Performance		Building	Catalog
Car Body Color (*)(**)		Blue	Red
Visual Attributes/ Elements		Presence of people	Studio shootings

(*) : This general statement can be adjusted when retaining specific creative options specifically adapted or unadapted to the color of the car. (**) : non mentioned colors have a neutral or balanced impact

4. Accelerate with Native

A channel that works toward any goal of automotive advertisers

As today's consumers are more likely to purchase products online, brands can help themselves by providing a richer digital content experience.

Most car buyers are undecided at the start of their shopping journey. As the average research process takes around 3 months*, the discovery moment is crucial for targeting active buyers with information related to your brand and car models.

Outbrain is an ideal partner to expand your reach outside the walled gardens. The world's largest automotive manufacturers trust Outbrain and leverage native advertising across the consumer journey and for multiple KPIs.

See how to best integrate Outbrain at each stage of your funnel.

Source: Statista, 2018

Identify, Engage & Convert Car Buyers

Outbrain's range of unique ad experiences are built to drive results for every goal, and are dynamically formatted to each publisher environment for deeper user engagement and ROAS.

	AWARENESS	CONSIDERATION	ACTIVATION
Marketing Goal	Expose your brand to a target audience and increase your reach	Boost your brand, develop interactions with your audience	Move prospects toward your acquisition goals
Formats	High Impact in-Article / Outstream Video	Standard / Carousel / Click-to-Watch Video	Standard / Carousel / Clip (GIF)
Targeting	Data / Contextual	Data / Contextual	Data / Retargeting
KPI	Video Views / Viewability / Reach	Visits / Engagement / Actions on Site / Conversions / PR Amplification	Clicks / Actions on Site / Sales / App Installs
Marketing Output	**Brand-Lift**	**Content Marketing** Brochure Downloads Test Drive Booking Car Configurator Store Locator	**Lead Generation** Brochure Downloads Test Drive Booking Car Configurator Store Locator
Pricing model	CPM & CPC	CPM & CPC	CPM & CPC
Buying Methodology	Direct & Programmatic	Direct & Programmatic	Direct & Programmatic

Set a Full-Funnel Campaign to Identify, Engage & Convert New Customers

Volvo launched an all-inclusive car subscription to meet an increase in mobility demands. To draw potential customers' attention to this new service, Care by Volvo and its online marketing agency SaphirSolution turned to leading Native Discovery platform, Outbrain.

Success Story:
Volvo combined different strategies to promote its subscription service.

Vertical	Objective	Product
Automotive	Awareness, Conversions	High-Impact, Click-to-Watch

Results
Care by Volvo was able to generate 1.8 million unique site visits via Outbrain in 6 months. By retargeting the Outbrain audience segments and using Lookalike Audiences, they were able to achieve higher conversion rates that were 4 times higher than standard campaigns. Furthermore, SaphirSolutions identified a "Halo Effect", i.e. an increased investment in Outbrain led to increased conversions across other channels.

4x
Higher CVR With Retargeting

4x
Higher CVR With Lookalike Audiences

Lift your brand awareness

Native advertising, particularly through in-article placements, is a powerful solution to achieve brand awareness objectives such as views, viewability, and target audience reach.

When it comes to branding, your needs are likely to be ad formats that offer highly viewable, brand-safe, and rich creatives. Reach a wide range of audiences ready to interact with your brand through the scale of the open web.

Considering the growth of video in digital advertising (video represented 42% of ad spend in 2019), leverage interactive native video solutions.

Success Story:
Peugeot increased brand message recall with Outbrain's Click-to-Watch video format.

