

Emotion

The most rational thing a brand can use

The evidence that emotionally appealing advertising is more effective than advertising based on rational brand claims and messages is well-documented.

But crises challenge even long-held beliefs. The COVID-19 global pandemic has raised questions about how advertisers can best connect with changing public moods during such a combination of health emergency, social lockdown, and economic shock.

Research can tell us how consumers feel in this environment, including about advertising. Analysing this data alongside longer-term evidence about effective advertising can help us understand whether and how brands should change approach to resonate more with audiences in a highly-charged atmosphere.

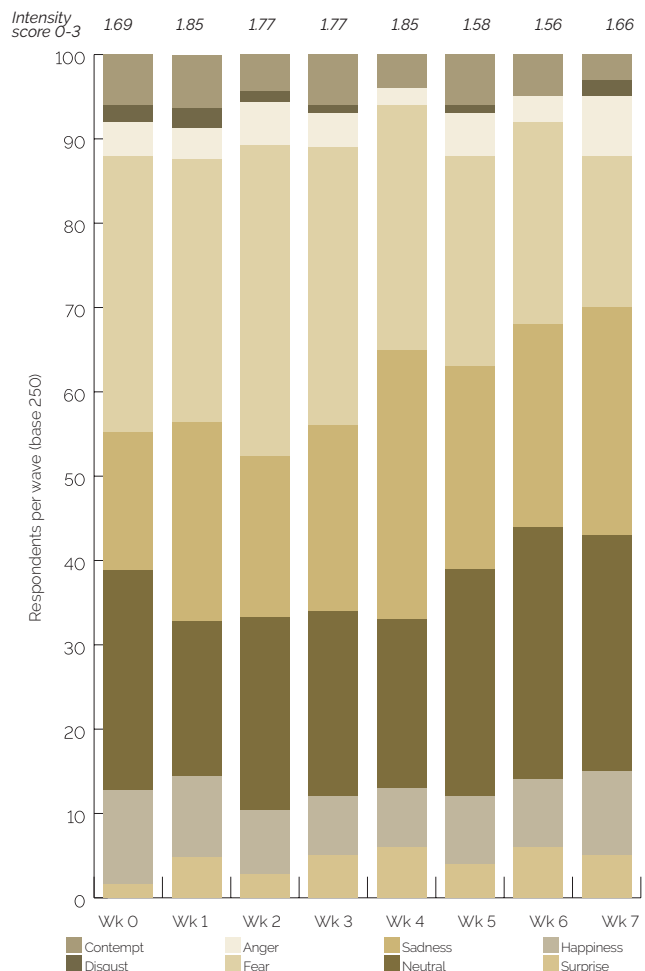
Below, we summarise findings from the System1 advertising research group into the performance of advertising during the pandemic, and historic insights from the IPA Effectiveness Databank of case study data collated over almost 40 years.

These sources re-affirm the power of empathising with audiences and of making creative choices to strike the right emotional notes.

The emotional cycle

Weekly tracking data collected by System1 from UK consumers in March and April 2020 shows the public's general mood and attitude towards the virus. (see Figure 1)

Figure 1: Initial fear gives way to sadness in a period of adjustment



One pattern is for people to cycle through emotions from fear and anger to sadness and acceptance as the outbreak has progressed.

As Orlando Wood, Chief Innovation Officer of System1, has written, "The crisis has given us a heightened sense of empathy and a greater feeling of connection with the world and the people around us."

