



Science on the Buses

Report to the European Commission

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Evaluation Report

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Evaluation of the SciBus Project

Chronology

The SciBus campaign was an advertising campaign on buses running across the European Union. A total of 8181 posters were displayed on 4638 buses serving the capital cities of the fifteen EU member states. The campaign was run during European Science and Technology Week in November 2002.

Methodology

The SciBus project was evaluated using a quantitative survey, conducted on buses running the campaign in four European capital cities. A total of 378 face to face interviews were conducted in London, Dublin, Luxembourg and Brussels. Data was then collated, translated (where not in English) and entered into spreadsheets for analysis.

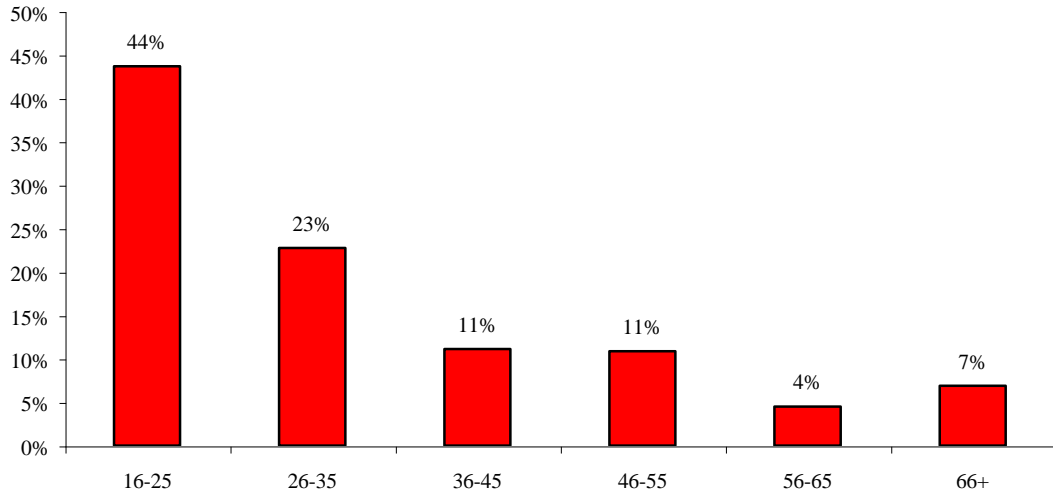
The Sample

A total of 378 structured interviews were conducted during this evaluation. The number of interviews conducted in each city was:

- London 76
- Dublin 102
- Luxembourg 100
- Brussels 100

Age Distribution

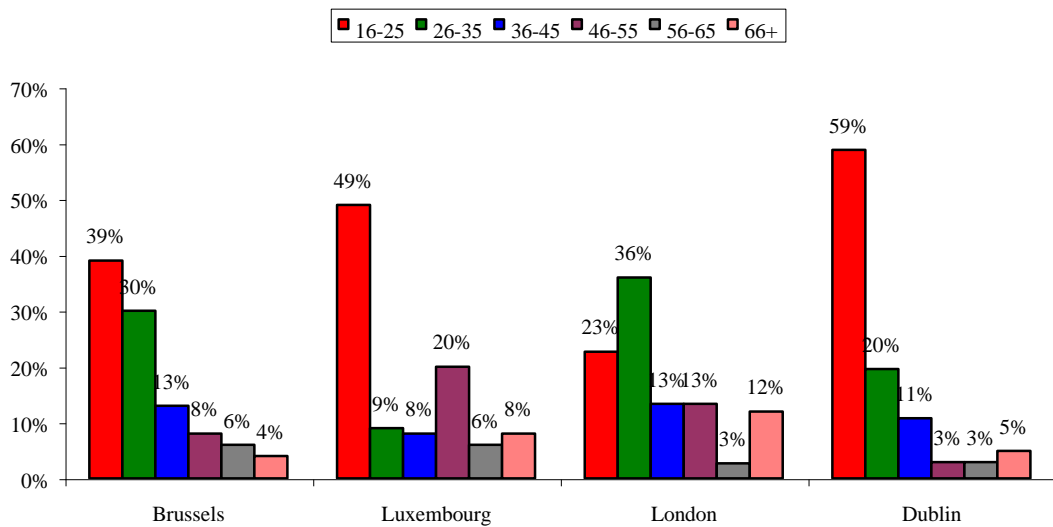
How old are you?