Vertical	Objective	Product
Automotive	Recall Brand, Brand Recommendation	Click-to-Watch
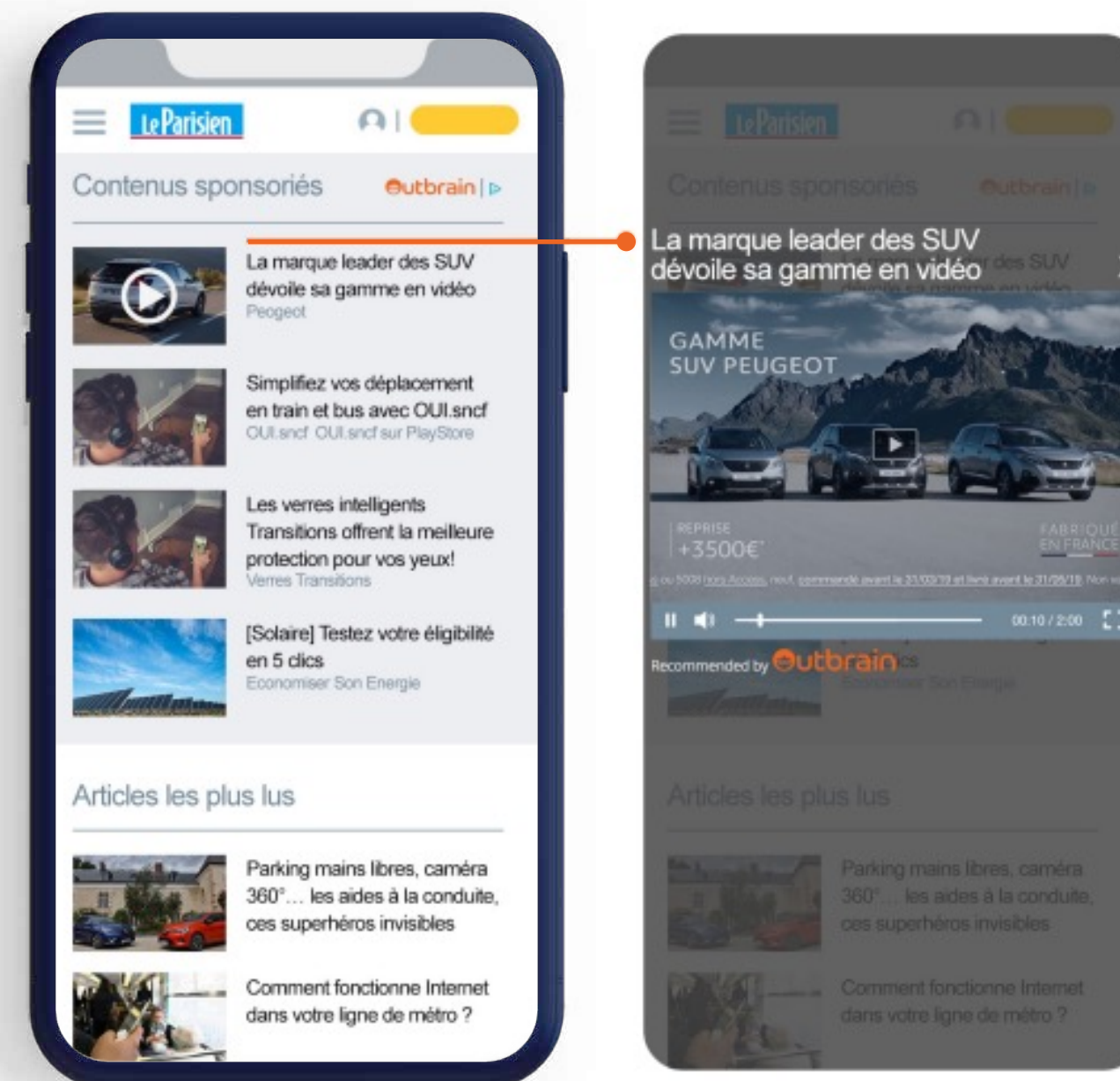
Results

The study conducted by Nielsen clearly showed better results for the group exposed to the video.
The opt-in Click-to-Watch experience delivered better engagement and resulted in higher rates of spontaneous recommendation of the brand (+20%) as well as an increase in the recall of the SUV line's benefits (+24%).

+33%
Brand Message Recall

+20%
On Brand Recommendation

Deliver high-value actions

Native advertising formats by Outbrain are engaging by definition.

Build on your brand story for higher engagement levels. Car buyers want to educate themselves through multiple pieces of content before making a purchase decision.

Beyond the simple click, Outbrain delivers high-quality traffic to enable automotive brands to measure indicators such as:

• Time spent

• High value actions such as brochure downloads, test drive bookings, car configurator

• New visitors

Success Story:
Honda recreates the showroom experience and drives strong engagement with its audience.

