



Should My Advertising Stimulate an Emotional Response?

The generation of emotion is crucial for successful marketing. Many brands benefit from an association with positive emotions. However, the most successful brands tend to have a balanced set of associations and rational strengths should not be ignored.

Advertising that generates an emotional response has two benefits. Firstly, it can help the emotions transfer to the brand, shaping the brand perceptions. Secondly, it can help generate engagement and memorability. While advertising can generate negative emotions to help create drama, for most brand advertising this needs to ultimately result in a positive emotional takeout.

For the past 10 years some commentators have reported that neuroscience has found the emotional content of advertising to be more powerful than any rational information. The neuroscientist Damasio has been interpreted as saying that when it comes to decision-making, feelings and emotions always dominate cognition. While some have regarded this as a new paradigm in advertising, it is worth reflecting on what Damasio actually wrote: “I never wished to set emotion against reason...nor did I ever oppose emotion to cognition since I view emotion as delivering cognitive information.”¹

The reality is that a typical brand purchase decision for a consumer is trivial. They will take the minimum possible time to make their decision which, depending on the category, may be only one or two seconds. However, they will try to make the best possible choice, calling upon their memories of, and associations with, the brands being reviewed.

So what is the role of emotion in advertising?

Shaping Perceptions

Emotion is important in marketing, as was highlighted when Dove adopted the *Campaign for Real Beauty* theme in 2004. Prior to this time, the brand communicated largely rational benefits, such as its moisturizing properties and mildness. It mainly used testimonial-style advertising, but, with little sense of a distinctive, dynamic or compelling personality, its growth was limited. The *Campaign for Real Beauty* aimed to build the brand at an emotional level by conveying a more democratic, celebratory and iconic vision of beauty. In doing so, Dove struck a strong chord with women who were tired of trying to live up to the idealized and unachievable standards shown by other brands. Almost overnight, Dove changed from being subdued and passive into a highly-distinctive, opinionated and admired brand — with a resulting huge uplift in sales across its entire range.

Another good example of where a more emotionally-based campaign benefited the brand comes from the brand SunCom. The U.S. telecom industry was known for advertising the rational “value” benefits of their service: dependability, great price and special deals. SunCom made major changes

¹ Antonio Damasio, *Descartes' Error* (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1994.), xix.



to their three-year-old marketing campaign, moving away from rational benefits in order to communicate more about the emotional benefits of connection. SunCom was the first telecoms company to base its messaging on the emotions of being connected to the people who matter the most and on the feelings people get from talking to others whenever they want. Moving away from the rational campaign and focusing on the emotional benefits of the brand created stronger breakthrough potential, communication and persuasion. This led to stronger brand equity. The ads were more enjoyable and, by building on the strong branding created from the previous campaign, highly memorable. Additionally, communicating the emotional benefits of the brand in a credible way helped to increase the news value of the advertising. As a consequence, consideration of the service increased significantly. The re-launch enabled the emotional benefits of the brand to come through more clearly and the brand's equity grew.

However, emotion should not be pursued at the expense of all else. One of marketers' key objectives is to shape brand representations — to ensure that positive associations come to mind, and so bias consumers' judgements towards their brands. Neuroscience has found that information about objects is stored in three main networks:

- Knowledge: The concrete information associated with an object (shape, colors, material properties).
- Experience: The actions associated with the object (how we handle or use it, the object's function).
- Emotion: The value of the object along multiple dimensions (e.g., good/bad, attraction/disgust, satisfaction/frustration).

The brain needs input from all three to form a representation of an object or concept.

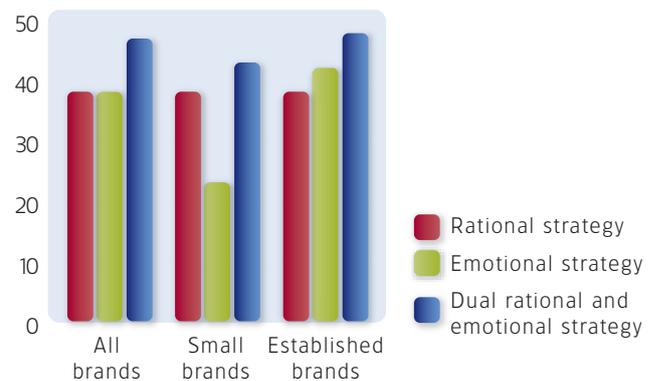
So the feelings evoked by the brand are an essential element of its associations, and highly likely to influence the chances of the brand being considered; but they are only one of three things that matter.