The posters were targeted at 16-35 year olds, with a particular interest in 16-25 year olds, and it is clear that this is the predominant bus user group in the surveyed cities.

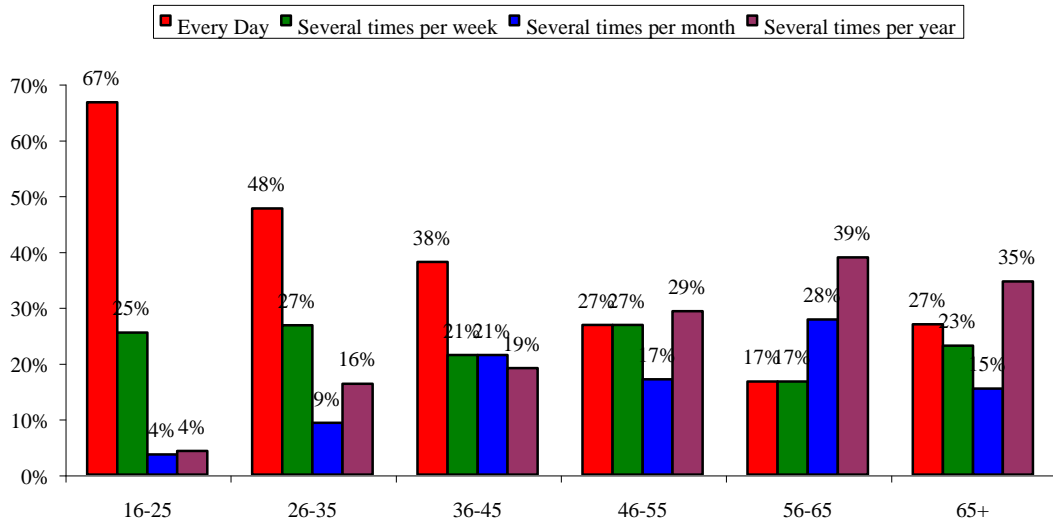
There was some variation between cities in the exact proportion of younger travellers, however, there was a clear predominance of the target audience in all surveyed cities.

How old are you?



Travel Habits

How often do travel by bus?



Not only are the target audience the largest single group on the buses, they are by far the most frequent travellers. This ensures that they will have had numerous opportunities to see the posters used in the campaign.

Gender Distribution

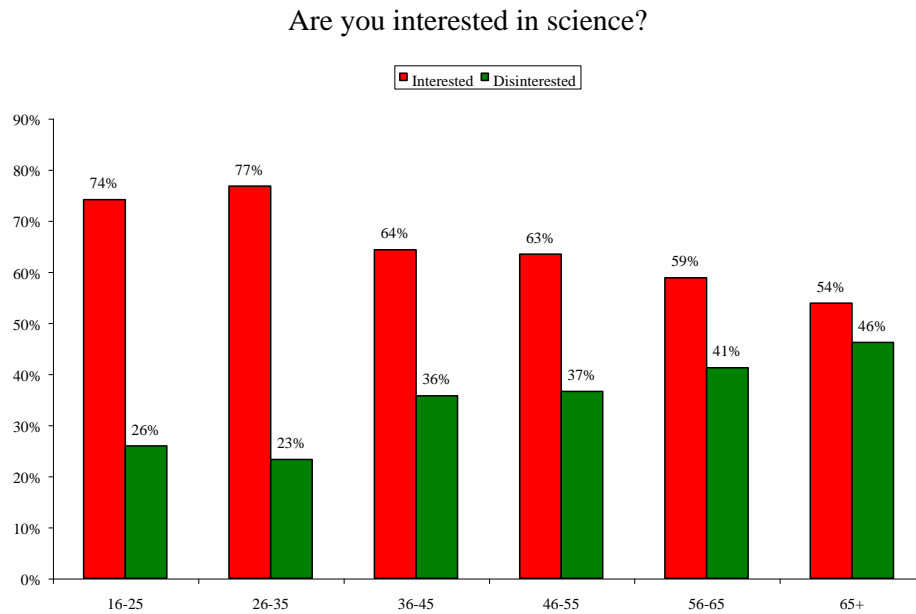
What gender are you?



