The state of creative effectiveness

2025

zappi | VAYNERMEDIA

As an industry, we are endlessly striving to make our creative more effective, because creative is one of the key controllable factors that drives return on media spend. As a result, I'm often asked about the impact of various elements on advertising. How do celebrities affect creative effectiveness? What's the role of music? Or humor? How does AI change things? These are all great questions, and we set out to answer many of them in this report.

But ultimately, I have one takeaway from the analysis we've done: **The fundamentals of great advertising are very clear and are the same as they've always been,** although they may be achieved in different ways as the landscape changes.

A successful ad must:

1. Stand out and grab attention
2. Influence the way people think or feel about the brand in the short and long term
3. Make the brand come to mind more powerfully, more positively and more often in the moments that matter

Humor, celebrities, music, AI — they're all helpful tools. But great ads continue to be those that can do those three things — and do them coherently across media to build a strong brand collectively.

In this report, we'll give you some tools to accomplish this. We'll show the current state of creative, explore the impact of various advertising characteristics on effectiveness, dive into the strengths and weaknesses of different categories, and ultimately offer a number of tangible tips to help you make **your most effective creative**.

Kim Malcolm
Head of Advertising Research

Throughout this report, you will also see insights from VaynerMedia, led by Wanda Pogue. VaynerMedia is an integrated strategy, creative and media agency that puts social at the center of all of their work.

As Global Chief Strategy Officer of VaynerMedia, Wanda Pogue oversees strategy across the agency's offices in North America, Latin America, EMEA and Asia Pacific. Wanda has transformed the agency's strategic vision, developing a fresh, cohort-led approach that is suited to today's modern marketing landscape.

This approach builds on the momentum seen across social before, during and after creative runs, by constantly listening and monitoring, and then building on insights to inform future work, media buys, all communication strategies, through to the Super Bowl. Wanda's approach puts the consumer at the center and brands directly into the cultural zeitgeist.

Wanda Pogue
Chief Strategy Officer

Table of contents

- What is creative effectiveness and why does it matter?.....5
- How can creative effectiveness be measured?.....8
- Overview of creative effectiveness in the US.....12
- Spotlight on different advertising characteristics.....19
- Creative effectiveness by category.....47
- Our tips for creating great ads.....65

Why does creative effectiveness matter?

Paul Dyson, founder of Accelero consulting, conducted research in 2023 (updating his research from 2014) to explore the drivers of return on media spend.

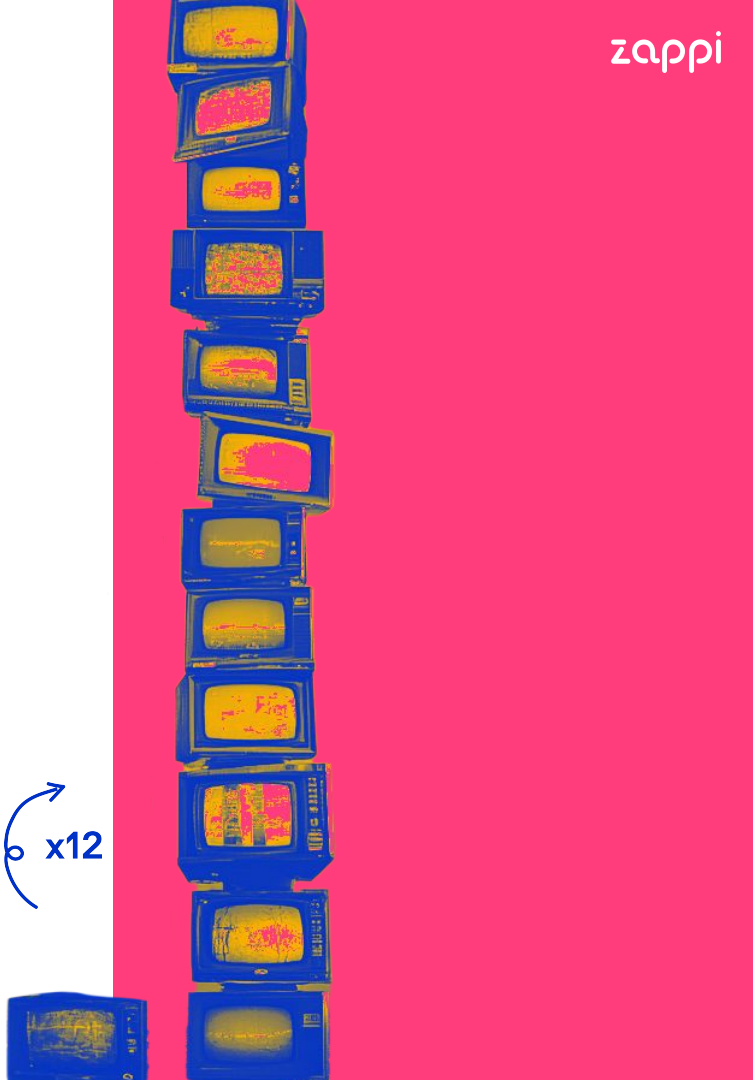
In his research he found that the profitability multiplier of creative quality is 12x.

This means that **better quality creative can result in 12 times the ROI** of an ad vs. poor quality creative.

And recent validation from Zappi found a 30% greater ROI from ads with strong creative effectiveness.

When an ad isn't creatively effective, brands have to invest significantly more in media for the same effect… if they're able to get those effects at all.

Therefore, it's worth ensuring your creative is effective.



VAYNERMEDIA zappi

Creative is a key variable of success.

Brands need to make creative content at scale that people will actually want to consume and engage with.

This gives brands more opportunities to connect with consumers and mitigates the risk of bad creative that doesn't convert and wastes paid media dollars.

What is creative effectiveness?

CREATIVE EFFECTIVENESS
The power of creative to drive short and long-term effects for the brand.

Successful advertising can't just be creative work. It must drive *outcomes* for the business, both in **short-term sales and long-term brand equity.**

Measuring creative effectiveness tells you whether your creativity has been harnessed for the brand to drive those short and long-term effects.

It's important to note that *creative effectiveness* refers to the **isolated power of the creative**. While media targeting and volume of spend obviously have a big role to play in overall advertising success, in this report we'll be measuring the impact of the creative in isolation.

This helps us understand if the creative itself will work successfully as a multiplier of your media spend.

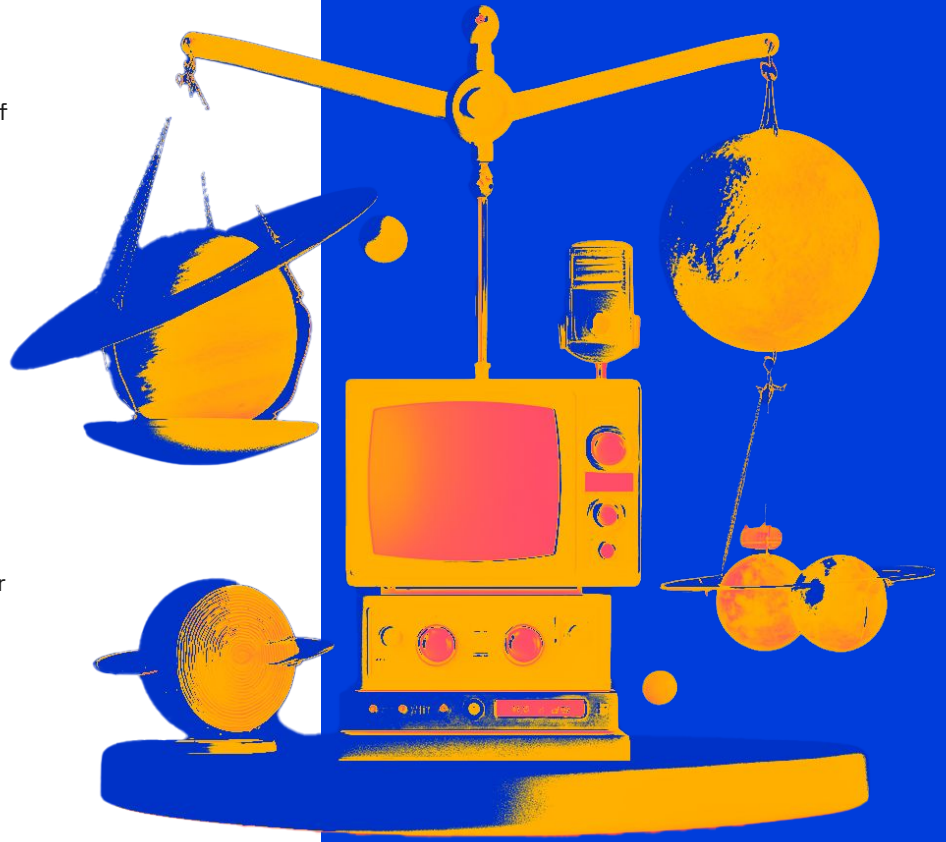
How to measure creative effectiveness

As any creative will tell you, it's very difficult to measure the effectiveness of creativity.

Many methods have emerged through the years to quantify creative effectiveness, including:

- **Traditional prompted closed questions**, such as an ad enjoyment rating scale.
- **Intuitive questions or tasks**, such as using pictures of facial expressions to ask about emotional responses or measuring how quickly people respond to a question, getting closer to system 1 (as opposed to system 2) thinking.
- **Inference**, such as comparing purchase intent before vs after exposure to the advertising or behavioral measures such as whether people watch the full ad.

All of these methods exist to help measure consumer response to creative.



No single approach gives the full picture

While each approach has its merits, none of them tell the full picture of creative effectiveness on their own.

- **Traditional prompted closed questions correlate highly with each other.** With these questions alone, it is difficult to spot the strengths and weaknesses in an ad. If someone likes the ad, they'll give it high scores across the board. If they dislike an ad, they'll score it negatively.
- **Fast thinking intuitive responses will tell you if the ad made anyone feel anything**, but not how well branded the ad is or whether the ad influenced people's predisposition towards the brand
- **Inference will help you understand if viewers were engaged enough to watch the ad** and if their purchase intent increased, but not anything about emotional response and most importantly, why viewers react the way they do.

Ultimately, you need a blend of each approach to fully understand the effectiveness of creative and quantify the impact for the short and long term.

How we measure creative effectiveness

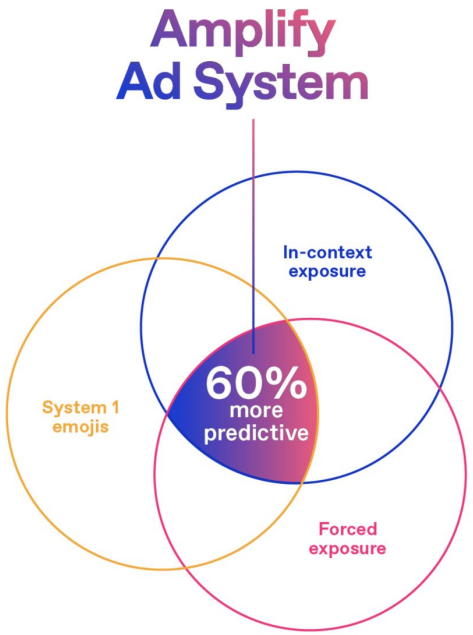
Developed in partnership with some of the world's biggest consumer brands, the Zappi Amplify Ad System blends the best thinking in advertising research to give a well-rounded and complete picture of creative effectiveness.

- **In-context exposure**: Measures real media behavior, ad skipping, brand recall and purchase impact.
- **Emojis**: Captures emotional response in an intuitive and globally relevant and representative way.
- **Forced exposure:** Assesses key ad KPIs, social risk and direct consumer feedback.

With this approach, we get a full picture of creative effectiveness. We can also understand an individual piece of creative's strengths and weaknesses to help diagnose issues and optimize it so it performs to its fullest potential.

In this report, we dig into the findings from over 4,000 US ads collected using this methodology to uncover what they can tell us about the state of creative effectiveness.

zappi



LEARN MORE

about Zappi Amplify

The metrics that matter

There's a lot that creative needs to accomplish to be successful. It needs to stand out, grab attention, take people on an emotional journey and ultimately influence the way they think or feel about that brand in the short and long term.

No single metric tells us whether all that has been accomplished. We have to look at a blend of metrics to tell the full story.

While there are many metrics we report on as part of the Zappi methodology, these are the ones we'll be highlighting in this report.

Important note: When we're looking at averages like we'll be doing in this report, small differences in numbers can make a big difference. While 3.8 vs. 3.9 in distinctiveness may not seem significant, if you're comparing the averages of many ads against each other, it does matter.

LEARN MORE

about Zappi Amplify

BRAND IMPACT

The potential of the creative to build the brand and drive sales into the future. A summary metric where 100 represents the highest-performing ads in the dataset, while 50 is considered average.

SALES IMPACT

The potential of the creative to drive short term sales. A summary metric where 100 represents the highest-performing ads in the dataset, while 50 is considered average.

OVERALL EMOTION

People are asked to select the one emotion they feel most about the ad. These emotions are then given a weight related to their power (love has the highest weight, then laughter, like, surprise. Net are the negative emotions. And lowest weight is to 'no emotion').

RELEVANCE

How relevant the ad is to respondents, scored on a five-point scale.

DISTINCTIVENESS

How different the ad is from other ads in the category, scored on a five-point scale.