There is strong evidence for this balanced approach. As discussed in the Knowledge Point *How Should I Improve the Image of my Brand?*, data suggests that brands with imbalance between these three areas are weaker and have

less growth potential. Millward Brown's Link™ copy testing database confirms this need for balance. Ads are routinely classified on their intended strategy; whether it is emotional, rational, or a mixture of the two. Looking at the average sales effectiveness of ads in each category (defined as likelihood to observe a sales uplift of at least 0.5 percent of market share when the ad airs), the most successful ads are those which pursue a combined strategy of emotional and rational messages. This is true across ads for all types of brands, but it is worth noting that for established brands solely emotional ads outperform solely rational ads; and for small/new brands solely rational ads outperform solely emotional ads.

A balanced strategy is the most sales effective

Likelihood of sales effect*



*>0.5% market share uplift

Base: 330 ads

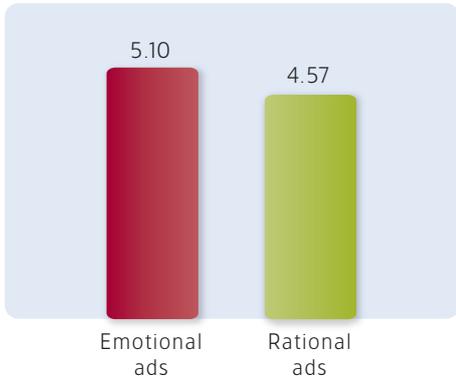
The Link With Engagement and Memorability

The other key role of emotion in advertising is to help generate engagement with the ad.

We pay more attention to emotionally-charged events, so we are more likely to get involved with emotional ads. The empirical evidence for this is very strong. The average involvement scores for TV ads in our global database clearly show that ads which pursue an emotional strategy are more involving to consumers than those with a rational strategy (those that pursue a combined approach fall in between).

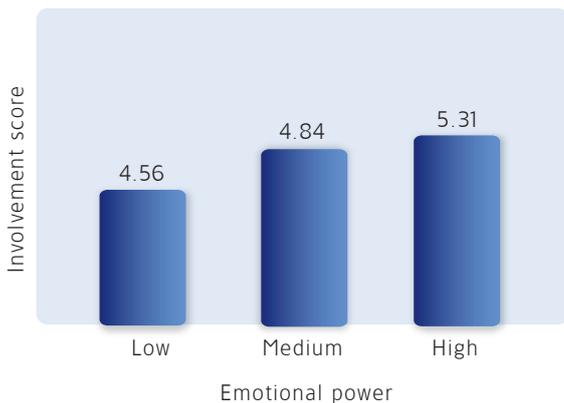


Emotional ads have greater consumer involvement than purely rational ads



Analysis of our Link™ database reveals that ads which generate a strong emotional response are rated as much more involving.

Ads which evoke stronger emotions generate greater involvement



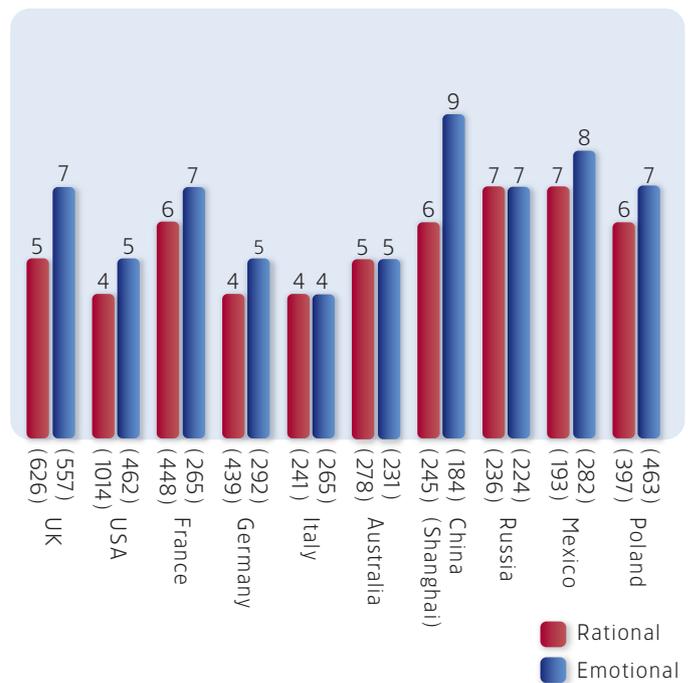
1856 U.S. English online ads, TV Link database

Sadly for advertisers, brands and advertising are not particularly important to people and so advertising is typically processed at a very shallow level. We usually watch TV to be entertained rather than to actively “learn” about brands, so the chance of remembering ads, or what they say about brands, is generally low. However, this is not to say that no processing of advertising takes place. An engaging commercial can evoke greater mental effort, and so boost its likelihood of being remembered. But the context of this is important: We are not in a deliberate learning mode, we want to be entertained, so advertising is largely processed as narrative. It is the narrative, rather than an explicit message about a product, that is likely to stick in the memory.