Overall, women are slightly better represented in the sample (56% female). However, as can be seen above, there is substantial variation in this figure across the surveyed

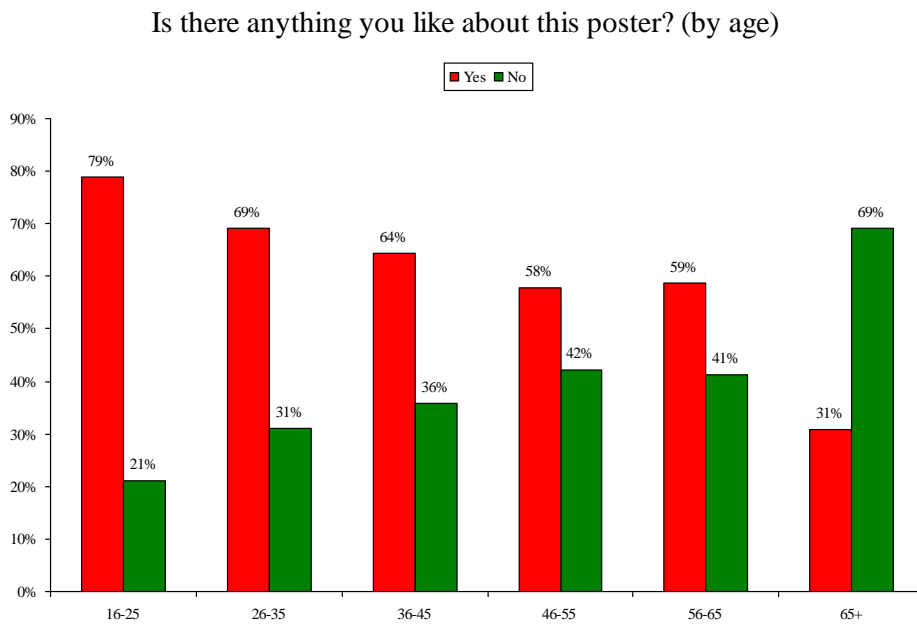
cities. Without the inclusion of Dublin the gender balance would be approximately equal.