UNAIDED BRAND RECALL

The percentage of people who spontaneously recall seeing the brand being advertised after seeing a reel of ads (*for which brands do you remember seeing ads?*)

PURCHASE UPLIFT

A percent change of purchase likelihood, for the tested brand, as a result of seeing the ad. People are asked which brand they are most likely to buy pre exposure to the ad. A 20% score on purchase uplift means 20% more people considered the brand after seeing the brand versus before.

Overview of creative effectiveness

We looked at all the US ads in our database to understand how effective advertising is as a whole.

The state of creative effectiveness

Whenever you analyze creative effectiveness for any individual ad, it's important to put those results in context by comparing them to other ads.

It's often useful to compare against a **country norm (average results for the overall country)** because every ad competes against every other ad for attention in the real world.

The numbers on this page are those averages.

There's not too much to learn from these numbers in isolation. Throughout the rest of the report, we'll add more color to put some of these numbers in context.

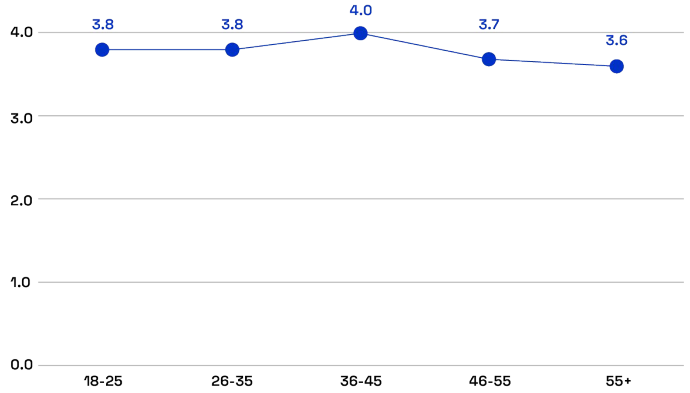
	US
Ad distinctiveness	3.8
Unaided brand recall	68%
Overall emotion	56
Purchase uplift	19%
Brand appeal	3.9
Relevance	3.6
Brand meets needs	4.0
Brand distinctiveness	3.7

Creative effectiveness by age

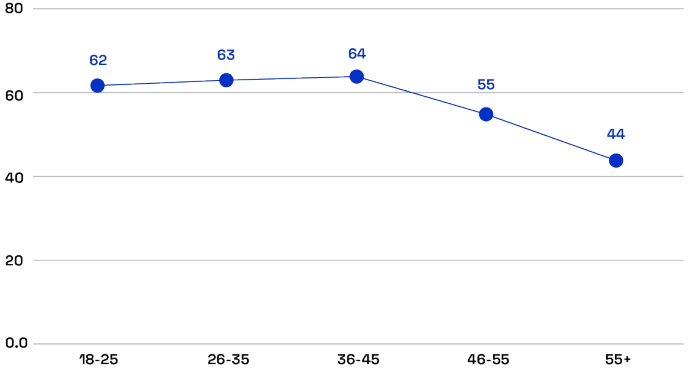
First, let's break down those numbers by age group. We see that **overall emotion and distinctiveness stay relatively stable from 18-45**.

But from age 46+, we see a sharp decline in ad distinctiveness (meaning the ads don't stand out and capture attention) and overall emotion (meaning they don't resonate as powerfully).

Distinctiveness by age



Overall emotion by age



The intentional targeting of younger audiences

It would be a mistake to conclude from this analysis that as consumers age, they become hardened and less emotionally moved by advertising. Rather, this is a clear indication of two problems:

1. **Brands are intentionally targeting younger generations.** Older generations are not connecting emotionally because brands are working hard to stay relevant to the youth, at the expense of staying relevant to older audiences.
2. Even when not *intentionally* targeting younger consumers, **advertisers are struggling to understand and connect with older generations**. Older generations are more rarely depicted in advertising and when they are, we often misrepresent them and misunderstand what matters to them to make them feel seen.

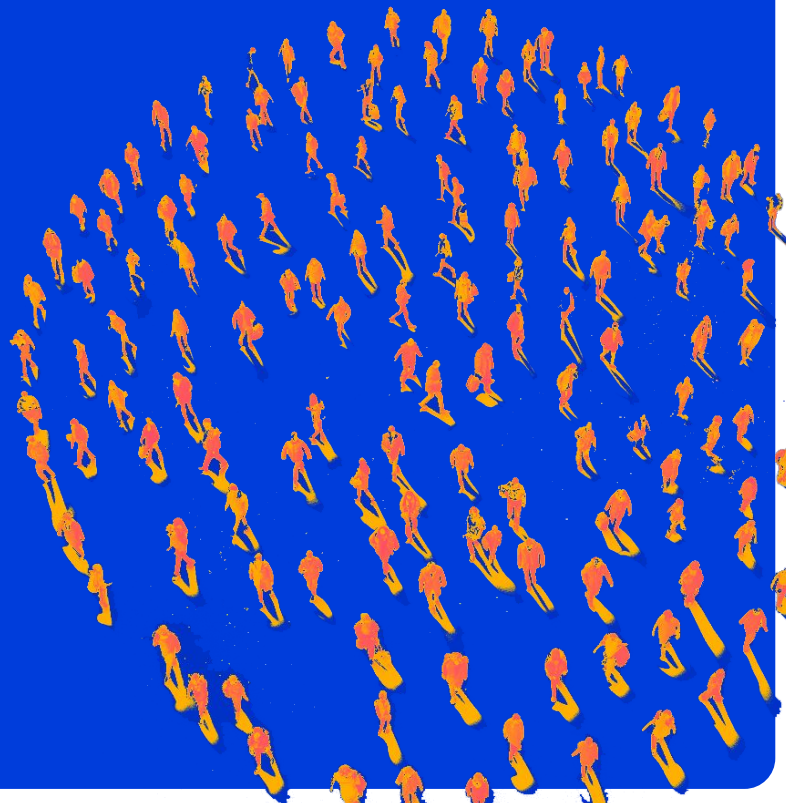
This is particularly problematic when we consider that these older audiences represent almost 45% of the population — and it is a hugely diverse group spanning decades!

It's worthwhile to do your consumer research to understand what matters to consumers above 46 years old. **How can you connect with them in your advertising?** How can you show them something that's truly relevant to their lives?

At VaynerMedia, we see cohorts as the key to capturing audience attention across generations.

Rather than serving one piece of creative to a mass audience, you can tap into the unique need states and preferences of different audience cohorts.

This allows for greater creative receptivity and media effectiveness.

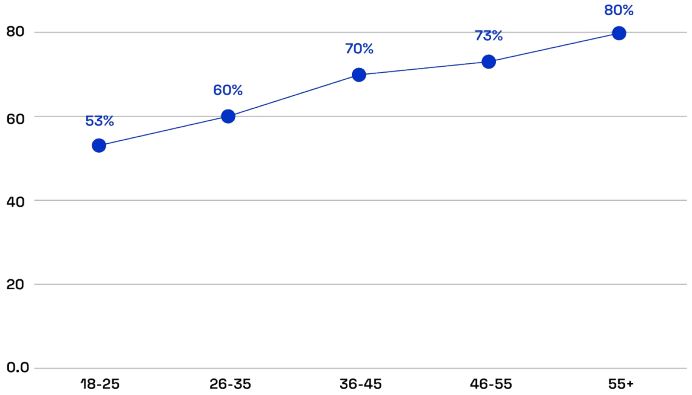


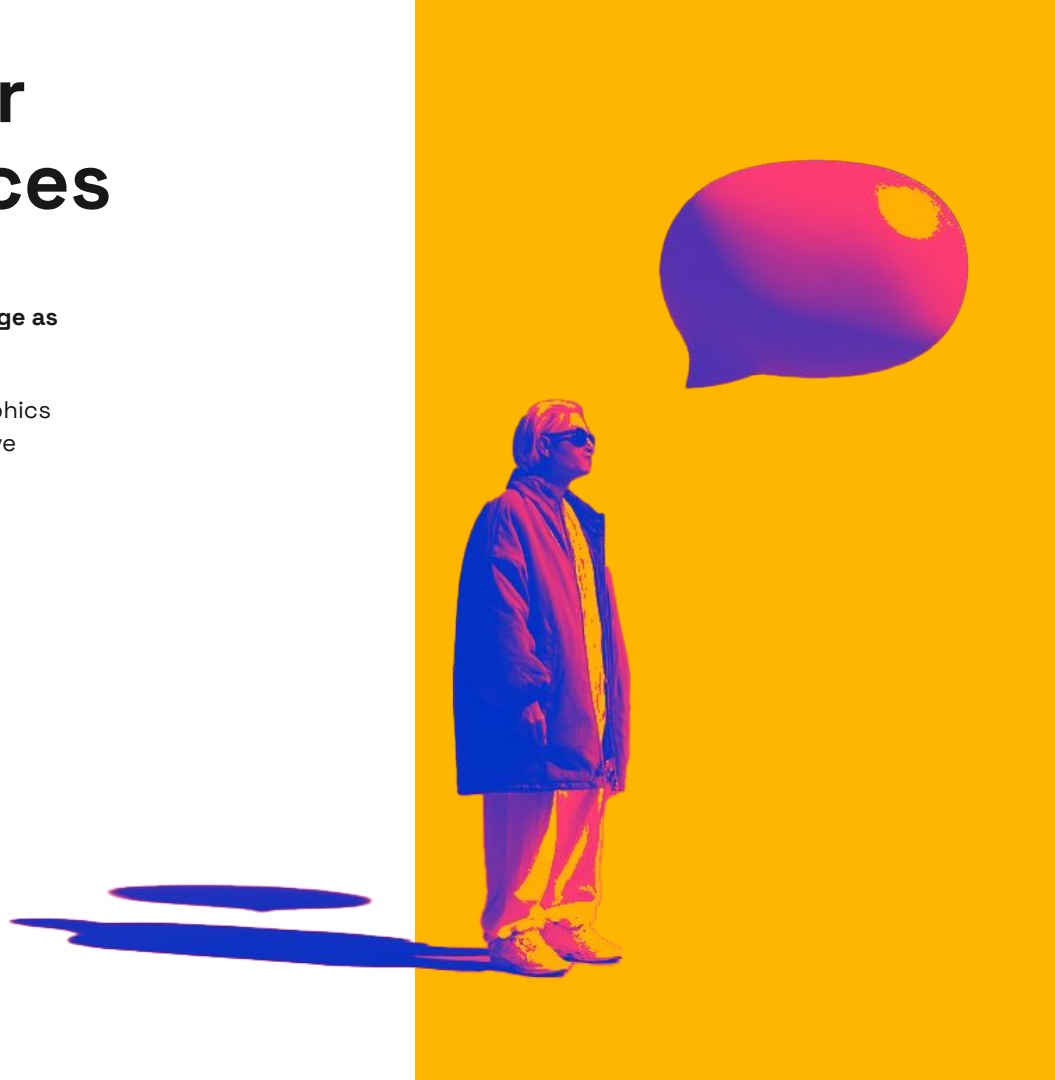
Brand recall is higher among older audiences

It's also worth noting that while distinctiveness and overall emotion decrease with age, **unaided brand recall actually *increases* on average as people get older.**

Having built up representations of brands over time, older demographics perhaps have more shortcuts to identify the brand via the distinctive assets, tone of voice, etc. in advertising.

Unaided brand recall by age





Creative effectiveness by gender

We also see differences in the way men and women respond to advertising in the US, albeit less marked than we saw with age.

On average, **men are a little more positive towards advertising** than women, finding it more distinctive and more relevant to them.

Again, our conclusion from this is not that men are simply more susceptible to advertising or more positive toward it overall, but rather that **brands are targeting their creative more towards men** or executing in such a way that the stories and execution resonate more with men.

Men are more likely to feel advertising is more relevant to them because they have been the default audience for many years. While times have changed and advertising has gotten more inclusive, we're still seeing the impact in the data.

One notable difference, however, is with brand recall: **Women have a higher overall brand recall than men**.

	Men	Women
Ad distinctiveness	3.8	3.7
Unaided brand recall	66%	70%
Relevance	3.7	3.5
Purchase uplift	20%	19%
Overall emotion	57	55
Love 😍	30%	27%

Spotlight on different advertising characteristics

Next, let's shine a light on individual elements of advertising to understand what's driving creative effectiveness.

zappi

Top likes & dislikes

What do audiences like most in advertising?
What do they dislike?