Advertising during the pandemic

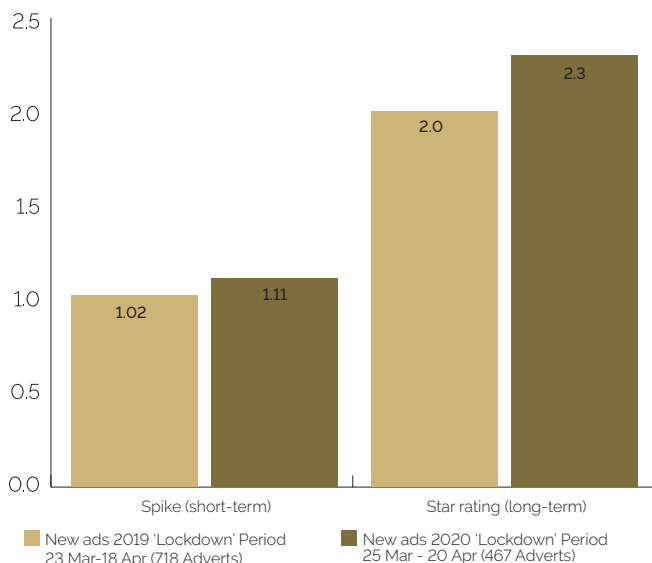
Can pre-existing advertising still be effective in this climate, or do brands need to develop new work for the pandemic?

To answer this question, System1 re-tested 100 US and UK ads in March that were tested in January and February. It also contrasted new ads launched in the week after the UK lockdown began on 23 March with new ads from the same period last year.

The research found little difference in the performance of pre-lockdown ads when they ran after 23 March.

However, new ads launched in the lockdown scored higher than new ads from a comparable period last year. In particular, new tactical ads created specifically in the light of COVID-19 (see Figure 2) performed better, although brand distinctiveness could be lost in a rush of similar-seeming ads.

Figure 2: New ads appearing in lockdown connecting better than ads appearing in same month last year.



Data source: System1, March & April 2020.

The data suggests that empathetic ads that express humour, generosity and humanity had particular appeal. Advertising approaches created before the lockdown were still viable.

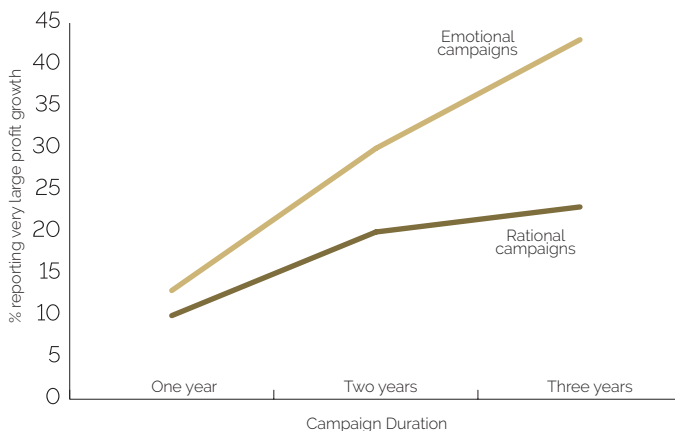
Emotion works - with the right creative

The ability of emotionally-oriented advertising to help brands connect with audiences and achieve business goals such as increased profit (see Figure 3), has been consistently shown in IPA research.

However, creativity is the single biggest determinant of effectiveness in advertising. The report 'Lemon',

published last year by the IPA and System1, outlined the creative elements found in effective emotional advertising. These include metaphor, dialogue, recurring characters or devices, and a sense of between-ness.

Figure 3: Emotional advertising is more effective - especially over the long-term



Data source: IPA Effectiveness Databank cases 1998-2010

Ads with such elements - and also those that allude to a specific place or community - work even better with audiences during the outbreak, according to System1.

Despite huge economic uncertainty, the evidence suggests that the rationale for using emotional creative advertising still holds. Indeed, there is more need for it now than ever.

The IPA and the FT, along with EffWorks, a cross industry marketing initiative, have partnered to support more effective advertising by businesses. For more on effectiveness materials, including links to IPA publications, visit ipa.co.uk/effectiveness



Please get in touch if you would like our support to help your business improve its marketing and brand effectiveness.

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Sources: 1 See 'The Long and The Short Of It', IPA, 2013; Effectiveness in Context, IPA, 2018; 2 'What should ads look like in the time of recession?' by Orlando Wood, LinkedIn B2B Institute; 3 First published in 'The Long and The Short of It', by Les Binet and Peter Field, IPA, 2013; 4 'Lemon. How the advertising brain turned sour', by Orlando Wood, System 1, IPA/System1, 2019; 5 See 'Lemon and the culture of empathy in the pandemic' webinar, Orlando Wood/IPA website