An important consequence of this greater engagement is that emotional ads are also more memorable. The more mental resources we devote to a stimulus, the more likely we are to remember it. In other words, if we are engaged with something, we are more likely to remember it than if we are uninvolved.

We have extensive evidence that emotional ads perform better on measures of advertising awareness. Looking at some of the key countries in our Link database, and dividing them into ads based on rational versus emotional strategies, shows that ads based on emotional strategies tend to be more memorable.

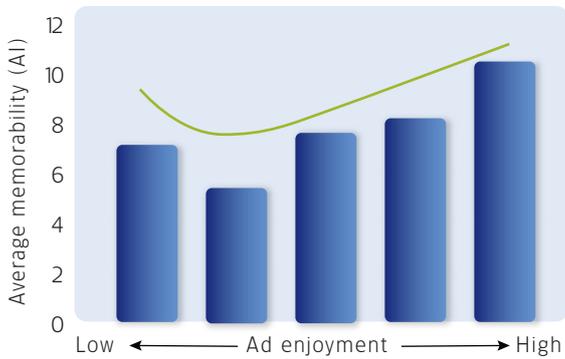
The Awareness Index tends to be higher for ads with an emotionally-based strategy



Enjoyment is a measure of the emotional response of consumers to an ad — it tells us whether consumers experienced positive or negative feelings during the ad. Sorting ads into five groups based on how much consumers said they enjoyed them, and plotting this against the average Awareness Index for the ads in each of the groups, reveals that the relationship between enjoyment and memorability is tick-shaped. The ads that evoke the least positive response (i.e., are disliked) are more memorable than those which fall into the middle ground, and those which elicit positive emotions become progressively more memorable.



Emotionally powerful ads are more memorable



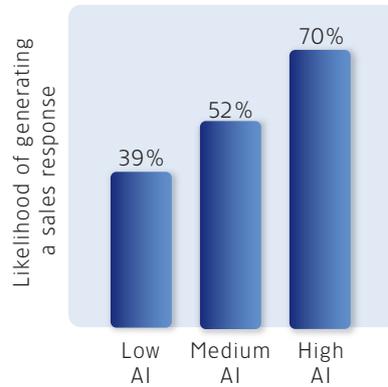
Source: 240 ads from UK Tracking database

This relationship between enjoyment and memorability was illustrated when an automotive brand introduced a new entrant to the mid-size SUV sector and supported this launch with a TV campaign. Two versions of the ad were produced, with the only difference being the soundtrack. Research showed soundtrack A, which was more enjoyable and involving than soundtrack B, was also likely to be more efficient in cutting through and converting media spend into branded memories. Furthermore, soundtrack A was the most differentiated ad for the brand to date. Soundtrack A also communicated a well-crafted message, and was more likely to create word of mouth and drive traffic to the brand’s Web site. The launch was successful, and Web search data showed exceptionally high levels of interest.

The Link with Sales

Given this three-way relationship between emotionally-charged advertising, engagement, and memorability, we would expect to see stronger sales effects for emotionally-charged advertising when it is more memorable. Our global ad databases support this hypothesis. Taking 232 ads classified as having an emotional strategy, the ads with a high AI are almost twice as likely to see a sales effect, compared to the ads with a low AI.

Ads with an emotionally based strategy are more likely to generate a sales effect if they have a high AI



Base – 232 ads with an emotional strategy

The Measurement of Emotions

It has been asserted that emotion is “unconscious” and so not available to conscious introspection which would mean that individuals are not capable of reporting the emotions they feel. It has been said that Damasio discovered that feelings and emotions are processed without the use of working memory and so must be processed automatically and implicitly. The consequence of this would be that the effect advertising has on consumers’ emotions and feelings would be largely unknown to them. The reality is that while psychologists often disagree on the exact definition of emotion, there is a wide consensus that a key component of it is subjective feelings — i.e., conscious experience. As Damasio wrote in *Descartes’ Error*: “I do not see emotions and feelings as the intangible and vaporous qualities that many presume them to be”² and “Feelings are neither intangible nor elusive.”³ There are transient emotions that do not reach consciousness and leave no trace (these are best assessed using neuroscience techniques, which can help assess a consumer’s emotional journey through an ad). But the consumer is able to describe the lasting emotions an ad leaves, and which may influence purchase decisions.