What audiences like & dislike about advertising

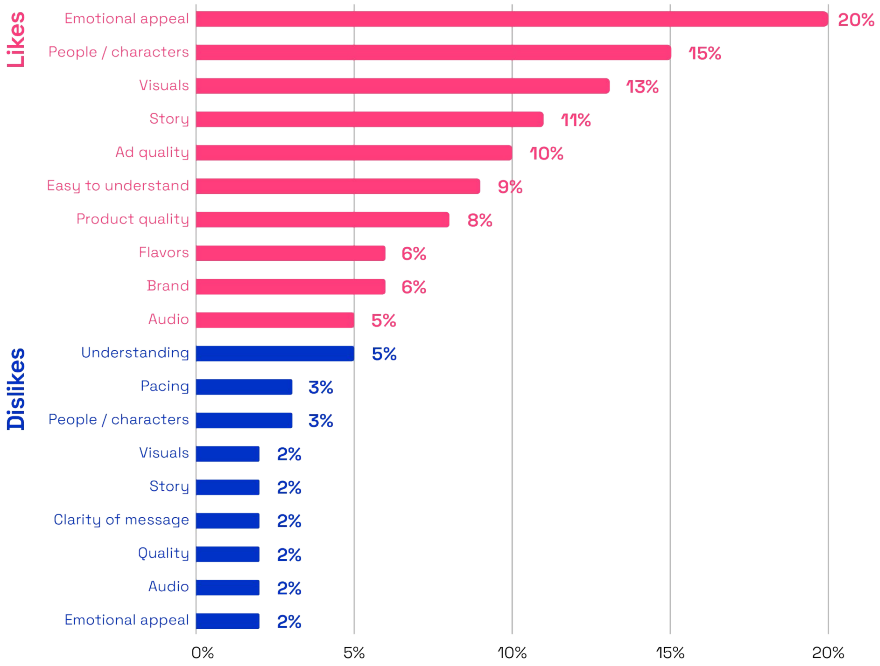
To kick off our spotlights we wanted to understand: What do people like and dislike about advertising in general? We analyzed **all the verbatim responses to all ads in our database** to uncover the most common likes and dislikes.

The important thing about this approach is that we haven't steered respondents toward these answers — we simply looked at what people spontaneously say they liked or disliked after seeing an ad.

Great news: **There's is a lot more to like about ads than dislike!**

We'll get into the top likes and dislikes in the following pages.

Most common advertising likes & dislikes



Graph shows percentages of each like/dislike out of total verbatim responses across all ads

VAYNERMEDIA zappi

If you want people to actually care about your ad, it has to be relevant. Full stop. It's not about selling — it's about storytelling that connects.

Real emotions, real value, real people.

-Gary Vaynerchuk

Now what: Making ads that resonate

Making an **emotional connection** is the biggest driver of advertising likes.

Emotional appeal is spontaneously mentioned by about 20% people across all ads, which means that people talk about ads being cheerful and fun, making them feel happy or joyful, having a positive vibe and/or being upbeat, refreshing, amusing, captivating or relaxing.

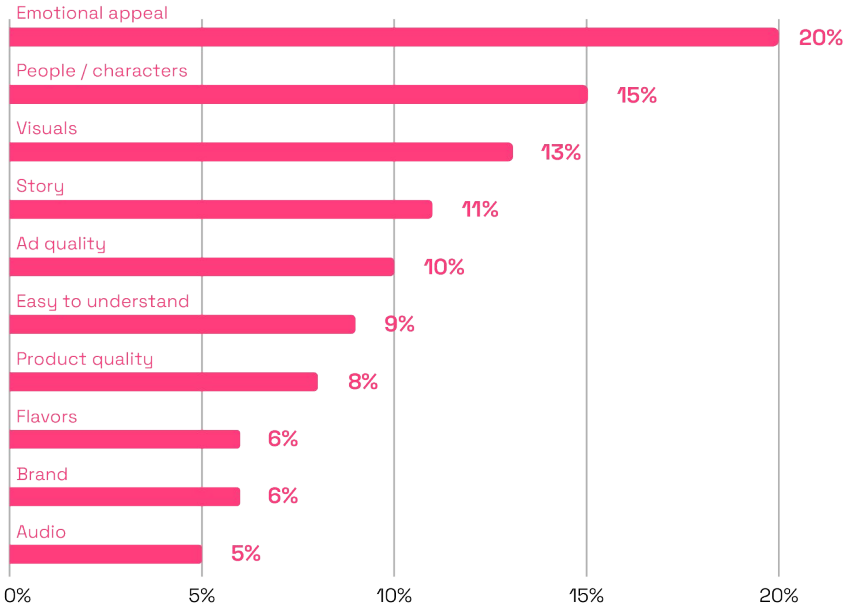
That means it's important to always consider the feel of the ad and the feeling you want to leave with people. And do your research to make sure that feeling is coming through.

Getting the **storylines** perfected is also important. That means getting the right **characters and people** (mentioned by about 15% of people across all ads), in the right place with the right plot (mentioned by 11% of people).

When you get the "who" and "what" right, they're mentioned as top likes. **But when you get them wrong, they're mentioned as top dislikes.**

zappi

Most common advertising likes



VAYNERMEDIA zappi

One way to ensure relevance is by keeping a pulse on culture and consumer attention.

Continuously mining for relevant platform trends and cultural signals on social that are impacting your brand's consumers allows you to stay agile and create content that resonates.

Now what: Making ads that resonate

If people don't "get" the ad, they don't like the ad. It's the single biggest driver of dislikes (5%) when people don't **understand**, but a strong driver of likes (9%) when they do.

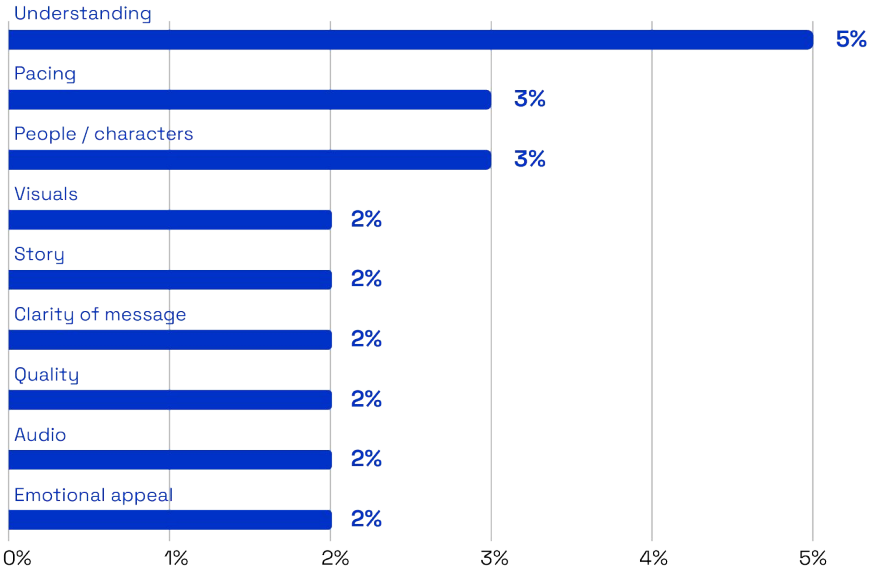
So don't lose people. Make sure they "get" it, or at least feel like they do. That doesn't mean you can't have a moment that not everyone gets (it may make those that love the ad love it even more!), but it means that no one should be left confused. During ad development, do your research to make sure the ad is actually understood.

Pacing of the ad is also essential. When you get it right, no one mentions it because it just feels right. But when you get it wrong, the ad feels too slow and unengaging — or too quick and people can't keep up. It's the second biggest driver of dislikes (3%).

Make your ad just the right length for the story you need to tell — and no longer.

zappi

Most common advertising dislikes



zappi

Brand recall

What is the state of brand recall in advertising today?

Overall, brand recall is an area of focus

Advertising exists to sell a product or brand (either in the short term, long term or both).

Which is why brand recall is a critically important metric to pay attention to.

You want your ad to be creative, stand out, convey key associations and drive emotion — but it's essentially a wasted effort if audiences don't connect all of that work to your brand. If people cannot remember seeing the brand being advertised, it will either do nothing to reinforce or build mental availability for the brand, or worse, it will strengthen a competitor.

The average brand recall in the US is 68% (and this is measured in a testing environment, we know it would be lower in the real world).

This means that right off the bat, **one third of media spend is being thrown away.**

Digging deeper, we see that there are **5% ads where not even half the people can recall** seeing the brand being advertised.

68%

Average brand recall*

**To calculate brand recall, we show the test ad in a reel of ads in the middle of some programming. After seeing this series of videos, people are asked which brands they remember being advertised. This approach is superior to traditional pre-testing approaches as it requires the ad and the brand it's advertising to be remembered in the context of clutter.*

But respondents are being asked to recall the brands after a short period of time. ***In the real world, brand recall would be even lower.***

Now what: Getting your branding right

To be effective, your creativity has to be harnessed for the brand.

There are many ways to ensure your brand is remembered:

- **Give your brand a role.** Your brand or product should play a key role in the story, so that the story can't be played back without mentioning the brand. It can be a hero in the story, the solution to a problem or a trigger for the action, etc. But if you removed the brand from the story entirely, it should no longer make sense.

- **Use distinctive brand assets (DBAs).** DBAs can help your brand play a role organically and allow for more creativity in the story, especially when you're advertising an intangible product. For example, your brand character can be the protagonist of the story and still cue your brand.

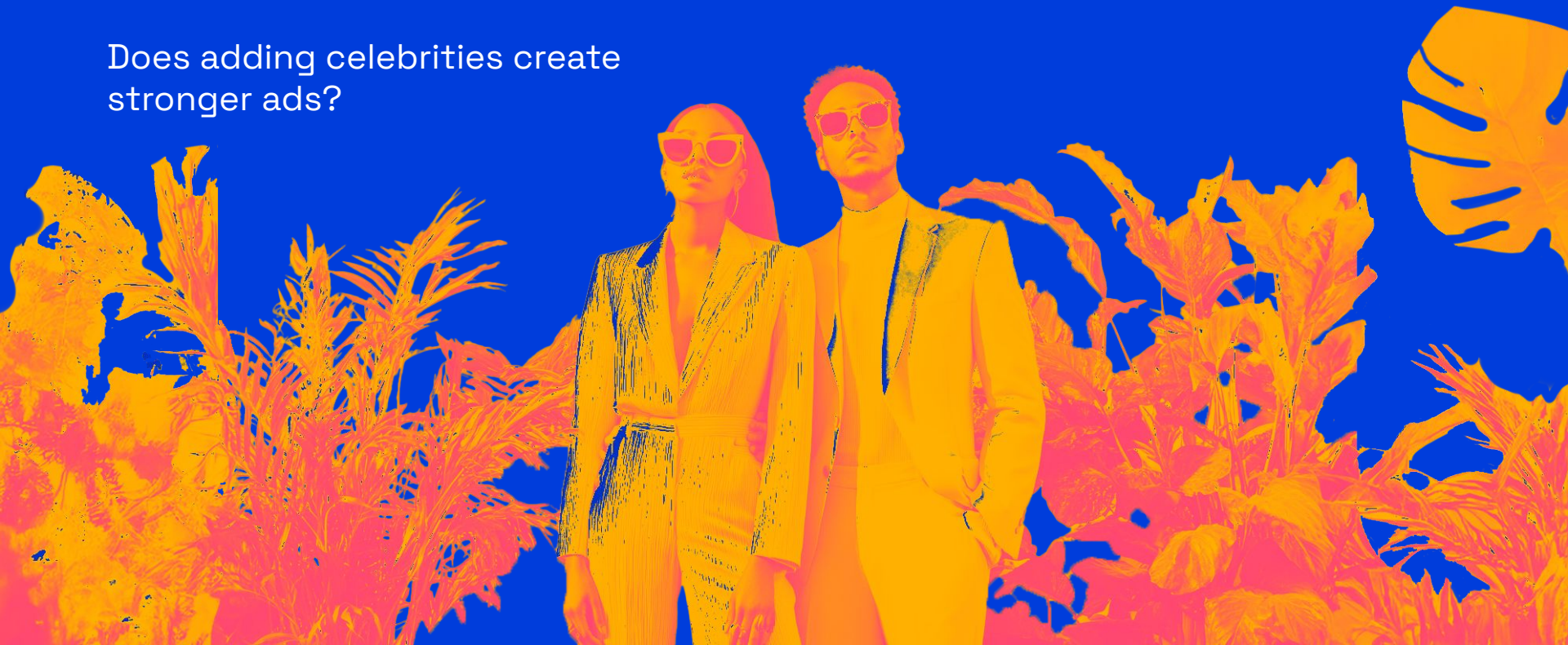
- **Create a consistent tone, feel or brand platform across campaigns.** If your ads always *feel* like your brand, they'll bring your brand to mind over time without needing your brand to play a huge role in the story.

We'll share more on each of these points (with examples) in the last section of this report.

zappi

Celebrities

Does adding celebrities create stronger ads?



Celebrities can help ads stand out, but alone they don't guarantee success

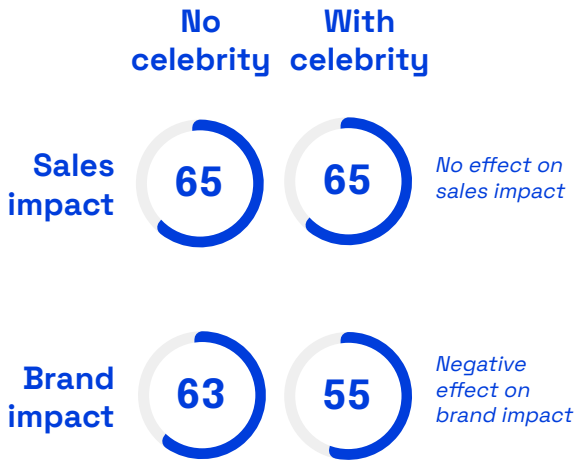
We see about 25% of ads contain celebrities. But perhaps not surprisingly, the presence of a celebrity is no guarantee of success. In fact, on average, ads with **celebrities have equal effectiveness (as measured by sales impact) to ads without.**

Why is this?

