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Advertisement memories and brand linkage

My aim in this chapter is to extend the view of advertising memory that I have already begun to build up, and to look in more depth at the interlinkage between memories of an advertisement and memories of (and predilection to buy) the brand that is being advertised. This ties in with the issues of recognition and recall that we explored in Chapter 16, but goes beyond them in many ways.

INTRODUCTION

You will recall, I hope, that neurologists understand our memories to be stored in patterns of neural activity in the brain, so a memory, or a concept, in a sense is just the sensitivity of some synapses, which makes their neurons more likely to be fired by future stimuli. This is true of the memory of an advertisement, and it is also true of the memory, or concept, of a brand. I also explained that it is not a case of a dedicated set of neurons representing one concept, and another dedicated set representing another concept; rather, there is a dense network of neurons, interlinked by the varying sensitivities of their synapses, and representing an equally dense network of overlapping concepts.

Take the example of someone seeing an advertisement for a brand of computer that features an elephant. One set of neurons that will be stimulated by this exposure is the set that somehow embodies the concept of 'elephant', with pathways that will have been laid down by previous exposure to pictures of elephants, articles about elephants,

conversations about elephants, the sight of real elephants in the zoo, and so on. Another set will be the set that somehow embodies the concept of 'computer', with pathways laid down by previous direct and indirect experience of computers. And another set will be related to previous exposure to this particular brand of computer. (The same is true, of course, for all the other concepts into which one could fit this advertisement, including the very concept of 'advertisement', and all the knowledge and understanding that makes us appreciate how flickering lights on a television screen or ink on a page can be designed to encourage us to purchase something.)

In short, we use our existing concept of the brand (our memory of the brand, if you prefer) to help us to decode this advertisement; and in turn, our decoding of the advertisement has an impact on our existing concept of the brand. So (provided the advertisement is not so disastrously obscure that it fails to evoke the brand concept at all, an issue I consider below) there is a direct connection between our memory of the advertisement and our memory of the brand.

The words 'brand linkage' suggest that the memory of the advertisement and that of the brand are linked, which is arguably a misrepresentation. It might make more sense to say that what happens is that the memories of the advertisement *become part* of the brand memories.

MEMORIES AND FORGETFULNESS

Impact Information did an experiment to learn more about the nature of advertising memories, and specifically how the memory-dredging techniques of recognition and recall actually function. In their experiment, respondents were shown commercials and asked whether they remembered having seen them before. Some of the commercials had not been flighted for several years. The average recognition rate was 67 per cent. That high rate is an indication that recognition of visual material is very slow to decay.

This is in sharp contrast to the prevailing wisdom in the advertising industry about the decay of ad-awareness. Adtrack's experience with tracking 30,000 commercials shows that, on average, in-market ad-recall (measured by a technique that uses the brand name as a trigger and requires a description of the advertisement) declines by 20 per cent each week in the absence of advertising support. By contrast, Millward Brown, using only the brand name as a prompt and asking for recent awareness, but not requiring a description, works to a constant rate of

decline in awareness of 10 per cent per week. Without further exposure by the end of even one year, let alone several years, ad-awareness on these measures would be minimal. However, the visual memory of the advertisement (as measured by recognition) is clearly still very much there, somewhere in the brain.

Figure 17.1 is one attempt at explaining what is happening here.

- If someone is asked for memories of the advertisement but prompted with the brand name, his or her memory of the advertisement is accessed via his or her memory of the brand name – which might provide an access route (that is, might prompt memory of the advertisement) but is not likely to be a very efficient method of prompting the memory of the advertisement.
- If the person is shown the advertisement itself, the prompt is directly to the memory of that advertisement, which is likely to be much more efficient.
- If the person is shown an unbranded advertisement then asked for the brand name, the route in is via the advertisement memory, but the aim is to access the brand memory: the reverse of the first method above.

As I explained in the previous chapter, advertisers distinguish the direct and indirect-prompt methods using the terms ‘recognition’ and ‘recall’.

