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WHITE PAPER

Making Deposits in Consumer Memory Banks

BY CHARLES YOUNG

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Modern neuroscience has found that there are three different memory systems in the mind. The first is the semantic memory system, where words, ideas and concepts are stored—that is, it’s the memory system we use when we think rational thoughts. The second is the episodic memory system, where autobiographical or personal experiences are stored—that is, it’s the memory system we use when we feel emotions. The third is the procedural memory system, where physical sensations of our five senses and the actions of the body are stored—that is, it’s the memory system we use when we do something with our bodies and engage physical activities, such as eating.

The most effective advertising does more than simply create top-of-mind brand awareness or name registration. The best advertising makes a brand seem real and fully present to the consumer by plugging images into all three of the memory systems of the mind. Simply put, successful advertising campaigns are targeted to the head, the heart, and the body of the consumer.

Long-term brand memories are created when the peak moments consumers focus on in an ad are highly charged with emotion. We know this from published research conducted in a variety of advertising categories, including fast food advertising. These are the meaningful moments in film that create a brand image.

Making Deposits in the Image Bank

Think of the three memory systems of the consumer’s mind as three different bank accounts. The job of advertising is to make regular deposits into each of these different mental accounts. The “coins” that are deposited in each account are the Branding Moments of a television commercial.

These long-term brand memories—“Branding Moments”—can be predicted from commercial pretesting research with Picture Sorts® diagnostics by looking at the intersection of the Flow of Attention and the Flow of Emotion graphs. (See Exhibit 1) These are the images that (1) consumers tell us are the ones they focused on and remember most strongly shortly after viewing an ad, and (2) they feel the most emotion about. An earlier article published in Admap demonstrated the validity of this research in predicting long-term brand memories.

Our published research has shown that a typical thirty-second commercial produces, on average, four branding moments in thirty seconds, though high-scoring ads can produce more and weak ads can produce fewer.

Triple Entry Bookkeeping for Brand Imagery

An idea that’s been around a long time is the theory that advertising works through a hierarchy of effects called Think, Feel, Do. (Though it has been long debated whether the order of the hierarchy is the same across brands and category. For example, for established brands, does feeling come before thinking? For new products, does thinking come before feeling? Furthermore, how does this differ for high-involvement versus low-involvement product categories?)

This model of how consumers process advertising provides us with a simple scheme for classifying the key visuals in a commercial. Based on consumer ratings of the meanings of each image, collected from our Flow of Meaning sort, we are able to infer the type of long-term memory created based on whether that image appears to be targeted to the head, the heart or the body.

An entire television campaign can be analyzed with this triple entry book-keeping approach to help advertisers understand the essence of what their advertising is contributing to long-term brand image. The fast food brand Chick-fil-A's television advertising in 2008, based on a pool of ten commercials, provides a good example of how this looks. (See Exhibit 2)

In the **Think Account**, Chick-fil-A deposited ideas such as “eat more chikin,” value offers such as “free breakfast now” and “chick-n-strips giveaway,” and new product concepts such as “peppermint milk shakes.” In general, visuals that go into the Think account are frequently identified by supers or words appearing on the screen—though outside the realm of fast food they might also include product demos or other techniques for presenting information in the form of rational product claims.

In the **Feel Account**, the brand deposited memories of cows sneaking into office buildings, cows parachuting out of the sky into football stadiums, and of the emotions on the faces of people reacting to these strange goings-on. In general, these are the images that form the gist of the story the brand is telling—the key frames that agency creatives would intuitively use in a brief storyboard of the idea.

In the **Do Account**, the brand helped the consumer mentally rehearse the act of eating their products—with sensory-loaded images such as chicken dipped in tasty cheese sauce and a fork probing meat hot on the grill. The role of product visuals in food advertising should be thought of in terms of extending the brand experience through the mental act of “virtual consumption” of the food by the viewer. The latest in brain research merely confirms the truth of the old saying that you eat with your eyes first.

Finally, to make sure that these three kinds of images are properly labeled for long-term storage—so that they don't end up in the lost luggage of the mind—at least one of the four coins in the commercial should tag the identity of the brand doing the advertising. In general, Chick-fil-A had well-branded advertising.

This simple method of counting the imagery in advertising provides a way of analyzing the account balances of different QSR ad campaigns in terms of where the emphasis has been placed in the creative work.

Account Balances in the Fast Food Category

In 2008 Ameritest conducted in-depth research on nearly 300 fast food commercials among a sample of over 25,000 consumer interviews. In deconstructing the visual communication of all this advertising, we analyzed the percentage branding moments devoted to each of the think-feel-do categories of brand memories. The results of this analysis are shown in Exhibit 3.

For some of the fast food brands, Chick-fil-A, Dairy Queen, McDonald's and Burger King, the emphasis of their creative executions was on getting the consumer to *feel*

something about their brands. This was generally accomplished through the use of storytelling involving warm sentiment or humor.