Celebrities can help an ad to stand out and be distinctive. They grab people's attention and they can help make an emotional connection. In fact, **ads without celebrities have an average distinctiveness score of 3.3, while ads with a celebrity have an average of 3.5.**

But distinctiveness alone doesn't make for an effective ad. Celebrities need to be relevant to the story and fit with the brand. The celebrity has to at least enhance the story in some way or play on what they are known for.

When a celebrity is there just for attention, they can end up overshadowing the brand. **We see that ads with celebrities have a lower brand impact than those without.**



Now what: Using celebrities effectively

Make sure your brand shines through along with the celebrity.

Celebrities aren't the same as brand characters like Tony the Tiger or Kevin the Carrot — they don't cue the brand in the same way. And celebrities can often advertise more than one brand, so that can lead to brand confusion if not handled carefully.

Choose your celebrity partnerships intentionally. **Make sure the narrative of the ad gives a relevant role to both your brand and the celebrity** and that the inclusion of the celebrity makes sense and adds to the story.

And of course, remember that a celebrity partnership can help your brand in other ways, like enhancing the talkability of the ad and promoting the ad or brand on social media. So there are other benefits for celebrity endorsements beyond creative effectiveness.

But celebrities can never be considered a shortcut to creative effectiveness.

Brands should consider influencers in place of traditional celebrity endorsements too.

Influencers are often closer to the consumer than A-list celebrities and can often have more authentic relationships with brands.

zappi

Emotions

How can you make your ads more emotionally engaging?
Which emotions should you target?

The state of emotions in advertising

Emotion is a critical component of great advertising (and we saw earlier it was the biggest driver of likes!). You may forget the specifics of an ad, but it's harder to forget how an ad made you feel.

We see that **ads that score within the top 25% on overall emotion are twice as likely on average to drive immediate sales** (with an average sales impact of 78 for ads in the top 25% of overall emotion vs. 41 for all others). But what emotions do people feel most?

For each US ad in the Zappi database, respondents are asked to pick the one dominant emotion the ad made them feel.

"Like" was selected for almost half of the responses (48%). Slightly more than a quarter of responses were for **"love"** (28%).

And **"laughter"** comes in at only 8%.

Thankfully some of the negative emotions like confusion, sadness, dislike and anger are only 0-3% of responses.

But the worst answer someone can give is "none." You never want your ad to make someone feel *nothing.* That means there was nothing to connect to emotionally in the ad. And while the percentage of ads that make people feel nothing is low at 6%, it's not something any brand should strive for.

	US average
Like 🙂	48%
Love 😍	28%
Laughter 😂	8%
Surprise 😮	3%
Confusion 😕	3%
Dislike ☹️	3%
Sad 😢	0%
Angry 😡	0%
None ❌	6%

Humor can help an ad stand out, but laughs alone don't make an ad effective

Let's take a closer look at humor. When we asked consumers what elements make them most likely to enjoy an ad, humor came out as the top-picked choice. Of course! We all like to laugh.

But just like we saw with celebrities, on average, **an ad being funny does not make a difference to sales impact in the US, nor to unaided brand recall.**

What humor does affect is **distinctiveness**. When we look at the top 20% of funny ads, we see that they are generally more distinctive — with a distinctiveness score of 3.8 for ads without humor vs. 3.9 for ads with humor.

This makes sense. **When the majority of ads aren't funny, making audiences laugh can help a brand stand out.**

But you still need to ensure the humor resonates and is used to help your brand's cause!

	Not funny	Funny (top 20%)
Sales impact	50	45
Distinctiveness	3.8	3.9
Unaided brand recall	3.7	3.7

Now what: Evoking the right emotions

Humor isn't the only successful approach to emotional resonance. You should strive to make people feel **any strong emotion** while watching your ad, so long as the ad resolves on a high note. That way, your brand is associated with that feeling.

We find even ads that use humor are more effective when people find them both funny and heartwarming (reflected as both "laughter" and "love" in our data).

That means not just making people laugh with generic slapstick comedy, but making them laugh through a slightly deeper connection. That may be through an observation about human nature they hadn't considered before, a fresh twist on something from their daily lives or even a story that relies on their love for your brand and their joy in seeing it as a hero.

There are many ways to go about it, but no matter your approach it's important to make an emotional connection that helps you be noticed and remembered.

zappi

Music

Does music increase creative effectiveness?

As music increases, emotion increases

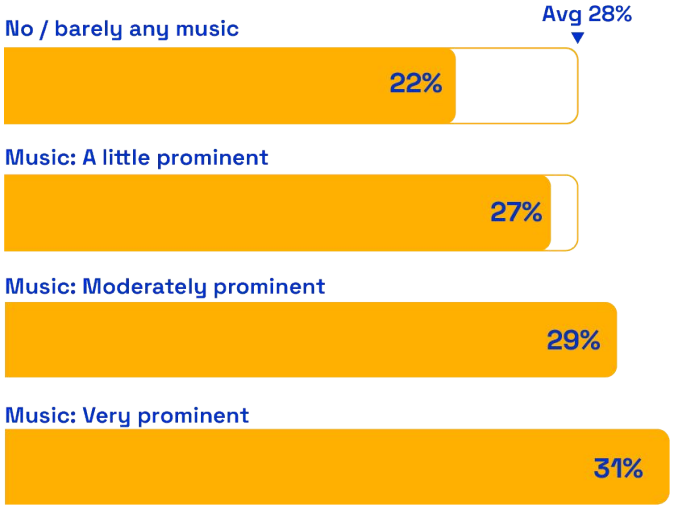
The majority (86%) of ads we've researched contain at least some amount of music.

And considering we've all seen very successful ads that don't use music at all (like Snickers' first "You're Not You When You're Hungry" ad with Betty White), it shouldn't be surprising that there is **no significant difference in overall effectiveness between ads that have music compared to those that don't.**

However, we found that music presence does have a significant impact on levels and type of emotion felt when watching an ad. Ads with at least some music within them saw an average overall emotion score of 56, while ads with no music at all scored 52 on average.

Most notably, **ads with more prominent music are more likely to score higher on "love" than those with less prominent music**. And as we said in the previous section, it's critical to make an emotional connection with audiences. Music can help build that connection by being a part of the emotional journey.

% 😍 by music presence and prominence:



Now what: Using music effectively

Music should be used purposefully — considered up front as part of the creative process rather than added as an afterthought.

It shouldn't detract from other elements in your ad or overshadow key associations you are looking to build or reinforce. It should add to the total experience of other visual and audio elements that make up your ad.

Think about how you can use music to:

- Set the mood and tone of your ad
- Help tell the story and punctuate the narrative
- Communicate product benefits
- Become a trigger for brand association

GET FULL REPORT

on music in advertising

AI

What do consumers think about AI & advertising?
What is the role for AI in the future of creative?

Consumers are mixed on their feelings toward AI in advertising

As part of the advertising industry, we likely all have our own opinions about the use of AI. But do audiences care about brands using AI to produce creative?

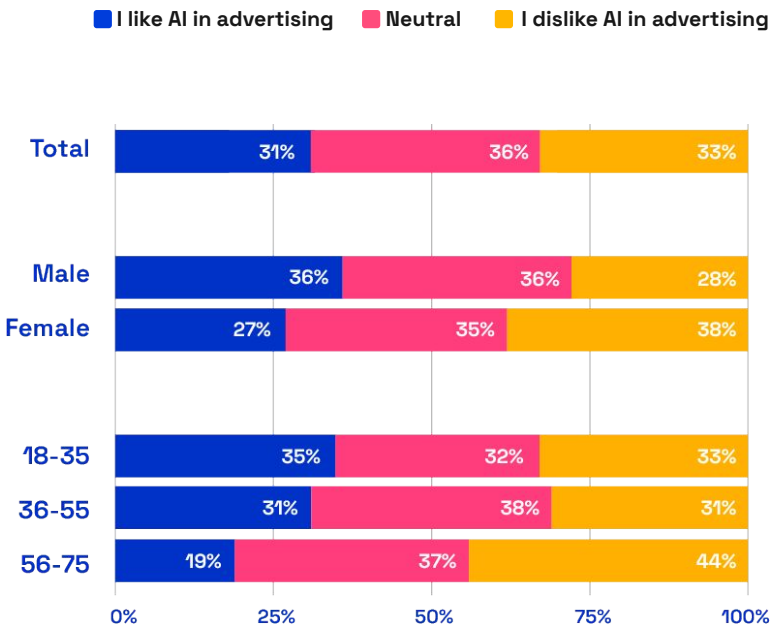
In our study of 1,000 US consumers, we saw some mixed reactions.

Overall, roughly a third of consumers say they **like the use of AI** in advertising, roughly a third say they're **neutral on the subject**, and a third say they **dislike it**.

There are some key differences among age and gender here. Men and younger consumers are more likely to like AI in advertising, while women and older consumers are more likely to dislike it.

It's fair to say this reflects attitudes and concerns towards AI as a whole, with older generations being more suspicious and fearful.

How do you feel about brands using AI to create advertising?



But AI doesn't necessarily change the way they view the brand

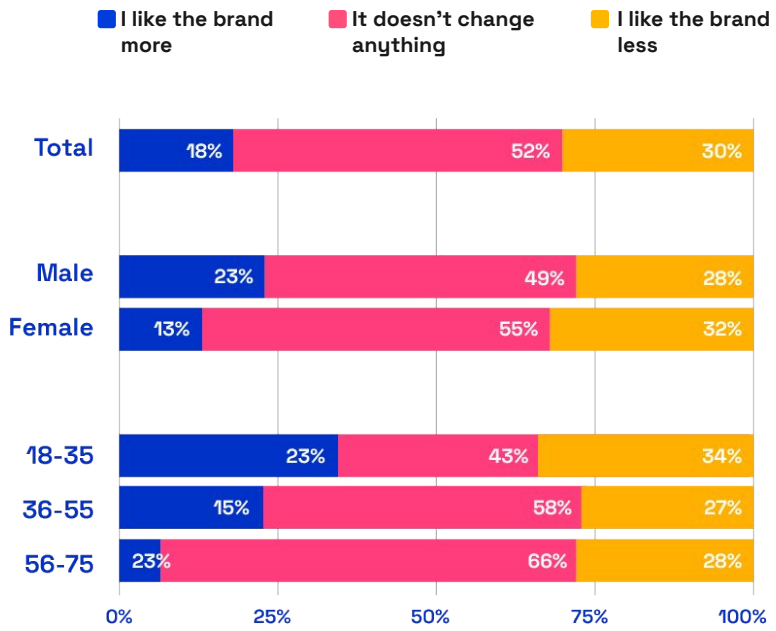
However, consumers' feelings on AI may not necessarily translate to their feelings toward the brands using it.

The majority (52%) of consumers say the use of AI in advertising doesn't change their perceptions of the brand. And that number is higher among older consumers — two-thirds of those aged 56-75 say it doesn't change their perception of a brand.

While only 18% overall say it makes them **like the brand more**, that number increases to nearly a quarter (23%) for consumers aged 18-35. Interestingly, that age group is also the group most likely to **like a brand less** with the use of AI (34%).

But notably, **30% overall do say it would make them like brand using AI less** — a percentage that holds relatively consistent across ages and genders.

Does knowing an ad was made using AI affect your perception of the brand?



Most people believe they can spot AI in advertising

Of course, AI can't negatively affect consumer opinions if they can't spot AI in the first place. Can audiences tell if an ad is created with AI? **A third believe they can, while 40% think they *might* be able to.**

Men are more likely to believe they can spot AI than women, and younger consumers are more likely to believe they can spot AI compared to older consumers.

That's what consumers believe about themselves, but is it true?

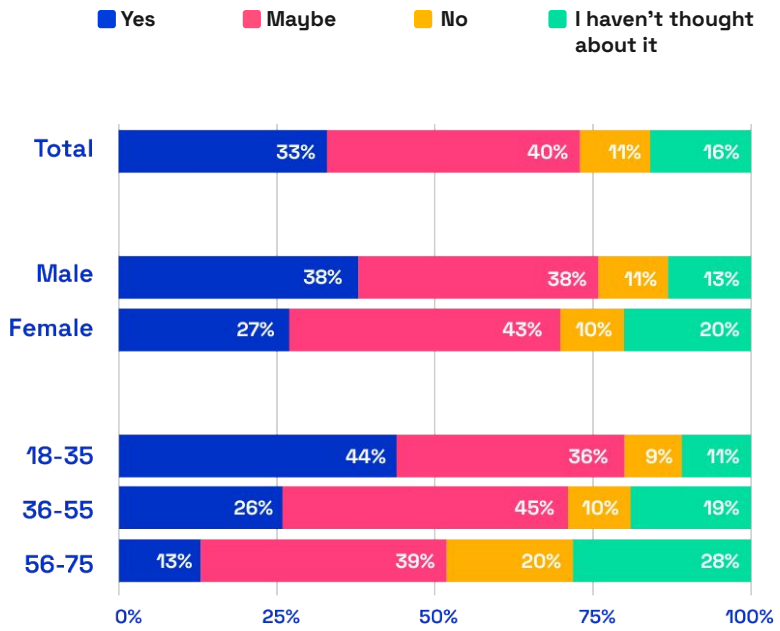
If an ad is AI-generated and done poorly (as in, it looks visually off or sounds like a robot wrote it), then consumers will likely be able to tell. And that has the potential to negatively impact brand perceptions.