It is our experience that advertising agencies and marketers prefer to be given higher numbers when it comes to measuring their advertising, and therefore they prefer methodologies that access the ad-memory directly: that is, methodologies that focus on recognition rather than recall.

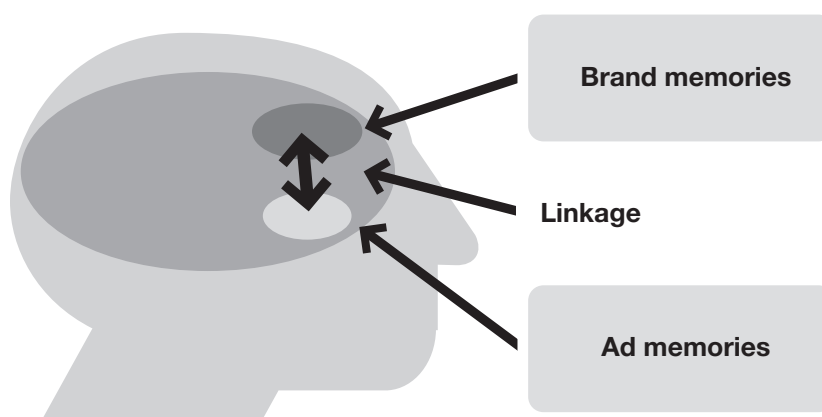


Figure 17.1 *Different access strategies to advertising memories*



However, it can be argued that to test recognition is not really testing how an advertisement works, or indeed how an advertiser wants it to work. The advertisement memory is not an end in itself: its purpose (in a simplified sense: of course, it could have less direct objectives as well) is to prompt the consumer to influence the brand memories – by either strengthening them, or even changing them. As we outlined in Chapter 1, when consumers shop they seldom think directly about the advertisements they have seen. They generally think first about goods (products or services) they want or need, and second about brands of those products. So the purchase is prompted not by the advertisement, but by the brand itself.

What marketers most need to know is not whether the advertisement itself prompts recognition (of itself), but whether it does the job of steering consumers towards the brand. So it makes a lot of sense for an advertiser to want to know whether the prompt of the brand name produces a memory of the advertisement. More generally, what is important is whether there is a good link between the memories of the brand and of the advertisement, and this is something that can be tested by seeing whether the advertisement comes to mind when the consumer is prompted by the brand.

SOME EMPIRICAL EVIDENCE

In the Adtrack system, we investigate recall techniques using both advertisements and brand names as triggers. So sometimes the respondent is asked if he or she can remember the advertising for a brand whose name he or she is given, and sometimes the process is reversed: the respondent is read a description of the advertisement, then asked whether he or she has seen it, and if so, whether he or she can name the brand that was advertised. The two questions are given to different samples of 200 respondents. Figure 17.2 shows the results for 800 commercials tested in the second of these ways.

As you can see, just over half of the sample recognized the advertisement, and of these a little less than half (that is, a quarter of all the respondents) were able to name the correct brand. It is noteworthy that in the normal Adtrack survey we find that where we do a recall test (prompting with the brand name and asking about the advertisement) the result is very close to the 25 per cent in the above chart that recognized and got the brand name right.

The more significant aspect here, however, is just how much advertising *fails* to make the advertisement–brand linkage. More than half the