Vertical	Objective	Product
Automotive	Conversions	Conversion Bid Strategy

Results

Thanks to Outbrain's CBS technology, Honda was able to effectively maximize the number of conversions while outperforming other channels in cost-per-lead.

+11%
CVR Vs. Average of Other Channels

+32%
CPC Vs. Social

outbrain   **TheContillery**

5. Ready, Steady, Go

While visuals are a **BIG** part of any auto campaign, they come not alone.

Headlines, targeting, bidding and defining the right KPIs are equally crucial for a successful campaign. It's also important to emphasize that CTR is not the *only* metric to consider when evaluating campaign performance.

Creatives

Test & Learn

Creating highly engaging and converting ad content is not an exact science, but we do have some helpful tricks to share.

A lot of different factors may influence your performance, so be sure to A/B test. Combine multiple titles, images, targeting, and devices in order to find the most efficient combination (as for search campaigns).

Consider the visual elements that have a positive and negative impact by country and vehicle type. Speak to an Outbrain expert for the best visuals that work toward high campaign performance, and A/B test to learn what works best for your brand.

I WANT TO TALK TO A NATIVE EXPERT

Recommended by Outbrain

Sponsored
Zeron

Let's Take The Scenic Route.

Wherever you're going, we'll get you there safely, comfortably and without worry. So go ahead, take the scenic route with Zeron.

Test Drive Today
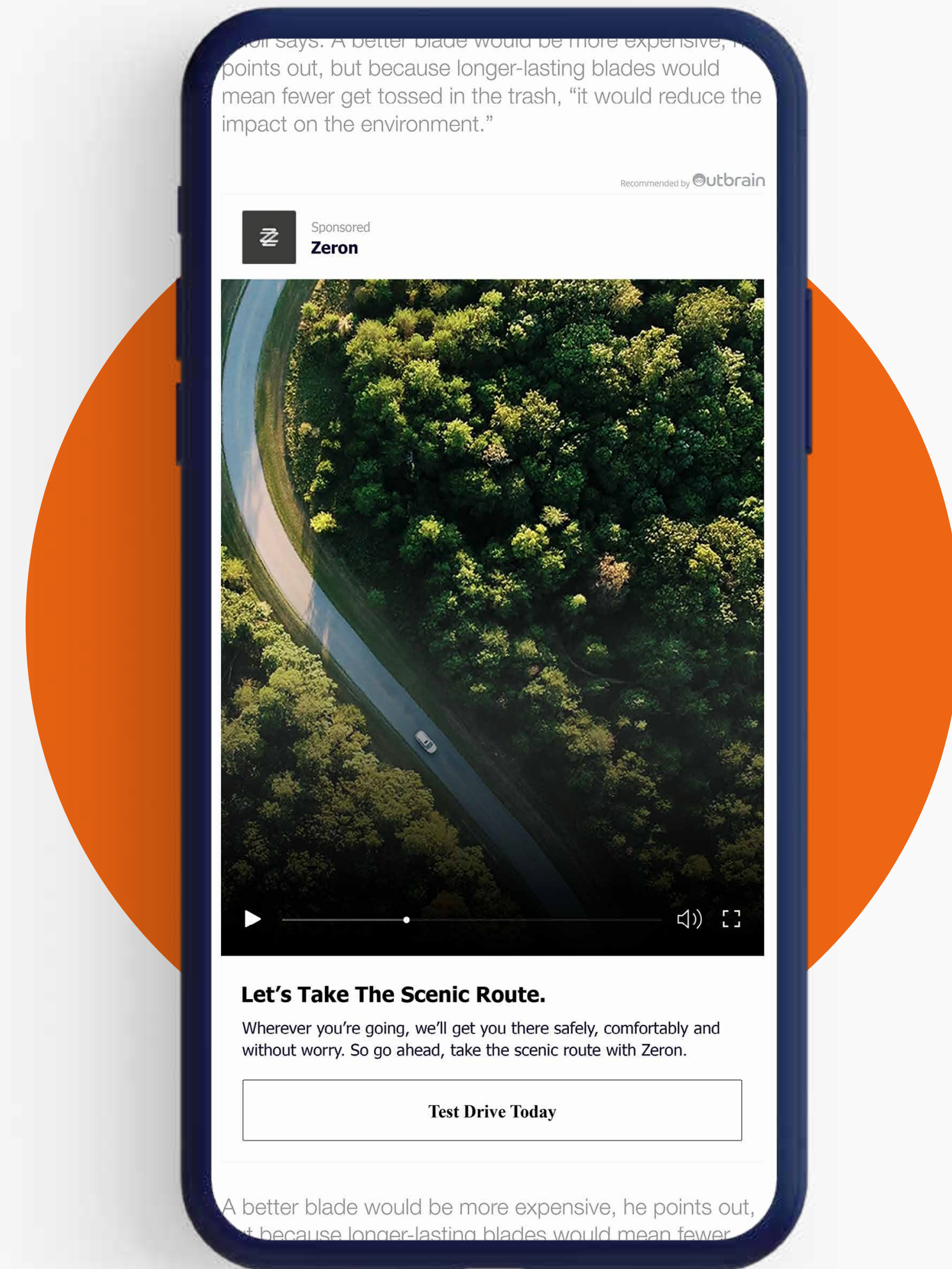
Diversify your media plan