But we saw in Puma's ad generated with AI agents in early 2025 that **audiences couldn't spot the AI** — as none of them called it out in our research of that ad. People tend to remember a rough story and a few key moments, not the details of every scene. So even if the ad had a few minor inaccuracies, they weren't enough to notice or remember.

Let's take a closer look at the Puma ad.

zappi

Can you tell when an ad is made with AI?



When done right, AI isn't noticeable and can create a solid ad

There are a lot of things AI executed well in Puma's ad:

- **The ad is grounded in an idea that resonated with people.** When people talk about the ad, 30% mention how emotive the message was for them: Uplifting, inspiring, empowering and motivational. The message is seen as highly relevant.
- **People recognize it's an ad for Puma** because the ad's structure gives a strong visual presence to the brand. The logo is featured on all of the clothing from the moment the mood changes to talk about how Puma does things differently — and people notice this.
- **People generally like the ad** and feel positive towards it. People like the message of empowerment/greatness and the diversity of athletes and sports being represented.

We heard things like:

> *I like the motivational speech and how I see different athletes from different sports pushing the limits to become great.*
>
> *I love how inclusive it is and how it validates people who aren't necessarily the best in their athletic pursuits.*
>
> *It carried a message I could relate to.*
>
> *Everything was very inspiring.*

Brand recall	72%	Norm 68%
Relevance	3.8	Norm 3.6
Enjoyment	4.0	Norm 3.9
Like 🙂	55%	Norm 48%

Now what: To use AI or not to use AI

Creatives may not love this message but it is the truth: **AI is here to stay.**

Consumers may have some hesitation around seeing AI in advertising. But at the end of the day, the outcome is all that matters to them — not the development process.

If the end result looks indistinguishable from a non-AI generated ad, tells a good story and makes them feel something, they will not care (or likely notice) that AI was used somewhere in the process.

And that's the main takeaway: A good ad must stand out and grab attention, influence the way people think or feel about the brand and make the brand come to mind more powerfully, more positively and more often in the moments that matter. **If you can use AI to help you accomplish that, why not?**

We never truly know how consumers will respond to an ad — AI generated or not. That Puma ad got some industry backlash, **but real consumers liked it.**

And that's all that matters.

In the future, AI in advertising will become a lot more common, so it's worth it to start experimenting now. Then don't forget to test the outcomes with real consumers. You may be surprised with what you find.

LEARN MORE

about Zappi Amplify

Now what: AI & human input

In our view, AI should be used in combination with humans to create the best results — at least for now.

The best ads are those that are grounded in a **real consumer insight** — something that matters to people and is somewhat surprising or that people haven't thought about in that way before. Something that is relevant to the brand.

This is where human creativity comes into play. Humans are best positioned to land on that idea that will resonate.

And once you have a great idea, **AI can be used to help bring that idea to life in various ways**. One of the most exciting applications of AI to us is using AI to create variations of executions to appear in different channels. For example, you can create a 30 or 60 second video ad (either with some help from AI or not) and then use AI to help turn that into executions for out-of-home, digital, etc. — using best practices from those channels.

But it will take a lot of training to get to that place. There is a lot of human input needed to train AI agents on your brand, your consumer and your channels. That's why we say it's important to start now. Invest in the technology you need, get your data in order and start experimenting.

You don't need to create a fully AI-generated ad like Puma. But you should start seeing what's possible today.

LEARN MORE

about Zappi Amplify

Creative effectiveness by category

We tend to see big differences in creative effectiveness across categories. Some are better at branding, some can produce more emotional stories, some lean more on humor.

Let’s dive into a few details about the strengths of some categories.

Introduction & caveats

In the following section, we'll take a look at how creative effectiveness varies across categories. We'll do this by looking at the averages for each metric for each category.

Keep in mind that these are the **averages of the category** — which means that many of the individual ads in those categories are *stronger* than the average and many are *weaker* than the average.

This exercise is meant help us understand the **general strengths and weaknesses of the whole category,** not individual brands within the category. This data can provide useful benchmarks for your individual ads and give a picture of how hard your advertising may need to work to overcome any common challenges for advertising within that category.

Additionally, we when we look at the emotion scores for each category, remember that in the Zappi Amplify methodology, for the overall emotion question, respondents are asked to select the one dominant emotion they felt while watching an ad.

Therefore, **no category can be stronger than average for all emotions**. If a category outperforms the average on "love" and "like," it will almost certainly underperform in "laughter." That tells us that the category tends to use love more than humor, not that the category necessarily *needs* to improve its use of humor. However, it may tell us that leveraging humor in that category is an opportunity to stand out.

Food

CPG food, salty and sweet snacks & restaurants

CPG food

The CPG food category has a number of strengths overall vs. US advertising as a whole.

First, it's **one of the highest scoring categories in laughter**, meaning it successfully leverages humor more than other categories. It also does well in distinctiveness, which is likely due in part to its use of humor. Humor is underused in advertising overall so making people laugh can help your ad stand out.

The category also has a **strong purchase uplift**, which is very important for the small, repeatable purchases you often find in food categories like snacks and candies. You have to stay in consumers' consideration set so when they're in the position to buy, your brand is top of mind.

Unfortunately it is a bit **weaker on brand recall**, which means that the category isn't as strong at cueing the brand.

	US food	US average
Distinctiveness	3.9	3.8
Unaided brand recall	66%	68%
Relevance	3.6	3.6
Purchase uplift	29%	19%
Overall emotion	57	56
Love 😍	28%	28%
Like 🙂	45%	48%
Laughter 😂	11%	8%

WHAT TO FOCUS ON

Get your branding right across each ad. Give your brand a clear role in the story and work to develop consistency in your communications platform and tone of voice. Make intentional and repeated use of DBAs. And if you don't have any DBAs, now is the time to establish them. There's also an opportunity to stand out with ads that evoke more of a feeling of love.

Salty snacks vs. sweet snacks

Diving a little deeper into the food category, let's look at salty snacks (like chips, crackers and pretzels) vs. sweet snacks (like chocolate, candy and packaged pastries).

We see two big differences between these categories. First, salty snacks has one of the strongest **brand recall** scores in this analysis, while sweet snacks has one of the lowest.

Second, **salty snacks has one of the highest laughter scores** while **sweet snacks have one of the highest love scores**.

Sweet treats are often associated with indulgence, holidays and special occasions — so that love score certainly makes sense.

And we can think of countless examples of hilarious salty snack ads, so that's no surprise either!

WHAT TO FOCUS ON

Sweet snack brands must focus on improving their brand recall. Don't let your distinctive, emotionally engaging ads go to waste with less than average branding. Salty snack brands are doing well, but may want to consider how to tap into deeper emotions every once in a while.

	US salty snacks	US sweet snacks	US average
Distinctiveness	3.9	4.0	3.8
Unaided brand recall	71%	63%	68%
Relevance	3.5	3.7	3.6
Purchase uplift	20%	20%	19%
Overall emotion	53	64	56
Love 😍	24%	36%	28%
Like 🙂	42%	43%	48%
Laughter 😂	17%	9%	8%

Restaurants

As a category, restaurants beat the average in emotional connection, with above average scores on relevance, overall emotion and love specifically.

Positively, this emotional connection also benefits the brand with strong brand recall. This is likely due to the decades restaurant brands have spent building their distinctive brand assets (think McDonald's golden arches, KFC's Colonel Sanders, Starbucks' green color and distinctive cups, etc.)

They may not have the most distinctive ads, on average, or the funniest, but they produce ads that make people feel a good mix of love and like, that are relevant to the audience, and importantly, make them remember the brand.

	US restaurants	US average
Distinctiveness	3.7	3.8
Unaided brand recall	70%	68%
Relevance	3.7	3.6
Purchase uplift	20%	19%
Overall emotion	58	56
Love 😍	32%	28%
Like 🙂	49%	48%
Laughter 😂	4%	8%

WHAT TO FOCUS ON

Keep focusing on getting your branding right. 70% brand recall is better than the average but there is still room for improvement! Standing out from the crowd with distinctiveness is another key area to focus on. Additionally, there are a lot of similarities in restaurant ads, so there's an opportunity to break this mold and stand out (see an example from Chipotle later in this report).

zappi

Beverages

Alcoholic &
non-alcoholic
beverages

Alcoholic beverages

The alcohol category does a good job of creating distinctive ads that make people feel something, primarily laughter. In fact, it's **one of strongest categories in laughter and overall emotion**.

But its key strength is in **purchase uplift** (27% vs. 19% average). More than most categories included in this analysis, alcohol does a great job of making people more likely to consider their brands as a result of their advertising.

This is important for a category with so many brands and subcategories — ensuring your brand comes to mind positively and enters/remains in the consideration set is critical.

It does struggle a bit with brand recall, meaning that not all of its creativity is harnessed for the brands being advertised.

	US alcohol	US average
Distinctiveness	3.9	3.8
Unaided brand recall	66%	68%
Relevance	3.7	3.6
Purchase uplift	27%	19%
Overall emotion	59	56
Love 😍	27%	28%
Like 🙂	47%	48%
Laughter 😂	12%	8%

WHAT TO FOCUS ON

Continue to create distinctive ads and keep leveraging humor when it makes sense. But don't be afraid to lean more into love as a way to stand out. Most importantly, focus on making sure your brand shines through in every one of your ads. Make sure it's consistent across campaigns and that each ad gives your brand a role. If you have DBAs, use as many as you can in a consistent way over time. If you don't have any DBAs, now is the time to start establishing them.

Non-alcoholic beverages

Non-alcoholic beverages (like carbonated soft drinks, teas, waters and juices) sit in the middle of the pack — **achieving roughly average scores** and not outperforming the average on any key metric.

It matches the average in distinctiveness, brand recall, like and laughter, and underperforms slightly in relevance, purchase uplift and overall emotion.

That being said, **this category has a ton of very strong ads**. Some brands have been creating great ads for decades, while others have both excelled and struggled over time. And there are many new entrants to the category, some of which are struggling to find their stride while others are breaking all the category codes and successfully gaining attention from the big players.

It's a category with a lot of good ads and a lot of weak ads, resulting in average scores across the board.

	US beverages	US average
Distinctiveness	3.8	3.8
Unaided brand recall	68%	68%
Relevance	3.5	3.6
Purchase uplift	17%	19%
Overall emotion	53	56
Love 😍	26%	28%
Like 🙂	48%	48%
Laughter 😂	8%	8%

WHAT TO FOCUS ON

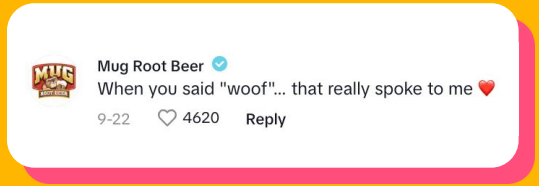
Make sure your ads are the good ones from the category. Look at what others in the category are doing and consider what you can do to stand out in a way that's true to your brand. Connect emotionally with audiences. And most importantly, give your brand a role in each of your ads.

VAYNERMEDIA zappi

At VaynerMedia, we've seen firsthand how humor can successfully capture audience attention for non-alcoholic beverage brands.

In one example, we worked with Mug Root Beer to turn the brand into something not just recognizable, but beloved. We took a "speak meme" approach and used CasC (Comments as Creative) with an unhinged tone to enhance community management.

As a result, the brand achieved over one billion social impressions and over 500K social followers in the first quarter alone, plus double digit sales growth vs. their primary competitor!



“Care” categories

Home care, personal care & pet care

Home care

Along with the other “care” categories, home care **does very well in relevance**. It seems that the more personal categories have a leg up on the others in creating ads that feel more relevant to people’s lives.

Home care also shines in brand recall, beating the average by three points. Many brands in this category have distinctive brand assets like Mr. Clean, Fabuloso’s purple color and Charmin’s bears — and that certainly helps audiences more immediately recognize the brand being advertised.

And while it does outperform the average in overall emotion, that strength is coming from a **higher “like” score**, showing that audiences feel a little less strongly about home care ads than they could. The category is relevant to everyday lives, but ads have to work hard to make the category more emotive and special.

WHAT TO FOCUS ON

Focus on finding more ways to connect emotionally with your audience. Getting people to feel “like” after watching your ads is good, but “love” is a stronger and more meaningful emotion. And (we know we’re starting to sound like a broken record!) get your branding right across your ads. This category outperforms the average, but there is still room for improvement!

	US home care	US average
Distinctiveness	3.9	3.8
Unaided brand recall	71%	68%
Relevance	3.9	3.6
Purchase uplift	22%	19%
Overall emotion	58	56
Love 😍	27%	28%
Like 🙂	52%	48%
Laughter 😂	7%	8%

Personal care

As a category, personal care does well in **overall emotion** — making people feel good while they watch the ad — and **relevance** — conveying things meaningfully.

While resonating and being relevant, it's great to see that personal care ads can also be **distinctive and stand out.**

And importantly, personal care is one of the **stronger categories on brand recall**, which means that the creativity in the category is being harnessed for the brand more than the average ad.