This can be simply demonstrated. In an ad for a NPower, a UK public utility provider, where two cute animated characters were used to represent gas and electricity. The story showed a woman bringing home the “gas” character to meet the “electricity” character that she already owned — thus emphasizing the brand’s offer of both gas and

² Antonio Damasio, *Descartes’ Error* (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1994.), 164.

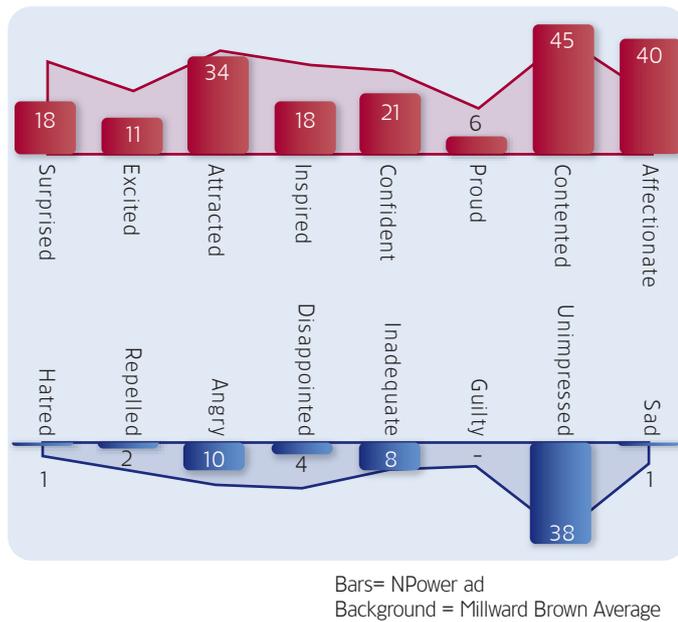
³ Antonio Damasio, *Descartes’ Error* (New York: G. P. Putnam, 1994), xxv.



electricity services. Some respondents (mostly men) were left unimpressed, but this was evoked at levels only slightly higher than average. For many, the ad prompted feelings of contentment and affection, with the latter in particular being evoked at much higher levels than usual. The ad achieved its aim of prompting warm emotions.

Affectionate, contented, and for some, unimpressed come through strongly

Emotional footprint



Negative Emotions

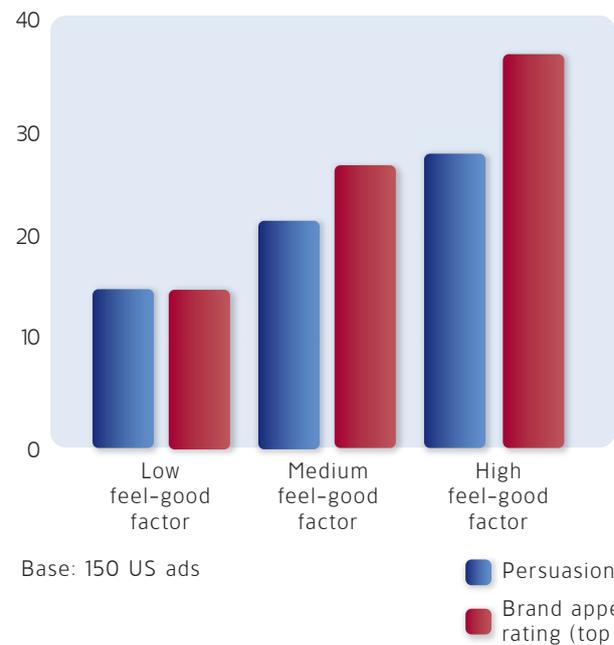
Sometimes it is necessary to engage consumers in an active-negative way. Government advertising for example, often utilizes this strategy to change consumer behavior (usually to stop it e.g., smoking, excessive drinking, dangerous driving).