Interest in Science

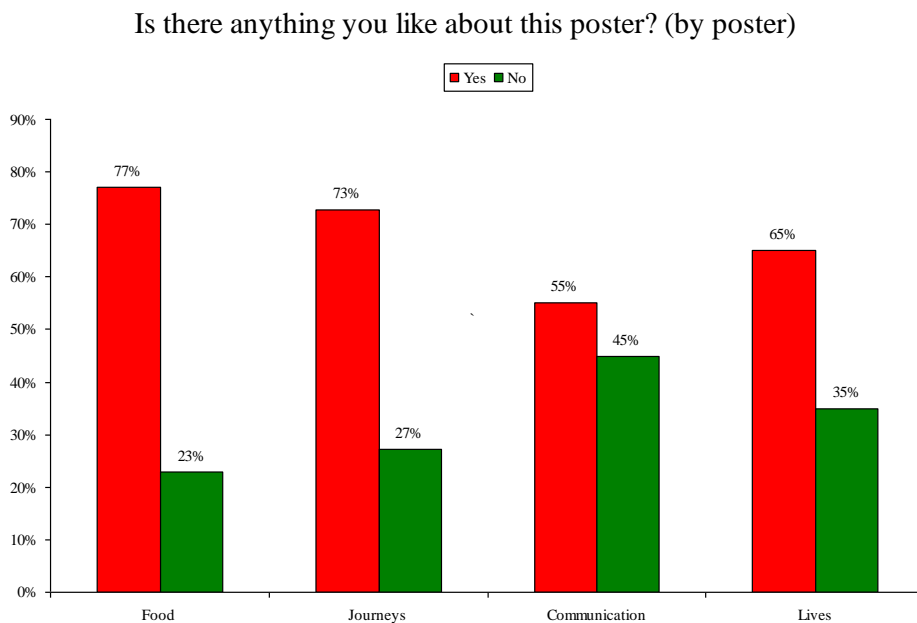


Of the whole sample, 70% declared that they were interested in science. This figure is in line with other survey work conducted in the UK and with eurobarometer. Women were generally less likely to declare an interest in science (52%) than were men (71%). Younger people were more like to express an interest in science, and interest seems to decline with age.

Approval of Posters

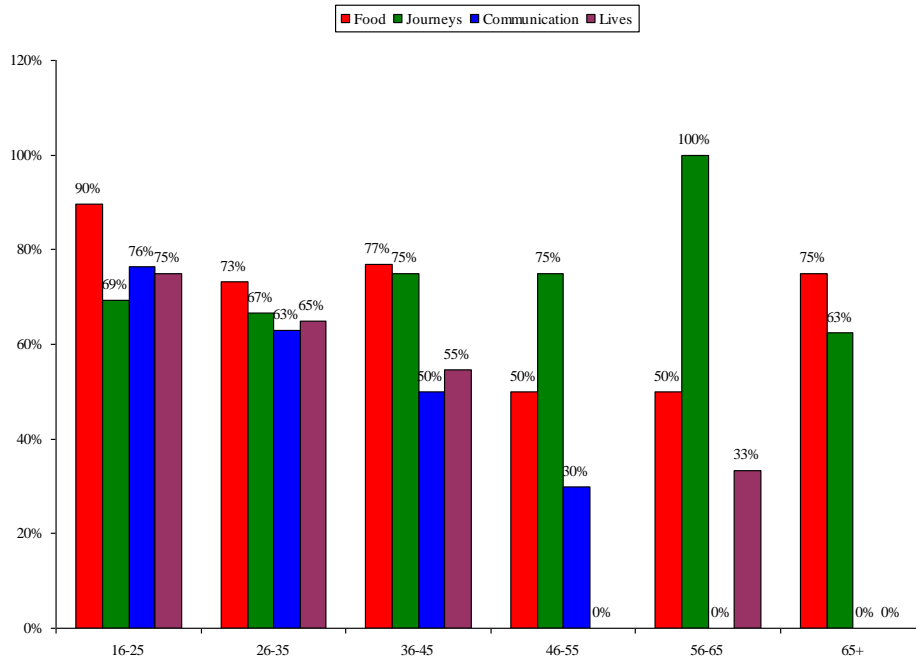


In response to the question "Is there anything you like about this poster?" some 68% of respondents said yes. Poster designs were most popular with the target audience, and approval drops away substantially with increasing age. The highest level of approval (79%) was voiced by the 16-25 year olds in the sample. Conversely, the lowest level of approval (31%) came from the over 65's. There was no significant difference in approval between genders.