In contrast, for other brands, such as Arby's, Quiznos, Papa John's, Popeyes, and Domino's, the executional emphasis was on getting the consumer to *think* about their brands. This was expressed in terms of value offers (e.g. Arby's), claims about the healthiness of their products (e.g. Papa John's), convenience (e.g. Domino's) and other rational arguments to choose the brand. This type of advertising was characterized by a prevalence of supers on screen, which was frequently the focus of viewer attention and formed the basis of more than half of the long-term memories created by these ads.

Finally, four brands—Jack in the Box, Wendy's, Quiznos, and Popeyes—spent more time than average romancing the product or getting consumers to imagine doing what they come into a fast food restaurant to do—eat the food.

Which approach is most effective? If you look at the Top Five brands, ranked in terms of the average Motivation scores for their complete pool of TV advertising, you can see that the most deposits are made into the **Feel Account**, selling to the consumers' hearts.

If you look at the Bottom Five brands, ranked in terms of average Motivation scores, you can see that the most deposits are made into the **Think Account**, selling to the consumers' heads. (See Exhibit 4)

Surprisingly, there was no difference in terms of deposits made to the **Do Account**, which contains product beauty shots and sensory appeals to eating the food. This suggests that finding new and creative ways to romance the food may be more important to improving advertising effectiveness than just simply increasing the amount of product time on screen.

Finally, it should be noted that the more motivating advertising was also better branded in the sense that visuals containing brand identifiers such as the name or logo were deposited in the long-term memory banks.

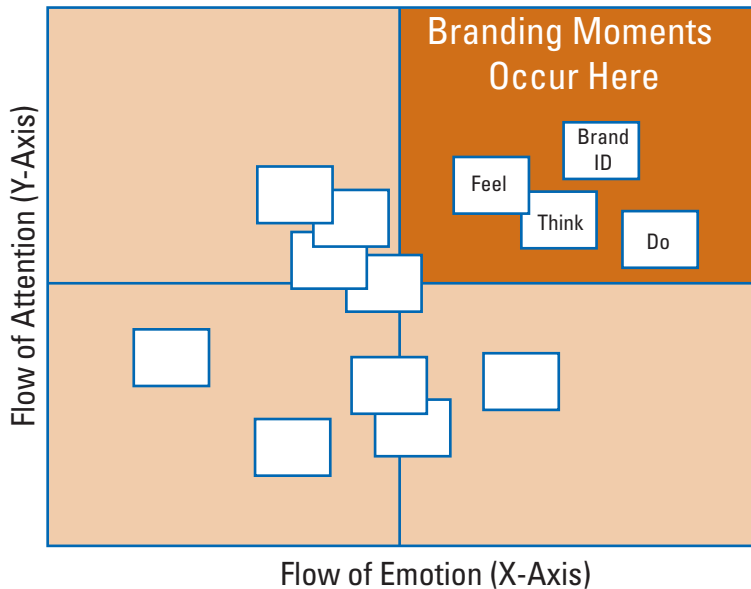
Conclusion

This visual, triple-entry bookkeeping approach to predicting the imagery deposited in consumers' long term brand memories is an unorthodox approach to analyzing the effectiveness of advertising campaigns. Of course, it leaves out media variables—how much money was spent to air each execution? It also leaves out the contributions of other media such as print, outdoor, or the internet—though the imagery conveyed via these channels of communication should enter our memory banks in much the same way. Moreover, in the fast food category at least, the bulk of the advertising investment continues to be made in television.

What it does do, however, is focus attention on the quality and content of the creative—the all important variable which many marketers obsessed with marketing mix modeling of media spend data tend to overlook. And it focuses attention beyond short term sales effects and beyond the short term blips in awareness measured by conventional tracking studies onto the more important goal of understanding advertising's long term contribution to brand equity, which exists only in the memories of consumers.

Exhibit 1

Branding Moments Help Us Define the Deposits We Make in Brand Equity



Think
(Targeted to Head)



Feel
(Targeted to Heart)



Do
(Targeted to Body)



Exhibit 3

Image Bank for 2008 QSR Ads

Brands	Think	Feel	Do	Brand ID	Total # of Ads
Chick-fil-A	13%	43%	17%	7%	10
Jack in the Box	15%	18%	36%	37%	4
Subway	29%	38%	26%	7%	23
Dairy Queen	14%	73%	11%	3%	6
Wendy's	25%	14%	27%	34%	22
Taco Bell	24%	39%	21%	15%	16
Sonic	36%	32%	19%	14%	42
McDonald's	16%	46%	20%	18%	56
Arby's	52%	18%	22%	7%	14
Quiznos	51%	5%	33%	3%	7
Burger King	22%	56%	15%	6%	27
Pizza Hut	50%	17%	21%	11%	13
Papa John's	66%	10%	11%	13%	13
KFC	33%	38%	25%	4%	14
Popeyes	56%	0%	33%	11%	3
Domino's	52%	17%	13%	19%	14

Ranked By Motivation to Visit Restaurant



Exhibit 4

Percentage of Deposits for Top 5 vs. Bottom 5 Brands

By Average Motivation Score