One, two, or even three channels is often not enough for a robust marketing campaign. While the content of your ad is important, where you advertise says just as much about your brand among consumers.

Compared to social, **native ads in premium environments** are:

+44%	+21%	+24%
more trusted	more clicked on	more likely to lead to purchase

It's simple for marketers to adapt their existing assets with native ads on the open web, safeguard their brand, and maximize ROAS in the process.

LEARN MORE

points out, but because longer-lasting blades would mean fewer get tossed in the trash, "it would reduce the impact on the environment."

Smartfeed

sponsored by: **RoadSide Insurance**
★★★★☆ 34.2k

New 'Chat' Feature Helps You Get Back On The Road Quicker!   Download Now

7 Celeb-Inspired Modifications To Level Up Your Ride
Sponsored: InspoModz
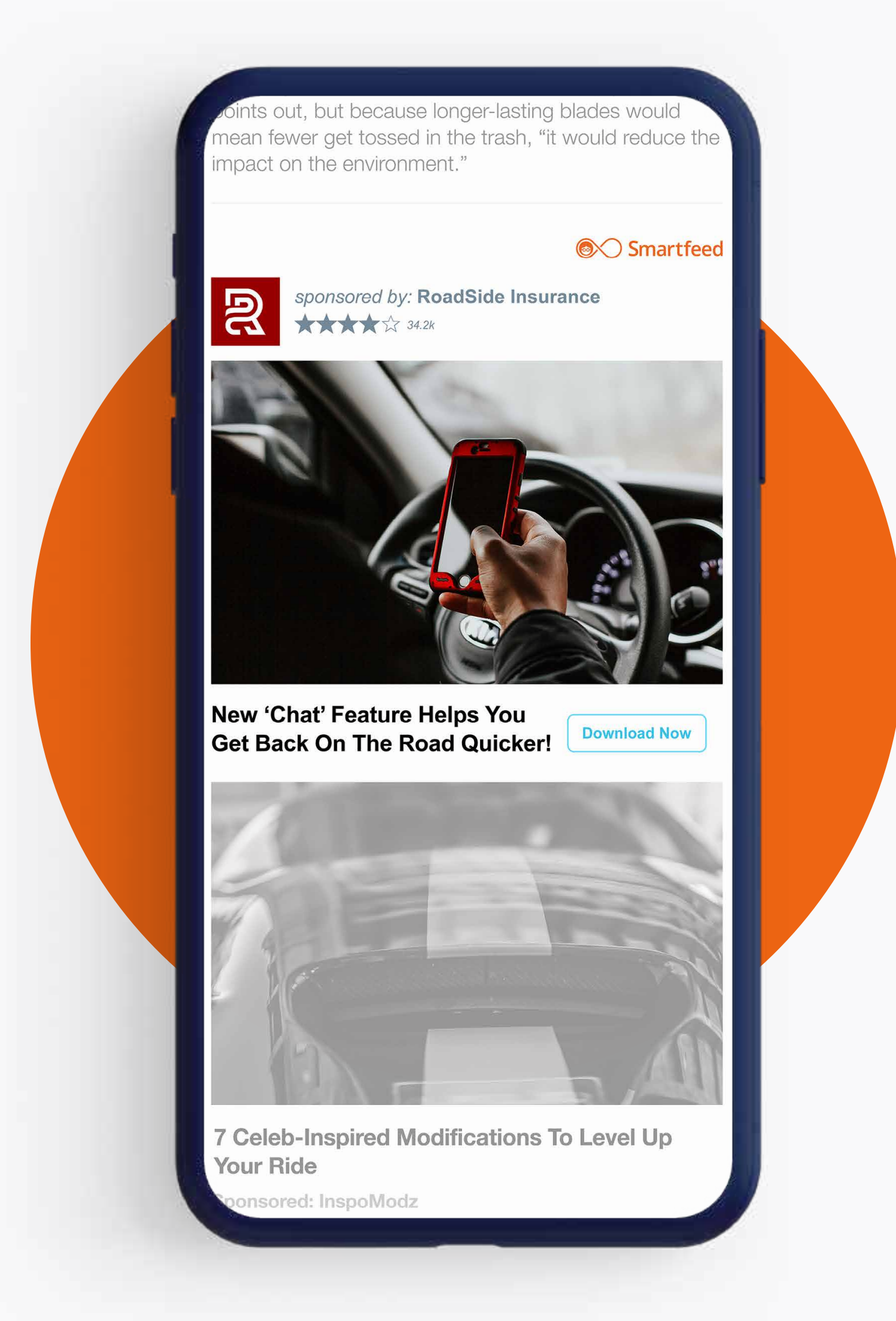
Campaign Goals