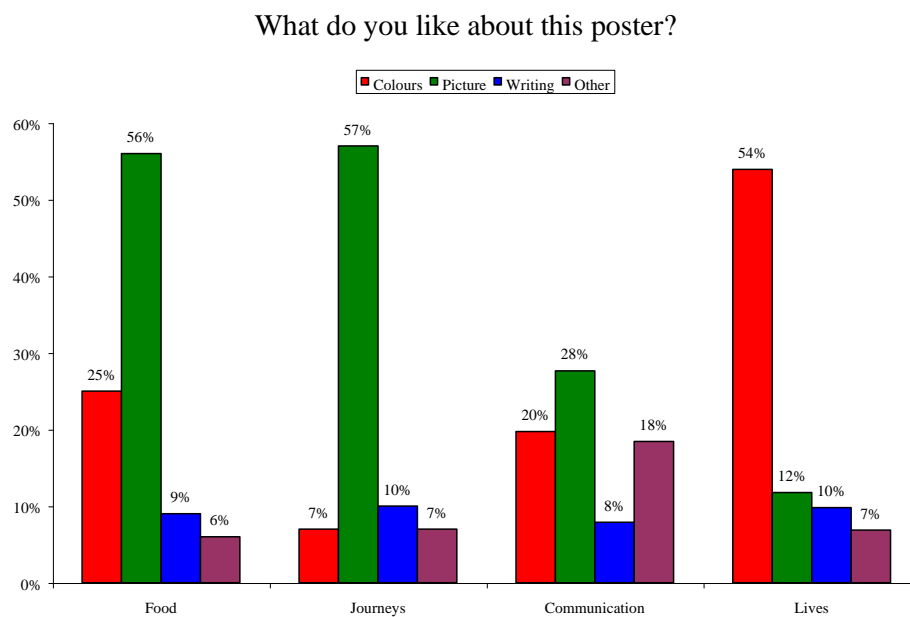


The most popular design was “*More Food or Better Food*” with 77% of respondents approving. The least popular was “*More Communication or Better Communication*”, with 55%. It is worth remembering at this point that the audience for the Communication poster was surveyed in London, the city with the oldest age profile among bus users encountered in this survey.

Is there anything you like about this poster?



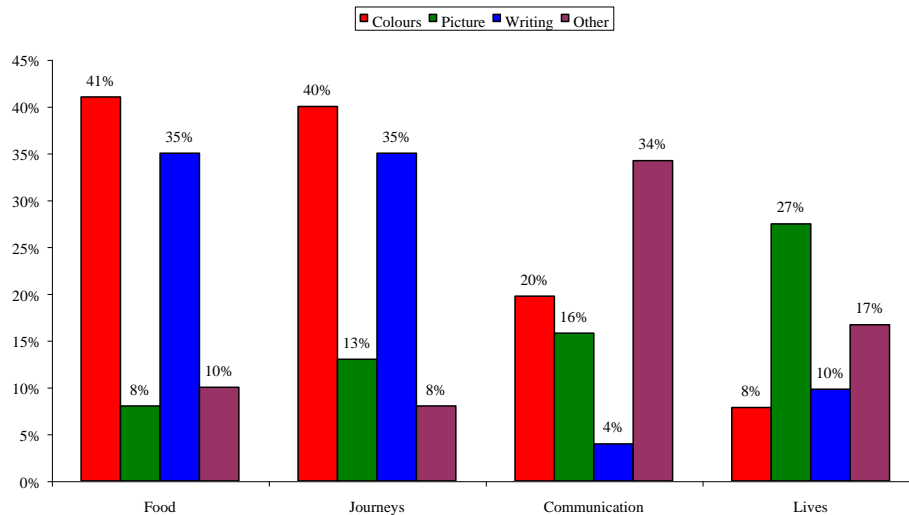
Popular Aspects of Posters



Reactions to particular posters designs showed a great deal of variance. Overall, 39% of respondents cited graphics and 27% cited colour palette as most appealing aspect of the poster. The graphics in both Food and Journeys proved particularly popular. The graphic for the Lives poster, was very much less popular, however the colour palette was generally well received. The communications poster drew the most mixed response, suggesting that no aspects of the poster were particularly liked by the audience. This interpretation is also supported by the much higher than usual number of responses in the “Other” category as respondents search for some positive aspect of the poster.

Unpopular Aspects of Posters

What do you dislike about this poster?