Brand advertising, however, has to motivate consumers to act in an affirmative manner — either to buy the product or to drive a more positive opinion of the brand. Ads that evoke positive emotions tend to have a more positive effect on the brand. Therefore, it is important for a brand embarking on an active-negative strategy to carefully consider the tone, and balance active-negative engagement with some positive engagement. A more balanced tone of engagement can deliver a better response — encouraging consumers to buy the product and driving a more positive opinion of the brand. Evoking negative emotions may be a key part of such ads, in terms of creating drama and setting up problem

scenarios. But given the importance of positive emotional associations in brand success, it is vital to leave consumers with the positive high of the resolution, rather than an abiding negative emotional memory of the problem.

Our “feel-good factor” reflects the net positive emotions evoked by an ad. Splitting the ads in our database into three groups based on this measure — high, medium and low — shows there is a clear relationship between measures of motivation and the feel-good factor. Ads which evoke strong positive emotions are far more likely to do well on our measure of Persuasion, and far more likely to elicit greater brand appeal.

Ads which evoke positive emotions have more motivational power



The dangers of generating negative emotions are demonstrated by the following case study for an alcohol brand in the UK. The brand was looking for an impactful ad to help boost awareness after a relatively successful brand re-launch. Link was used to evaluate the finished film to check the communication was on strategy, but also to check that reaction to the chosen creative idea was on track. At a topline level, the new execution for the brand performed well with a good AI, in large part driven by an exceptionally high Involvement score. But this involvement was driven by particularly high levels of irritation (the third most-irritating ad in the database). Almost one in three people said that the

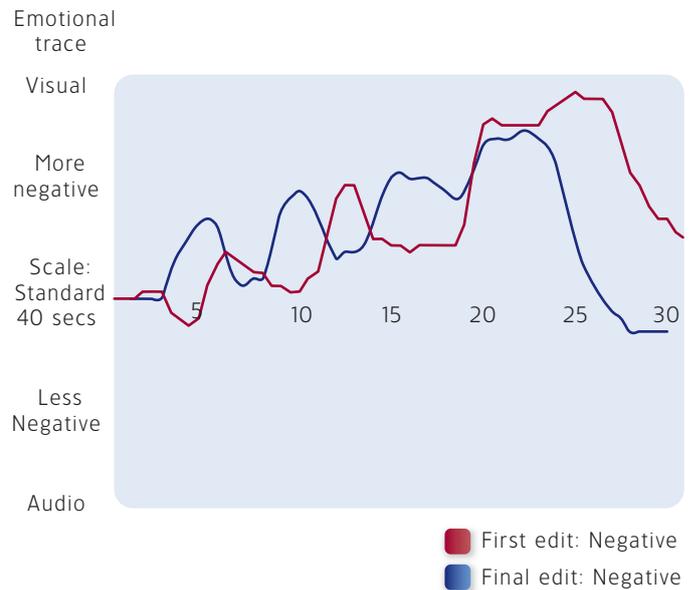


advert made the brand seem less appealing. We looked for a more positive reaction among the subgroups to help with possible targeting solutions, but found none. The music was a large element of the problem, driving both mild enjoyment and vehement anger. Since the music was integral to the ad, little could be done to resolve the problem at such a late stage. As the ad was likely to damage brand appeal and rile consumers of all types, we recommended that it should not be aired. However, the client made the decision to put the ad online via YouTube and the brand's Web site. Responses posted on YouTube were numerous and strongly negative. After a week, with no signs of the negative reactions abating, the ad was pulled.

The problem of ads that generate strong negative emotions can be resolved. An ad for Corsodyl — a brand of mouthwash — showed someone spitting blood while brushing, before finally a tooth fell out. It was so disturbing and unpleasant that the ad did not generate the desired persuasion and did little to build brand appeal. It even put some people off the brand. It was the most actively-negative, disturbing and unpleasant ad ever tested online in the UK and was in the top 1 percent for irritation. A second version of the ad was created which was intended to tone down some of the overtly negative engagement.

The emotional trace for the ad shows that while negative emotions (largely driven by a sense of being repelled) were off the scale in the first edit, they were far less dramatic in the final edit⁴. This allowed the ad to resolve itself with predominantly positive emotions.

Negative emotions less dramatic in final film



Knowledge Points are drawn from the Millward Brown Knowledge Bank, consisting of our databases of 80,000 brand reports and 40,000 ads, as well as 1,200 case studies, 900 conference papers and magazine articles, and 350 Learnings documents.

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⁴ Respondents are asked which emotion they feel most strongly during the ad, then move a mouse to indicate how the level of this emotion varies throughout the ad