Define clear KPIs ahead of your campaign planning

Outbrain is efficient at engaging new and existing audiences.
Set the right KPIs to measure your success and go beyond the simple click.

It's **highly recommended** to set up a scoring system by which to value certain KPIs depending on the overall goal of a campaign. Pixels implementation is usually required, but direct connections to analytic solutions are also possible.

In any case, it is strategic to feed the Outbrain team and its technology with engagement metrics in order to optimise results.

In order to measure the total return on investment, it is recommended to **look at all conversions** (direct and indirect).
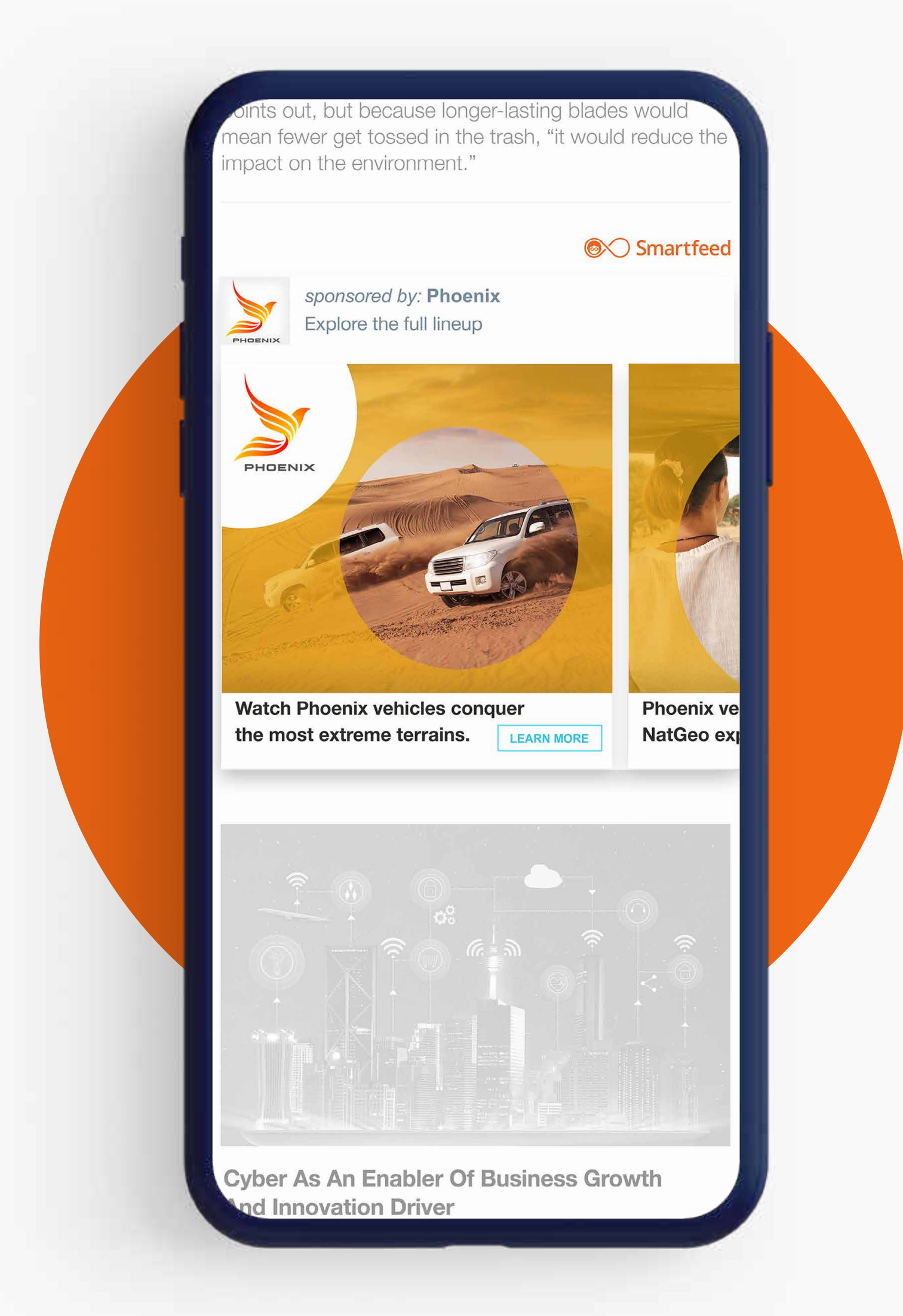
Bidding