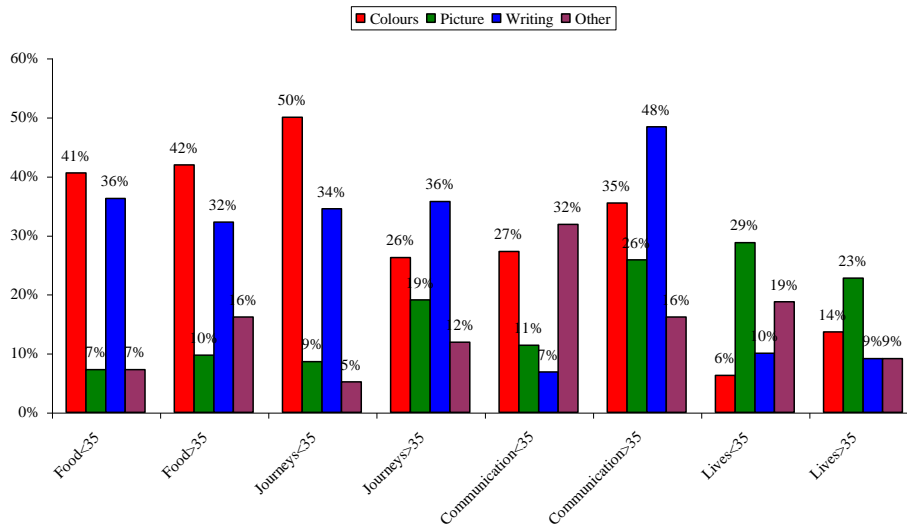


While the graphics of the Food and Journeys posters were generally very popular, the colour schemes used on these posters were not. Previous experience indicates that text is always one of the least popular aspects of poster design, especially with the target audience.

The Lives poster is unusual, in that its graphic proved to be very unpopular. It should be noted that the survey for this poster was conducted in Dublin, where sensitivities around reproductive technologies, and abortion in particular, are very high. There was a widespread misperception that the poster was campaigning on one side or the other of the abortion debate, and the use of foetuses in the graphic was frequently seen as being in bad taste. This reaction was not spotted in the pre testing stage of the project, when this design was tested with respondents from two catholic countries (Spain and Portugal). We conclude, therefore, that this reaction was unique to Ireland.

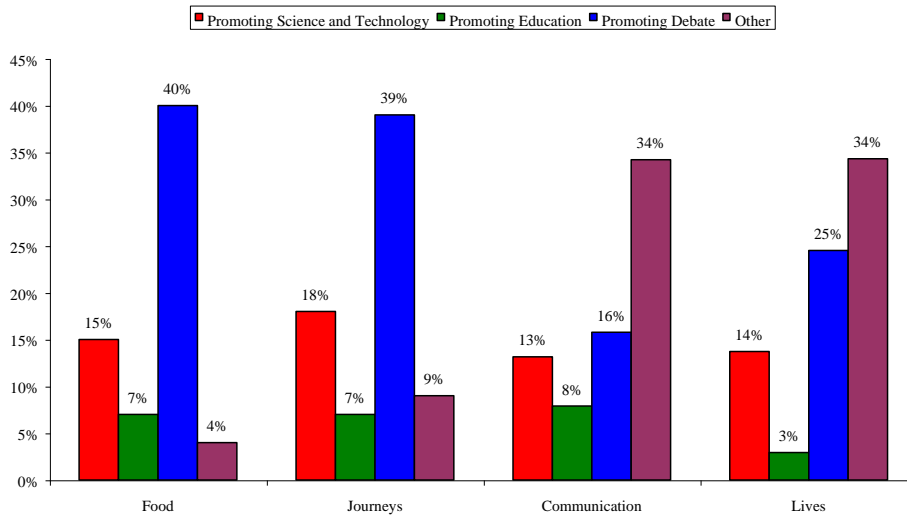
Just as there was no consensus on the popular aspects of the Communication poster, so there is little or none on the unpopular aspects. The very high number of responses in the “Other” category serves to highlight this confusion. Comparing reactions of those under the age of 35 with those of the over 35’s, the only real difference lies in the older respondents’ dislike of the graphic in the poster. Several negative comments were recorded during the survey in relation to the activity of the girls in the picture “They shouldn’t spend all day playing with computers” and in particular, their posture “they’ll all have bad backs when their older if they lounge about like that.”