WHAT TO FOCUS ON

This category scores the lowest in laughter among all the categories we looked at for this analysis. There's an opportunity to use humor when it makes sense as a way to stand out compared to the usual way beauty is displayed in advertising. And while this category outperforms the average in brand recall, there is still room for improvement! Keep using DBAs, stay consistent (while fresh) and give the brand a clear role in the story to ensure branding remains strong in each and every ad.

	US personal care	US average
Distinctiveness	3.9	3.8
Unaided brand recall	70%	68%
Relevance	3.9	3.6
Purchase uplift	20%	19%
Overall emotion	61	56
Love 😍	31%	28%
Like 🙂	55%	48%
Laughter 😂	3%	8%

Pet care

Petcare is one of the strongest categories we looked at, and a key driver of that success is that it has the highest overall emotion score — driven by its **strong love score** (39% vs. the 28% US average).

It makes sense that a category focused on animals does a great job of making people feel something by reminding them of their love for their pets. Animals alone don't make a great ad, but they certainly do help!

And in a category like this, there's a real opportunity to use people's love for their pets in emotive and engaging ways.

The category also significantly overperforms the average on **relevance**.

But this category does struggle a bit to harness that love and relevance for the brand, coming in at below the US average in brand recall (64% vs. 68% average).

WHAT TO FOCUS ON

Branding is the most important thing to focus on for this category. It's important to ensure that the story told and the animals used are harnessed for the brand, so the campaign helps you grow your market share.

	US pet care	US average
Distinctiveness	3.9	3.8
Unaided brand recall	64%	68%
Relevance	4.0	3.6
Purchase uplift	29%	19%
Overall emotion	68	56
Love 😍	39%	28%
Like 🙂	45%	48%
Laughter 😂	7%	8%

zappi

Services

Financial services &
telecommunications

Financial services

Financial services ads score **lower than the average in nearly all metrics**, notably distinctiveness, relevance and emotion. This is understandable, as it's harder (but still possible!) to advertise an intangible product or service compared to a tangible one you can physically show off. And financial services is a generally more stressful subject matter people don't always want to engage with.

One area that it nearly achieves parity with the average is in brand recall. Most US insurance brands feature "brand characters" in their advertising that have become household names thanks to many years of investment. Insurance may seem a dull topic at first glance, but insurance brands have found engaging ways to highlight why insurance is a good idea, often using these brand characters along with humor — which is why the category **outperforms the US in laughter** (and is the top category for laughter in this analysis!).

The category's overall brand recall score is dragged down by banking, which is much weaker in this area compared to insurance.

	US financial services	US average
Distinctiveness	3.6	3.8
Unaided brand recall	67%	68%
Relevance	3.3	3.6
Purchase uplift	15%	19%
Overall emotion	47	56
Love 😍	16%	28%
Like 🙂	48%	48%
Laughter 😂	17%	8%

WHAT TO FOCUS ON

Investing in DBAs is critical, especially for banking brands, to make future advertising more effective. Money is a sensitive topic for many consumers, so it's essential to research your ads during the creative process to ensure you've landed on something distinctive that's still relevant and connects emotionally with the audience, while still meeting all regulatory requirements.

VAYNERMEDIA zappi

While it can be tougher to market an intangible product like financial services, there's no reason financial services brands can't be relevant to younger audiences on social media.

In one example, we helped Visa convert a legacy Olympics sponsorship into a relevant story for Gen Z on social — since Gen Z viewership of the Olympic Games itself was at an all-time low.

Leveraging Visa team athlete stories and trending event conversations, we created and iterated on 240 assets for 10+ markets across instagram and TikTok during the Olympics, resulting in benchmark-breaking social content performance and community engagement (including 227 million impressions and nearly 40K likes on comments) that created a new playbook for future Visa sponsorship engagements.

Telecommunications

Telco advertising performs less well, overall, than other categories — which again is understandable for a category selling intangible services. Distinctiveness, brand recall, relevance and overall emotion are all below the US average.

However there are a few bright spots. **Purchase uplift is slightly above the US average**, which means that, on average, telco ads do a decent job of making more people more likely to consider the brand as a result of seeing the ad.

The category also **slightly overperforms the US average for laughter**, which means they rely on humor a bit more than average.

	US telco	US average
Distinctiveness	3.4	3.8
Unaided brand recall	63%	68%
Relevance	3.3	3.6
Purchase uplift	21%	19%
Overall emotion	45	56
Love 😍	15%	28%
Like 🙂	53%	48%
Laughter 😂	10%	8%

WHAT TO FOCUS ON

Tap into the strong role your brand plays in consumers' lives and identify how it is the enabler of things that matter to them. This can help your ads be seen as more relevant and leave people feeling more love toward your ads and your brands. Once people's emotions are captured, make sure your specific brand benefits by using DBAs, establishing continuity in your brand platform and giving the brand a role in the story.

Tips for creating great ads

What does all this tell us about how to create ads?

Here are some of our top tips, along with some examples for inspiration.

Stand out from the crowd

To be remembered, an ad needs to capture attention and then hold attention. To capture attention, **your ad must be distinctive**.

It needs to stand out as something new that audiences haven't seen before. It can't blend into the background like wallpaper.

That is certainly no easy feat.

Think about what's unique about your brand that only you can deliver. Then think about the category codes in your category and how you might be able to do something different. Or think about how you can execute in a surprising, funny, bold or intriguing way for the category.

Can you stand out by being funny? By tugging on heartstrings? By using an unexpected celebrity (who still fits with your brand)? By adopting a different style or tone than the rest of your category? The possibilities are endless!

Example: Chipotle

Being different from the category can help you stand out — like Chipotle's "Unfolded."

Created to generate awareness for the future of sustainable agriculture, the animated film was produced by Venables Bell & Partners and brought to life by the Grammy-nominated artist Halsey.

Under 10% of advertising is set in a rural setting (and 80% of fast-food advertising is set indoors), **making this ad highly different from what's expected.**

The unique setting combined with a beautiful visual style and compelling music from a popular artist produced a distinctive ad that audiences knew could only be for Chipotle.

Sales impact	92
Brand impact	73

Ad distinctiveness	4.2	Norm 3.8
Unaided brand recall	82%	Norm 68%

Take people on an emotional journey

Audiences will forget the specific details of your ad, but they are much more likely to remember the way they felt watching it.

The best way to connect with people is to not just make them feel something, but **take them on an emotional journey**.

But this doesn't need to always be a heartfelt story that makes people cry, it can be done in a funny way too.

Think of your ad as a mini movie and take inspiration from any great story you've ever seen: Start with a hook, establish the setting, characters and scenario, introduce a conflict or struggle and build on the tension until it reaches a climax — with a satisfying resolution that leaves people on a good feeling.

It can make people feel any number of emotions along the way, but resolving on a positive note gives you the best chance of people feeling positive about your brand.

Example: Budweiser

Budweiser's "First Delivery" does an excellent job of taking the viewer on an emotional journey in this spot that follows a young Clydesdale on a mission to save the day by delivering a fallen keg.

Created for Super Bowl LIX, this spot is Budweiser's 47th Super Bowl ad that features the Budweiser Clydesdales.

The ad is a great example of how good storytelling goes a long way in advertising and can help hook your audience from start to finish. In fact, this ad captivates the audience from the beginning, with 90% of viewers watching the full ad — not an easy achievement for a 100 second spot!

This ad is also undeniably enjoyable and emotionally connects with people, **driving multiple peaks of love and laughter throughout**.

Sales impact	100	
Brand impact	98	
Overall emotion	73	Norm 56
Love 😍	48%	Norm 28%

Find a real consumer insight

Can you remember watching an ad that really struck a chord with you and left you thinking, “Wow, they ‘get’ me”?

Many of the ads that **resonate the best** with audiences are those that are grounded in a real consumer insight. These are ideas that are instantly understood, but aren’t too obvious that you’ve really considered them before.

These are truths like Snickers’ “you’re not you when you’re hungry” or Always’ idea that doing something “like a girl” doesn’t mean “bad” to a young girl, it only comes to mean that over time as society tells them so.

Tapping into a real human truth helps you connect with people and have them saying “Oh yeah, that’s so true.” It will make your ad, and ideally your brand and product, feel relevant.

It doesn’t have to be deep or poignant (although it certainly can be), but it has to feel grounded in consumers’ lives.

Example: Currys

Take Currys' "IRL" for example. Created to encourage shoppers to come into stores by reminding them of the unique value of IRL shopping, the brand hilariously highlights the insight that consumers have gotten so used to shopping online that they may not remember how to function inside a real store.

In the ad, shoppers are seen trying to zoom in on product packaging by pinching their fingers on boxes and leaning in, as well as "swiping through" items on shelves and knocking them over.

By **capitalizing on this insight and delivering it in a way that relates to their brand message**, viewer's found the ad to be highly relevant (and of course, relatable), meet their needs and resulted in strong purchase uplift for Currys!

Sales impact	85	
Brand impact	93	
Relevance	3.7	Norm 3.3
Purchase uplift	21%	Norm 15%

VAYNERMEDIA zappi

Use organic social to explore new ideas

Organic social provides a new way to play, learn and scale with content ideas.

On social, you can post at scale with content that is relevant, see what human beings — not us in the industry — care about it, and have the ability to amplify it or create a campaign around it.

Build & use your distinctive brand assets

Distinctive brand assets (DBAs) are shortcuts that help people instantly and intuitively recognize the brand being advertised — and then help them recognize the brand wherever they encounter it going forward.

These can be brand characters, colors, shapes, sounds or music, taglines or words, fonts or even the overall tone of your ads or a consistent use of a brand platform.

Everything from the M&M's candy characters, McDonald's golden arches, the shape of the Heinz ketchup bottle, Mastercard's association with the word "priceless," and Netflix's "ta-dum" sound, all are DBAs.

If you don't have many DBAs outside of your logo, it's worth it to establish them now.

When you do have them, you have to **keep using them until they can stand on their own** and instantly call to mind your brand.

Brands that establish and use DBAs for years and years can eventually reap the rewards of playing around with them and creating something really fun and distinctive. But this takes years of discipline and can't be rushed!

Example: Aldi

A wonderful example of DBA usage is everyone's favorite carrot: Aldi's Kevin the Carrot.

Aldi has included Kevin the Carrot in their Christmas ads for more than nine years, fully establishing him as a **brand asset that viewers immediately recognize.** As soon as viewers see him appear on screen, they already know it could only be an ad for Aldi. And while he began as a feature of Aldi's Christmas ads, Aldi has been able to use him successfully outside of Christmas — even featuring him in an ad for the 2024 Olympics.

Not only that, consumers have developed a love for Kevin the Carrot over the years, which results in high Love and Like reactions as soon as he appears on screen — a great thing to have consumers feeling when they see an ad from your brand.

And because of this, as an added bonus, it provides creative freedom for the brand to create fresh and compelling storytelling without "forcing" it.

Sales impact	88	
Brand impact	88	
Ad distinctiveness	3.9	Norm 3.6
Unaided brand recall	85%	Norm 72%

Example: Mint Mobile

While Aldi's Kevin the Carrot is perhaps a perfect example of the use of DBA characters, it's a DBA that's nine years in the making. Another example that's possibly more attainable to apply to your brand is Mint Mobile's "55+ Plan" ad.

This spot is chock-full of DBA's — from their mint green background, to their strategically placed logo and even Ryan Reynolds, once again starring as the protagonist in their ad.

What makes this such a great example is that telco ads tend to struggle with branding, leaving audiences less likely to remember who the ad was for on top of having a general lack of established DBAs in the category. But this is not the case for Mint Mobile!

Their focus on **DBAs highly differentiates them in their category** and resulted in 79% of viewers being able to correctly identify who the ad was for — a true lesson in great DBA usage!

Sales impact	96
Brand impact	93

Ad distinctiveness	3.8	Norm 3.4
Unaided brand recall	79%	Norm 63%

Compared to telecommunications norm

Give your brand a role in the story

People tend to remember key elements of an ad or a general summary of it, rather than the detail. If your brand or product isn't a part of that summary, it probably won't get credit for the ad.

That's why it's so important to think through the role your brand will play in the spot.

While you're developing ads, think about how people might summarize it, and then ask yourself whether the brand would have a role in that summary.

Could they play back the story or summary of the ad without mentioning your brand? Does your brand provide a turning point in the ad? A hero? **Would the ad make sense without the brand?**

Example: Doritos

In 2025 Doritos brought back their Crash the Super Bowl contest, which gives creators the opportunity to enter their own Doritos ad into a competition for a chance to be selected as the brand's Super Bowl ad. And what better way to engage fans than to have them participate in the making of the ad itself?

This year's winner, entitled "Abduction" was created by Ohio-native Dylan Bradshaw, and features a man fighting to save his bag of Doritos from being abducted by aliens. The man and the alien ultimately shared a bag together in the end.

The whole story revolves around Doritos being so desirable that even an alien wants them — and a human would fight hard not to let them go. **You can't play back the story without talking about the role of Doritos.**

Sales impact	95
Brand impact	91
Ad distinctiveness	4.3 (Norm 3.8)
Unaided brand recall	80% (Norm 68%)

VAYNERMEDIA zappi

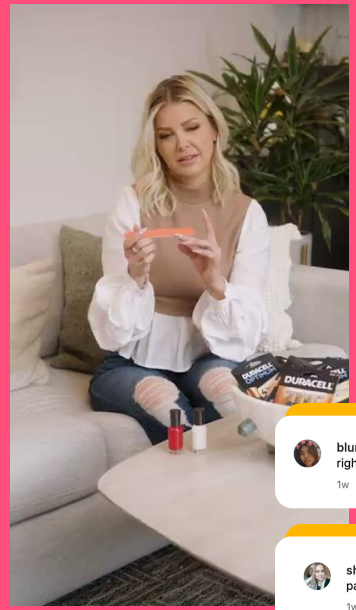
Example: Duracell

Social media opens up a whole new world of opportunities for giving your brand a role — because you can jump into any developing story that fits your brand or product.