Even the most engaging creatives targeted to the perfect audiences aren't enough to maximize your ROAS without the proper bid strategy.
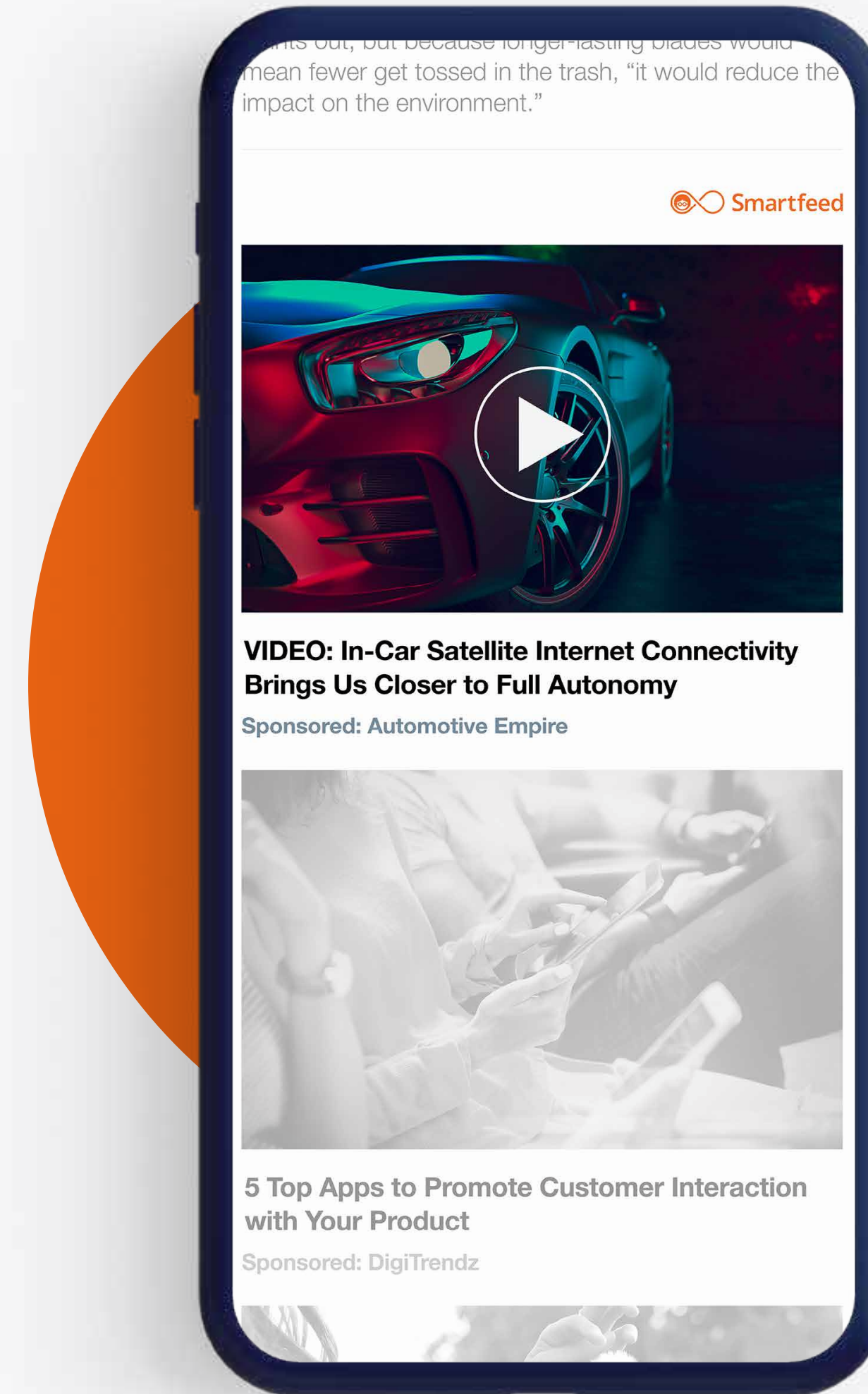
Conversion Bid Strategy

a.k.a. CBS uses machine learning and AI methodology to auto-optimize and adjust the bid strategy for your campaign goals. To make the most out of CBS, first identify your overall Outbrain objective and primary KPI:

- **Target ROAS:** Adjusts your CPCs to bring as many conversions as possible within your target ROAS.

- **Target CPA:** Adjusts your CPCs to bring as many conversions as possible within your target CPA.

- **Fully Automatic:** Adjusts CPCs to bring as many conversions as possible within your set budget.

- **Semi Automatic:** Outbrain adjusts CPCs for each impression while letting you adjust your campaign's CPC.

CHECK OUT HOW IT WORKS

Smartfeed

VIDEO: In-Car Satellite Internet Connectivity Brings Us Closer to Full Autonomy
Sponsored: Automotive Empire

5 Top Apps to Promote Customer Interaction with Your Product
Sponsored: DigiTrendz

6. Conclusion

Outbrain, your partner in achieving all of your auto advertising objectives.

Outbrain strengthens consumer engagement, with all of its attributes (formats, targeting technologies, and more) designed to create concrete audience interaction: **a click.**

In the past few years, Outbrain has increased its portfolio and offers a wide diversity of formats and technologies to address all types of objectives in a media plan: awareness, consideration, and performance.

Outbrain's recommendation platform has shown its efficiency as a strong alternative to social that can help you diversify your media mix from the walled gardens.

GET IN TOUCH WITH OUR NATIVE EXPERTS

We have a team fully dedicated to the auto vertical.

Your Pit Crew

Outbrain

Outbrain is a leading recommendation platform for the open web. Our technology enables one-third of the world's online consumers to discover new things through recommendation feeds on their favorite media and connects advertisers to these audiences to grow their business.

TheContillery
THE DISTILLERS OF ENGAGING CONTENT

TheContillery uses artificial intelligence to help brands increase the impact of their visual communication, and reach creative excellence on an unlimited scale in the new era of high frequency content. The new possibilities offered by artificial intelligence enable brands to tackle the highly challenging need to create visual engagement at scale.