What do you dislike about this poster? (over and under 35)



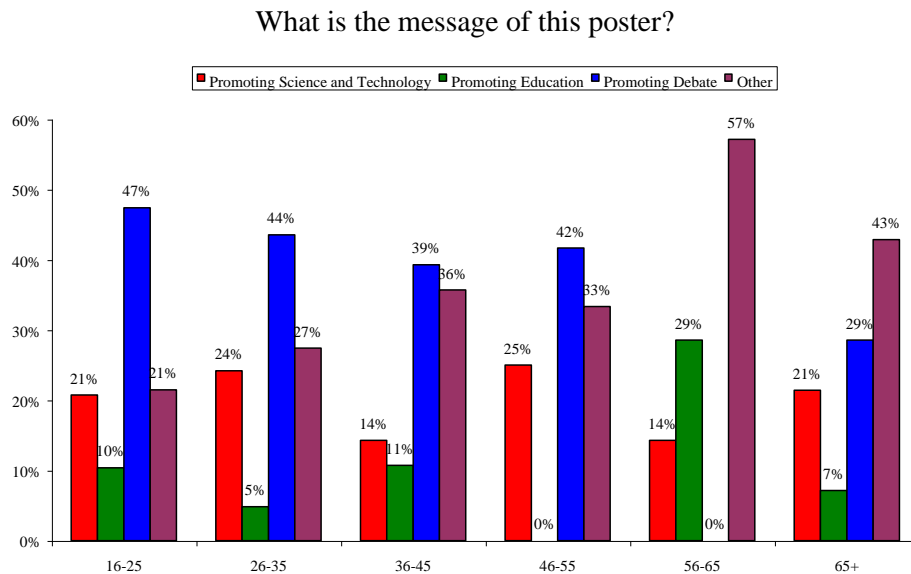
Interpretation of Posters

What is the message of this poster?



In all, 15% of respondents thought that the posters were promoting Science and Technology for their own sake, 6% thought they were promoting education and greater understanding of science and technology. Almost a third of the surveyed sample stated that they believed that the purpose of the poster was to promote debate about contemporary science and technology.

The Food and Journeys posters were the most successful in this respect. The high level of responses in the “Other” category for Communication reflects the ambivalent reception alluded to above, and also the fact that the sample in London was much older than elsewhere in the survey. Almost all of the responses in the “Other” category from the Dublin sample are references to abortion and the life vs choice debate.



Younger respondents were very much more likely to identify the promotion of debate as the key message of the poster (47% of under 26’s). Conversely, older respondents were much less likely to do so. At the same time, older respondents were increasingly likely to identify messages that could be coded in the “Other” category. This diversity of responses indicates a widespread confusion over the key message of the posters and indicates that the design of the posters has succeeded in targeting the particular needs of a young audience. Many of the older respondents assumed that the posters were, in fact, advertisements, although they were unsure exactly which products were being promoted.

SMS Responses

Each poster carried a telephone number to which bus users could send a text message in response to the poster. A total of 191 such messages were received. A breakdown of where messages were sent from is tabulated below.

<i>Country</i>	<i>Poster</i>	<i>No. Sites</i>	<i>No. Weeks</i>	<i>No. Messages</i>
Finland	<i>Communication</i>	600	2	4
Netherlands	<i>Communication</i>	4	1	~
Portugal	<i>Communication</i>	900	1	~
UK	<i>Communication</i>	300	4	13
Belgium	<i>Food</i>	425	4	11
Denmark	<i>Food</i>	303	2	24
Germany	<i>Food/Lives</i>	490	4	14
Spain	<i>Food</i>	100	1	~
France	<i>Journeys</i>	100	1	2
Luxembourg	<i>Journeys</i>	120	4	3
Sweden	<i>Journeys</i>	2325	1	8
Austria	<i>Lives</i>	400	4	~
Greece	<i>Lives</i>	150	2	51
Ireland	<i>Lives</i>	400	2	26
Italy	<i>Lives</i>	500	4	35
				191

Looking at which poster designs produced the greatest response it can be seen that “More journeys or better journeys” prompted 13 responses, “More communication or better communication” 17, “More food or better food” 49 and “More lives or better lives” 112.