For example, in a scene from a recent episode of Vanderpump Rules, Tom Sandoval explained that one of the reasons he was unhappy with Ariana Madix is because he can't remember the last time she went to the store to buy basic household supplies, such as batteries. The sound bite went viral on social with people calling Tom out as being ridiculous.

We helped battery brand Duracell jump into the conversation, first by commenting on relevant TikTok videos and then by creating our own video with Ariana as a spokesperson for the brand.

Talk about an incredible opportunity for the Duracell brand to tie into a trending moment!



26.5M
VIEWS

91.4K
SHARES

229K
LIKES

4.1B
EARNED MEDIA IMPRESSIONS

bluntednani_ Duracell said #teamariana & WE STAN!! that's right she's buying HER OWN batteries 😂🎉
1w 240 likes Reply

shespeaksbravo I am OBSESSED with the brilliance of this partnership🌶️
1w 1,197 likes Reply

dylanbonner90 I have never felt the need to comment and like a Duracell Instagram post.... until today. The perfect ad. #teamariana 👏
1w 247 likes Reply

janetmurphyprice Only buying Duracell batteries for the rest of my life
1w 1,500 likes Reply

Be consistent over the long term

Consistency is key to establishing your brand. Building a clear and coherent representation of a brand in people's minds so it comes to mind quickly and easily when it matters.

And consistency also helps ads to be easily recognizable for people.

Developing a meaningful brand platform that allows for consistency — and yet also offers space to be creative over time — is the best way to help to build immediate and coherent brand memories.

A **consistent brand platform** is something like Dove's real beauty campaign, HSBC's global/local messaging, Mastercard's "priceless" association and Cadbury's generosity.

But keep it fresh

While consistency is key, that doesn't mean you have to box your brand in with the same exact playbook time and time again. **You can still maintain a consistent thread between your campaigns while also introducing something new.** Something to keep it fresh.

In fact, we often see that having a consistent platform ultimately results in greater creative freedom.

Fresh consistency is a great way to keep your audience engaged while still remaining true to your brand. Think: Same characters, new adventure. Or even same joke, different characters. Or same brand platform, updated for modern-day life.

There are many ways to keep the traits that are essential to your brand platform while inserting something new and exciting for your audience, or expressing the idea in totally new or fresh ways.

Example: Snickers

Snickers' long running "You're Not You When You're Hungry" is a wonderful example of a brand campaign that has consistently delivered over time.

Beginning with their original 2010 ad featuring Betty White, the campaign taps into a real consumer insights that you don't always act like yourself when you're hungry. Snickers delivers on this in a hilarious way, by showing a young football player transformed into Betty White while playing — transforming back into himself once he has a Snickers bar.

The ad was such a hit with consumers, the brand kept it going with other famous characters such as Danny Trejo and Steve Buscemi stirring things up as members of The Brady Bunch in 2015 and Willem Dafoe as a cranky Marilyn Monroe in 2016.

In an updated example, "Welcome Aboard the Hungry Skies" suggests that maybe difficult passengers on a plane (like those we've all encountered) are just difficult because they're hungry. **It's a distinctive ad that can only be for Snickers!**

Sales impact	97
Brand impact	88
Ad distinctiveness	4.2 (Norm 3.8)
Purchase uplift	26% (Norm 19%)

Example: Dove

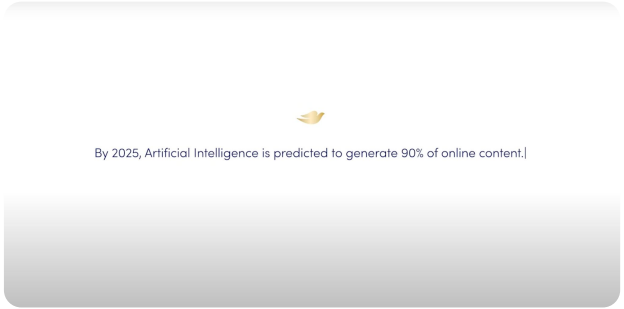
Dove is known for its inspiring and ever-empowering “Real Beauty” campaigns. But the brand also does a good job of keeping them fresh.

While the message originally began targeting the threat of social media and touched up/fake images, **Dove has done a great job evolving to address the threats to “real beauty” over time,** targeting the impact AI can have on real beauty today.

We saw that evolution in the “The Code: A Dove Film” ad. The ad maintains the brand’s consistent message of always portraying real beauty, this time applying it to the onslaught of AI-enhanced imagery — and even AI’s version of what a beautiful woman should look like.

In the ad, an AI tool is asked renditions of that very question, serving up impossible images of women. At the end of the ad, Dove states: “Dove will never use AI to create or distort women’s images” and invites the audience to learn more on the Dove website and encourages them to #KeepBeautyReal.

With a high distinctiveness score and great brand recall, this approach keeps Dove consistent, but still relevant to today’s issues.



Sales impact	98
Brand impact	95

Ad distinctiveness	4.3	Norm 3.8
Unaided brand recall	77%	Norm 68%

Example: KitKat

KitKat has been using “Have a break, have a KitKat” since 1958. The brand has successfully evolved the idea of “having a break” and grounded it in real consumer insights over time — ensuring that it always feels relevant and never feels stale.

Recently, KitKat played with the idea that it’s **difficult to truly take a break in today’s world.**

In “Break Better,” we see a young man sitting at his desk in a bustling office. When he stands up to take a break, all his post-it notes, pens, laptop and even whiteboard start trailing behind him and eventually sticking to him as “I Want to Break Free” by Queen starts to play. Eventually he opens a KitKat and all the items fall off of him, allowing him to truly take a well-deserved break.

It’s a clever way to visually show how hard it can be to disconnect — and feature KitKat as a hero in that story. It works because KitKat has owned “having a break” for 80 years, so it feels consistent but also fresh for audiences!

Sales impact	97
Brand impact	96

Ad distinctiveness	4.0	Norm 3.6
Overall emotion	60	Norm 43

Build or reinforce what people know, think and feel about your brand

What is your brand known for? What do people expect from your brand?

Once you've established your brand, your audience can begin to expect things like how your brand makes them feel based on what they already know, think and feel about it from past experience.

If your ads fit with that expectation, **audiences are likely to remember your brand and feel positively about it.** But if you go against that expectation, they may not recognize or remember your brand — or be confused by the connection.

This isn't to say you can't change your brand image or brand associations over time, but it can't be done overnight! And it always needs to done by keeping some aspect of familiarity, rather than switching completely from one thing to the next.

Example: Liquid Death

Liquid Death, created after observing concert-goers and musicians alike drinking water out of energy drink cans to avoid judgement and fit into the scene, **consistently delivers on a rebellious, edgy tone that fits with their brand**.

A great example is their ad with The Prince of Darkness himself titled "Ozzy Osbourne warns kids not to snort Liquid Death" that promotes their Death Dust, a powdered electrolyte mix. The spot shows Ozzy driving around and telling a pair of kids not to snort the stuff and the real purpose of the powder — a hilarious poke at both the rockstar and the mix. It's an incredibly distinctive ad that sets the brand apart from the category.

Even when promoting their new keg sized option of Liquid Death to pregnant women in "Kegs for Pregs," the brand still maintains their edge and humor, while being a bit polarizing — but that comes with the rebellious territory — and still generates a lot of laughs and enjoyment from viewers, as it's what they can expect from the brand.

Sales impact	95	
Brand impact	77	
Ad distinctiveness	4.5	Norm 3.8
Brand distinctiveness	4.1	Norm 3.7

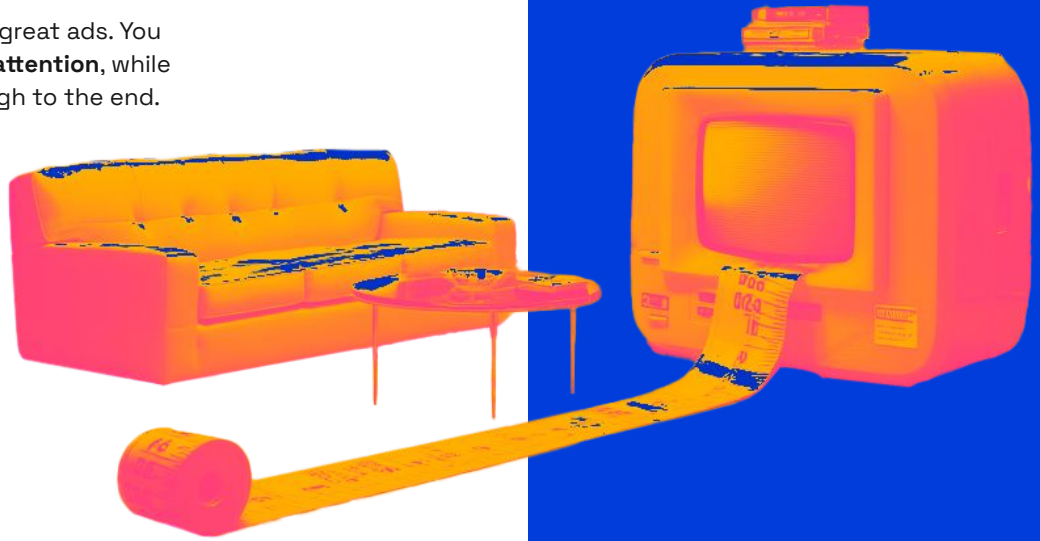
Make your ad just the right length

Have you ever found yourself sitting through an ad that completely loses your attention? What about one that was so fast, that you had no idea what was going on, nevermind what brand the ad was for?

Finding the right length is a critical component to making great ads. You want to take your audience on a journey that **keeps their attention**, while also being mindful of their time investment to see it through to the end.

We are often asked what the ideal length for an ad is. The answer is that it differs by context/media, but also it has to be determined by the narrative you are telling. There are a lot of great short ads and a lot of great long ads out there. The key is in making the length just right for your story.

Don't make it longer than it needs to be so you lose people. And don't make it so short that people are lost and cannot follow it.



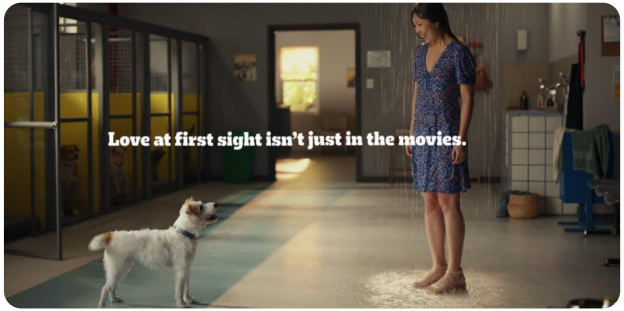
Example (Short): Pedigree

At only 15 seconds long each, Pedigree's "Love at First Sight" campaign is a wonderful example of a series of spots that tell a full, emotional story in a very short period of time.

The first spot in the campaign, "Party" shows a man all dressed up at a party, professing his love to someone off-screen as confetti falls, which turns out to be a dog in an adoption center. The ad promptly concludes with the words "Love at first sight isn't just in the movies. It's available at your local shelter." appearing across the screen.

The second spot, "Rain" depicts a woman standing in the pouring rain, exclaiming, "I've wanted an eternity with you from the second I met you!" The one she's shouting to is again a dog at an adoption center, concluding with the same words on-screen.

Both spots do an excellent job at delivering the brand's message and evoking a strong emotional response, showcasing that **a short ad doesn't have to limit effectiveness or the ability to create strong emotion**.



Sales impact	99
Brand impact	84

Enjoyment	4.3	Norm 3.9
Overall emotion	74	Norm 56

Example (Long): Lay's

At one minute long (and some additional longer versions), Lay's "The Little Farmer" ad is perhaps the definition of a long ad executed to perfection.

Set to the tune of Barry Louis Polisar's "All I Want Is You," this spot follows a young girl who sets out on a mission to grow something on her own, while her family heads out to plant potatoes on their farmland. From rainstorms to grasshoppers and more, the girl keeps watch to protect her little spud. In the end, she proudly adds her fully grown potato to the massive load atop a Lay's truck.

Viewers were hooked on the story, which elicited strong feelings of love and togetherness; with many viewers noting how lovable and family-oriented it was.

Even though it was on the lengthy side, the heartfelt storytelling of the determined young girl captivated viewers, eliciting strong feelings of love while also leading up to a feel-good brand message that this is exactly where their product comes from — from family farms across America.