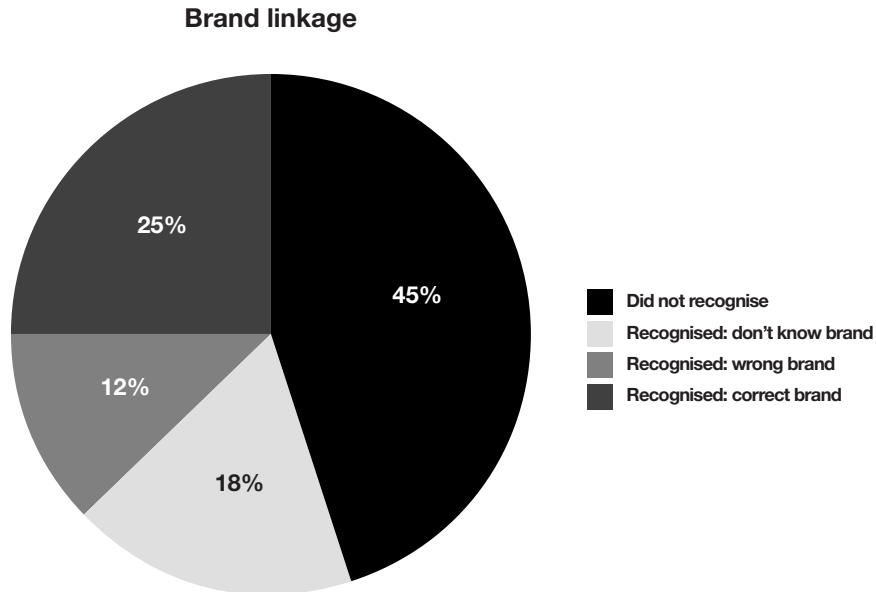


Figure 17.2 *Recognition: respondents who can name a brand once the advertisement has been described*

time, when a respondent recalls the advertisement, he or she cannot recall which brand was being advertised! It is a great waste of the advertising budget if when your advertisement comes to mind, the consumer thinks of your competitor's brand.

Experience has taught us that there can be a number of reasons for poor brand linking. The major culprit, however, remains poor branding in the advertisement.

Stewart and Furse (1986) were the first to develop the concept of 'effective length' of a commercial. They defined this as the length of the commercial from the first moment attention is 'engaged' and the viewer realizes which brand is being advertised. Thus if a 60-second commercial only mentions the brand in the thirtieth second (and the viewer has had no clue which brand is being advertised for those first 30 seconds), its effective length is only 30 seconds.

Impact Information has done the same analysis on its database. Its research too has found that some of the variation in recall from commercial to commercial can be explained by looking at the effective length rather than the real length.

Certainly in South Africa it appears to be fashionable for creative people not to mention the brand early in a commercial. They seem to

think that it spoils their creation. However, it is worth bearing these statistics in mind.

We are not suggesting, however, that every commercial should start with pack shots. There are far more subtle (and indeed, creative) ways of establishing the branding early in a commercial. Very often it is only necessary to have some branding in the background, or to use a part of the 'brand image'. Brand images (which include symbols, logos, advertising themes, slogans, jingles, even just a distinctive 'style') are incredibly useful for advertisers. Once the device has been established, this does the work of establishing the branding. (For example, the moment an actor says 'Wasuup', the branding has been done effectively: the audience will realize that Budweiser is being advertised. A slice of purple silk does the same job for Silk Cut cigarettes.) We come back to branding devices later in the book. However, when an advertiser opts to 'set' the branding of a commercial through a device like this, great care has to be taken in the media scheduling to ensure that the device is well established early in the life of the advertising campaign. This might require high-impact scheduling (our term for very high frequency in the media schedule).

NEUROLOGY

Let us tie these insights into the neurological research we discussed earlier in the book. Remember that the memory of the brand will be used to interpret the advertisement. When brand memories (that is, memories of anything that is associated with the brand, and triggers the concept of the brand) are stimulated at the same time as the memories for the advertisement are laid down, the link between these memories is itself formed.

The longer the synapses between the neurons that embody the brand memories and the advertising memories are stimulated, the stronger the laydown of the link between brand memories and ad-memories will be. If a 60-second commercial includes branding devices in the first second, the brand memories will be stimulated for all 60 seconds. If it only mentions the brand in the fortieth second, the brand memories will only be stimulated for 20 seconds. So once again a whole body of empirical advertising research validates aspects of the neurological model of memory; and the neurological model of memory explains a finding of advertising research for us.