There are probably several factors contributing to these results. The first of these is the scale of the campaign, both in terms of the number of sites where the poster is displayed and the duration of the campaign in that city. In five of the cities, the campaign ran during European Science and Technology Week itself. Two of those cities returned a total of ten SMS responses, while the others returned none at all. On the other hand, a four week campaign in 500 sites in Rome prompted 35 responses, while a two week campaign in 150 sites in Athens brought in 51 messages.

The two issues with the greatest social resonance (see previous audience research reports) yielded by far the greatest response. However, even these designs brought no responses at all from two of the cities in which they were exhibited. While SMS texting would seem to be an accessible and attractive mechanism for response among the target audience, there are profound differences in response rates in different parts of Europe, even while considering the same poster design.

Roughly 50% of all responses to each poster design were direct responses to the question posed on the posters. These include responses such as “Yes”, “No”, “More” and “Better”. Some of these responses were slightly more expanded, such as “I think we should have more”.

The other 50% gave more extended responses, which addressed underlying issues or gave arguments to support the senders' position. All of these responses show a very high level of engagement with the issues alluded to in the poster design.

- Personally I believe that better controlled food would be the first step into the right direction
- YES to local and appropriate farming technology. NO to global companies controlling our food and trade.
- Supposing my mother had chosen to abort me and my brother due to the fact we had Cystic fibrosis. I think the world would have lost out especially my girlfriend. Perhaps science will rid the world of cf before birth and that would be great.

Respondents were able to transcend the narrow choice offered by the question on the poster

- What is wrong with more and better food
- More lives AND better lives. compassion means both.
- One does not exclude the other, therefore I want more lives with better lives.

Many respondents took a more social/political view of the issues raised

- Technology is only as good as the person working it.

- Science has the answer but the question is who has the science. Ask the "capital" not us, they know.

Ultimately, there was no consensus of opinion on any subject at all. Rather, there was a diverse and vibrant expression of opinion from all parts of the spectrum:

- There is something in the air. A feeling that science is on the verge of cracking the secrets of mankind and our universe
- I think that science manipulates life and deteriorates the quality of life considerably. Cloning is already possible, that's not right.
- I personally choose better life. I like luxury.
- More lives instead of better lives for the few
- Science does not have the answer, but its aim is a better life.
- There is no better life, we know it's all a cheat

Summary of Key Points

- The target audience for the posters is heavily represented on buses across the European Union
- A large majority of the target audience has something positive to say about the posters (79%).
- Use of graphics across the whole poster set is by far their most attractive feature; non textual design elements together account for 66% of positive comments
- Opinions were varied as to what were the least attractive aspects of the posters, and there were no generic conclusions to this question. The Lives graphic drew most of the negative observations in Dublin, whereas in London broad ranges of criticisms were made of the Communication poster.
- The target audience were very much more likely to identify the promotion of debate about science and technology as the core message of the posters than were any other age group.
- There was an uneven distribution pattern of SMS responses, which does not seem to be related to the different poster designs. Broadly speaking the more extensive the reach of each campaign the greater the SMS response, but this is not always the case.
- The quality of the SMS responses in terms of substantive statements of opinion was very high, with 50% volunteering arguments or reasonings to support their views.

Conclusion

The use of internal bus posters would seem to be a very effective and economical way to reach the target audience in large numbers. The use of carefully researched and tested targeting methods, in both design and choice of content ensured that a very large proportion of the target audience identified the core message.

SMS texting as a mechanism for response is widely accessible to the target audience. Texting is a widespread and popular activity for the target audience and this project suggests this technology may have a role in further debate/issues driven outreach activities. The quality of text contributions was very high indeed. There was, however, a very uneven distribution of text responses across Europe, with several cities contributing no responses at all. While this is plainly due in part to the extent of the campaign across different countries, there is a need for further research to investigate how these differences arise and what can be done to boost response rates in those less responsive areas.

In general, the poster campaign was popular and found an audience that was agreeable, engaged and interested. Young people showed a willingness to consider the issues presented to them and to enter into a debate on those subjects.

We believe that the techniques we have adopted in this campaign can be used elsewhere to produce more cost effective high impact interventions in the future.