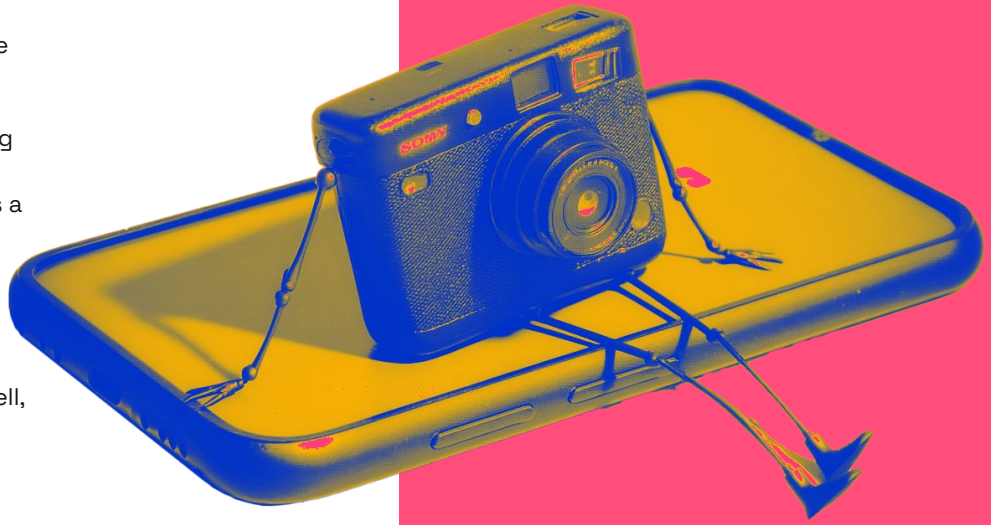
Sales impact	97	
Brand impact	96	
Enjoyment	4.3	Norm 3.9
Overall emotion	70	Norm 56

Communicate the positive things about your brand (implicitly or explicitly)

It can be argued that it's better to be direct, but that's not always the case with advertising.

Typically, brands find implicit ways to shout about their latest offering in clever ways that **subtly share its value**. Think: Shot on iPhone by Apple. While this campaign never says "Buy the iPhone because it has a great camera," it does show a beautifully shot montage of everyday moments with the message that they were taken on an iPhone by everyday users — implicitly reminding people of the perfection of photos taken using the phone.

But that doesn't mean being direct should be off the table. If done well, **brands can find success in explicitly advertising their offerings in a positive way**. Take Old Spice's commercials for example. Throughout their ads the man constantly praises Old Spice, it's smell and how "manly" it makes you — but he does so in a series of situations that are absolutely hilarious to watch, making for a fun experience for viewers.



Example (Implicit): Reese's

Reese's "Don't Eat Lava" ad, which premiered at Super Bowl LIX, does a great job at implicitly communicating how delicious the brand's new chocolate lava peanut butter cups are.

The ad depicts a crowd of people, who appear to have taken the "lava" addition to the Reese's cups quite literally, as they begin flocking to an active volcano (armed with buckets and cups) to get a taste. Park rangers hold them back and give a PSA to not eat lava, but to eat Reese's chocolate lava instead.

While the brand doesn't explicitly state that their treats are so good they'll have you doing the absurd to get a taste, they didn't have to. Viewers found the ad absolutely hilarious, **but received the message loud and clear** that Reese's chocolate lava peanut butter cups are a hit worth trying.

Sales impact	92
Brand impact	87

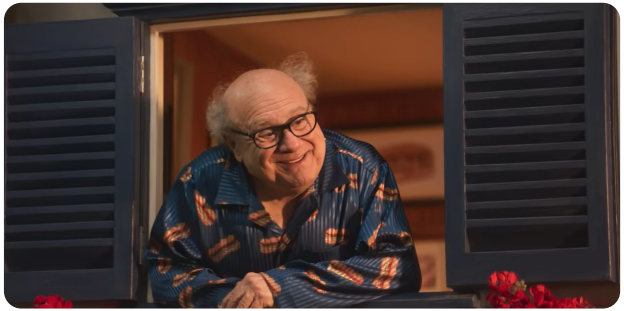
Unaided brand recall	78%	Norm 68%
Laughter 😂	27%	Norm 8%

Example (Explicit): Jersey Mike's

For a more direct approach, Jersey Mike's "Wakey Wakey" certainly delivers on the entertainment factor, while also being very explicit about their great tasting sandwiches.

This spot features Danny Devito, who's shown waking up in his home to the delicious smell of food — which is apparently located *inside* a Jersey Mike's restaurant. He proceeds to fully narrate their "morning prep" as the audience sees shots of "sizzling bacon," "slicing of tomatoes" and the "bopping of fresh lettuce."

Concluding with a shot of their fresh ingredients and the message "Freshly prepped every morning, it's a Jersey Mike's thing: a sub above" the brand couldn't be more **straightforward about their message that their sandwiches are not only delicious, but made fresh**. And with Danny Devito added in to the mix, the audience was highly entertained the whole time!



Sales impact	97
Brand impact	91

Purchase uplift	29%	Norm 19%
Laughter 😂	20%	Norm 8%

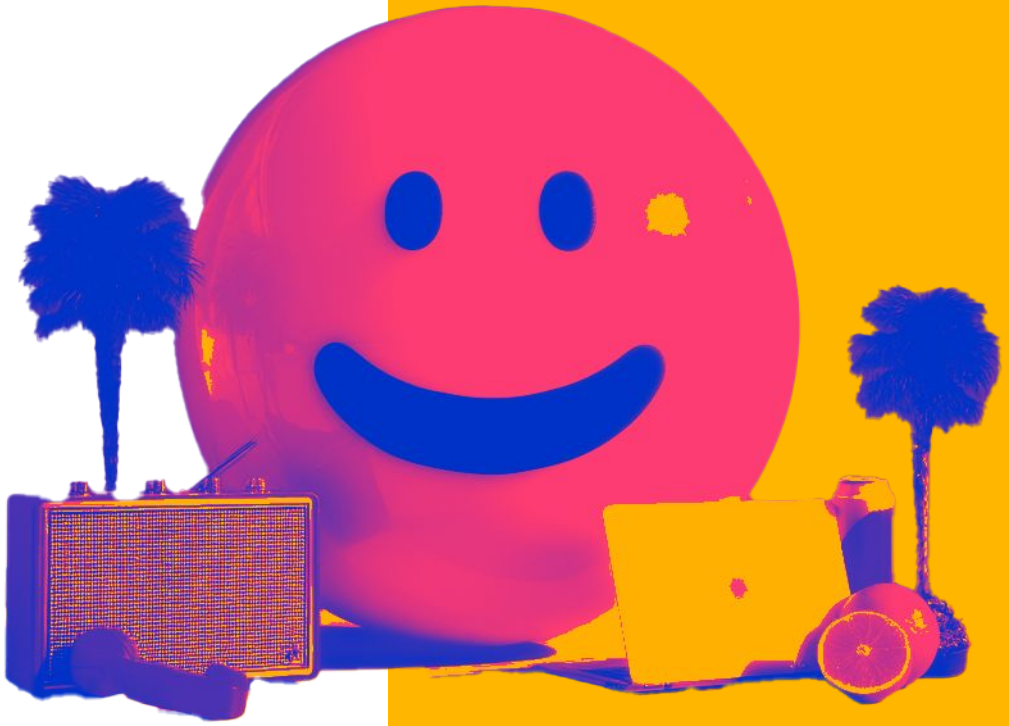
Execute in a coherent way across channels

With so much media fragmentation, it is proven that **the more channels you use as part of your campaign, the better the return**. Multiple channels help you reach more people, but they also make the impact more powerful when people see the campaign expressed in multiple ways.

Of course for this to work, the campaign idea needs to be expressed in both a coherent way across channels AND in a way that plays into the characteristics of the channel.

When developing a campaign, brands should think about the key things that should look and/or feel the same across the assets. One asset should cue another. And they should all cue the brand.

Ultimately, they should work together to create a stronger, more immediate and more positive representation of the brand such that it comes to mind into the future for more needs and occasions.



Example: Magnum

Magnum did an excellent job creating a multi-dimensional and cross-channel campaign for their "Nothing Cracks Like Magnum" ad.

In one of the ads in the campaign, a woman sits on her couch and opens Magnum's classic ice cream bar while she sits next to her very sleepy cat. As she takes a bite, the bar lets out a loud, resounding *crack!* which sends the cat flying into the air with a screech as the words, "Nothing cracks like Magnum" appear on screen.

But the brand took this iconic *crack!* a step further for this campaign, **creating digital billboards with a radio tie-in that gives listeners a sonic "bite" sound** when they drive past.

They tapped into a unique product insight they were able to carry over to the out-of-home ad space to take their campaign even further — creating a sensory experience that resonated very well with consumers!

Sales impact	97	
Brand impact	94	
Ad distinctiveness	3.9	Norm 3.7
Overall emotion	63	Norm 44

Example: Cadbury

Cadbury recently brought back its iconic “How do you eat yours?” tagline after 20 years with an integrated campaign focused around the idea that you can learn everything you need to know about a person based on how they eat their Cadbury Creme Eggs.

With the ad “Big Deal,” we learn that Heather likes to nibble her Creme Eggs while maintaining eye contact. As the ad continues, we discover how this defines Heather’s personality through a number of humorous scenarios in which she asserts dominance while continuing to eat her Creme Egg.

An out-of-home campaign brought to life other examples of Creme Egg eating habits and what they tell us about the person.

And all of this was centered around driving people to the **online test to allow them to learn about what their approach says about themselves** — allowing people to continue the conversation online.

The whole campaign was a smart approach to bring the iconic tagline into the modern day while leveraging multiple channels.

Sales impact	84
Brand impact	76
Ad distinctiveness	3.8 (Norm 3.6)
Laughter 😂	16% (Norm 6%)

Final thought: Bring consumers in early

It's easy to get overwhelmed by all the data and advice in this report. Stand out. Make an emotional connection. Be consistent, but also fresh. And don't forget to give your brand a role and build/reinforce key associations or category entry points while you're at it! But don't do it explicitly. Or maybe you can be explicit, if you can do it well.

How can anyone be creative with all that to think about?

That's where consumer feedback comes in.

Professional comedians don't come out on a big stage and riff about whatever they're thinking about that day. They try out new jokes with smaller audiences over time to land on the best material told in the way that gets the most laughs. Then they take what they've learned to the big stage.

The same applies to your advertising. **The day your ad airs for the first time shouldn't be the first time any consumer is seeing your ad.**

Instead, consumers should be brought into the process early and often to help you pick your direction, shape your story and optimize the final campaign.

With a deep understanding of what works with consumers, you'll be able to create advertising you can be confident in.

You can create truly effective creative.

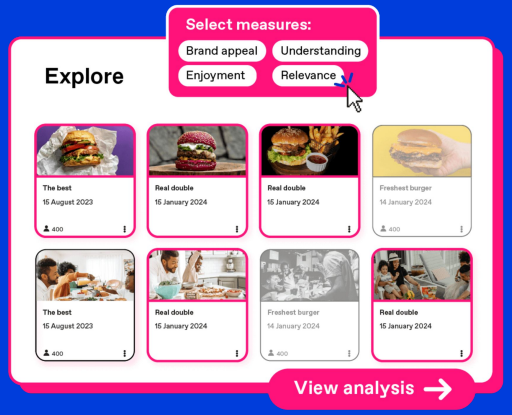
Create winning ads with connected insights

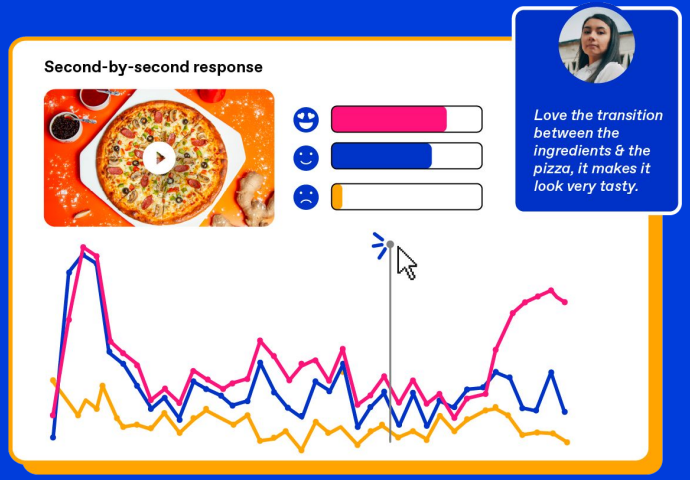
To create a great ad, you need consumer feedback.

The Zappi Amplify Advertising System is a modern research system that gives you quick, accurate consumer feedback — powered by data and supercharged with AI.

With Amplify, you get:

- An ongoing learning loop for better, data-driven advertising
- Quality consumer research you can run fast, early and often
- AI reporting to get from data to insights in one click
- Comprehensive, validated metrics and diagnostics for confident decisions
- All your research data in one comprehensive platform, so you can connect insights over time and learn from every win
- Backed by the most actionable and predictive research methodology





See how Zappi can help you create winning ads with connected insights

GET A DEMO

About VaynerMedia

VaynerMedia is a global integrated creative and media agency, built for today's consumers. As the Modern Agency of Record, it understands the nuances of today's attention landscape, empowering brands to win attention, drive relevance, and deliver business results. Founded in 2009, by Gary Vaynerchuk, the independently owned agency operates in 15 offices worldwide, including Amsterdam, Bangkok, Chicago, New Delhi, Kuala Lumpur, London, Los Angeles, Mexico City, Miami, New York, Tokyo, Toronto, Singapore, and Sydney. VaynerMedia is part of the VaynerX family of companies.