ANECDOTAL EVIDENCE

In the 15 years that I and my company have been tracking advertising awareness we have had some unique experiences, and since the people involved in them have moved on, we can now mention the brands involved.

Kelvinator – a manufacturer of white goods such as washing machines and refrigerators – made a commercial that showed a Ford light delivery vehicle with a lot of cardboard boxes on the back driving up the path to a farmhouse. These were then unloaded and the happy family was shown with all their new Kelvinator appliances. We tracked this commercial for several weeks and could hardly find a respondent who could describe the ad when we mentioned Kelvinator appliances. We then realized that the first brand identification in the commercial was in fact the Ford logo on the delivery vehicle. When we asked respondents if they had seen an advertisement for Ford delivery vehicles, they all described the advertisement with the vehicle delivering stuff to the farmhouse.

In terms of the neurological model of memory it is clear that the first neural network embodying the concept of a brand that was activated was for Ford. The advertisement memory became linked to that in the brain, and even though Kelvinator later got plenty of mentions in the advertisement, the linkages to the Kelvinator brand concept were so much weaker that it really did not register. The problem was easily rectified by getting a touch-up artist to remove the branding from the vehicle.

We had an even more amazing experience when Grey Advertising convinced Nedbank to make an advertisement with no brand mention at all. Up to that stage Nedbank had been running a very powerful campaign where the sign-off line for each advertisement was, ‘Makes you think, doesn’t it?’ Not only had the sign-off line become well known in South Africa, the actor used in all the advertising also became a symbol for the bank, a part of its brand image.

The new campaign did not use the actor or the character he had portrayed, however. In fact, the whole advertising style was changed from a ‘hard sell’ to a ‘softer image-building style’. Right at the end of the advertisement the words ‘Makes you think, doesn’t it?’ appeared on the screen, but nowhere in the advertisement was there an explicit brand mention.

We tracked this commercial for several weeks, reporting that virtually no one remembered seeing a campaign for Nedbank. The agency then decided to increase the frequency of exposure substantially. Unfortunately this did not help – we still found very few respondents were aware of the campaign.

At this stage the client insisted that the brand name be added at the end of the commercial. Our tracking showed no difference in the result.

We asked ourselves why this was, naturally, and our thesis was this. Everybody who was ever likely to see the advertisement had seen it several times by this point, so when it appeared on screen no one thought, 'Aha, this is that ad where I couldn't figure out what on earth was being advertised. I'd better watch it again to see if I can find out who it's for.' Instead, people thought, 'Boring ad, didn't seem to be selling anything I'm interested in, no need to watch it again.' The viewers' attention was lost long before the branding at the end of the advertisements, so naturally it had no effect.

We suggested that Nedbank move the branding to the beginning of the commercial. This worked very well.

Here's another example involving Kelvinator. The company made an advertisement for its twin-tub washing machine showing two baby elephants with nappies playing in the mud, then the mother elephant washing the nappies in the Kelvinator twin-tub machine. This was one of the most liked South African commercials at that stage, and was also well remembered.

However, no Kelvinator twin-tubs were sold, and the firm blamed the advertising. The agency asked us to show the Adtrack results to Kelvinator to demonstrate that the advertisement was well remembered and liked. We thought this would be a difficult meeting, one where we had to save the agency's bacon. It turned out to be very much the opposite – the client was now praising the advertising. What had happened was that Kelvinator had thought the twin-tub was such a neat machine that it had had a logo designed specially for it, showing two hearts. This did in fact appear briefly at the end of the advertisement, but it had nothing to do with the story of the two baby elephants.

The commercial had been launched, and the twin-tubs had gone on promotion nationally with promotional material consisting of the two-heart logo. This was the period during which there were very few sales. Then in between our being called in by the agency and our presenting our research to Kelvinator, the company launched a second promotional cycle for the twin-tubs. This time the promotional material consisted of cardboard elephants. The washing machines had record sales.

This example serves as a nice demonstration of how advertising works at the time of purchase. When the promotional material reminded people of the advertisement at the time they were making purchase decisions, the advertisement had a chance to influence the decision. When it did not, the advertisements, though liked in themselves, had no effect.

White goods are not FMCG products, but it looks like the buyer decision-making process here is very much the same one as Gordon Brown proposed (see Chapter 1). Buyers do not go looking for a specific product that has been advertised. Instead they go looking for a type of product



they want or need to buy; and when they are faced with a choice between brands, the advertising recall can pitch in to affect their decision.

The Adtrack system sometimes measures advertisements that fail to gain much recall despite a good media schedule backing them. The problem is often that the commercial suffers from branding problems. We have, with a lot of success, advised advertisers in this position to try 'high-impact scheduling' – a term we use for a media schedule that flights the advertisement several times during the same time slot, and sometimes even twice during the same commercial break. High-impact scheduling would be wasteful for most advertisements, and is contrary to all media planning theories. However, when a commercial fails to penetrate consumers' memories, it might be all that can be done. It appears that what happens is that the first exposure does the branding for the second exposure.

THE MILLWARD BROWN 'CREATIVE MAGNIFIER'

Not surprisingly, since their basic business is advertisement tracking (just as Adtrack was the basis of Impact's business), Millward Brown has also become very aware of the brand-linking problem that many advertisements experience. It has come up with a rather elegant approach to the problem, called the Creative Magnifier.

The basis behind this development is the realization that people's memories of a television advertisement are seldom equally strong for every second of the commercial. Almost invariably, only a few seconds of the commercial accounts for most of the memories. An often-used example is an advertisement for Harp beer. A guy arrives at a girl's apartment, she goes to make tea, he plays with her dog and its ball, the ball bounces accidentally through the window, and the dog jumps after the ball through the window. The final scene is of the guy and the dog having a Harp beer in the pub. In copy testing most people could remember the dog going through the window, but few could remember that the advertisement was for Harp.

Anybody involved in advertising will have examples of such commercials, where the core creative device is not really linked with the branding, and so heavily overwhelms the branding that everyone remembers the advertisement, but not the brand.

Millward Brown terms the remembered scene the 'creative magnifier', and sees it as having two functions: first, to make the advertising impression memorable, and second, to make a link between that impression and the brand. This concept is generally shown as a V-diagram, as in Figure 17.3.

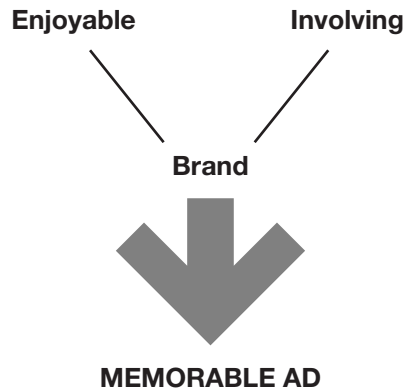


Figure 17.3 *What makes memorable advertising*

Obviously if the creative multiplier does only one of these functions, the advertisement will fail. The extent to which it does both well will be the extent to which the advertisement is 'memorable in the name of the brand'. Obviously, the ideal is that all 30 seconds of a television commercial form the magnifier, not just a few. The extent to which the creative multiplier does its job can be measured quite easily in research.

Again, this fits into the neurological model of memory formation. The creative multiplier is the section of the commercial that attracts attention to it: the section that, as a result, is remembered. But if the *brand* too is to be remembered, it is important that there be laid down a linkage in the brain between the creative multiplier and the concept of the brand. If this does develop, any memory of the creative multiplier will trigger a memory of the brand; but if it does not develop, although the creative multiplier itself will be remembered readily when a trigger is provided, there is no way for this to lead into a strengthening of the brand memory.

That makes a part of my case, I hope: it outlines how we should be looking to design ads that are likeable, to ensure that they attract attention, and that they attract attention to the right thing – that is, the brand that is being advertised. Now I want to look at another core issue for advertisers: just how often we need to repeat this process to ensure that it works.