DO EMOTIONS IN ADVERTISING DRIVE SALES?

USE OF FACIAL CODING TO UNDERSTAND THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ADS AND SALES EFFECTIVENESS

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INTRODUCTION

It is now widely accepted that human emotions play a significant role in driving our decisions, from the type of content we watch to the products and services we buy (LeDoux 2002; Damasio 1994). Physiological changes in our heart rate, posture, facial expression and voice convey emotion responses to the world around us. These responses are encoded in the System 1 brain circuit, the automatic and largely emotional processing system of the brain. When making decisions, our past and current emotion experiences bias our decision-making subconsciously, making emotions an important influencer on our decisions (Loewenstein and Lerner 2003).

FIGURE 1

What types of emotional responses to advertising drive sales? We collected and analyzed over 11,000 facial responses to find out. Images taken are a subset of facial response data collected with permission to share publicly.

Emotions and advertising effectiveness

The role of emotion in marketing and advertising has been considered extensively since early work by Zajonc (1980) who argued that emotions function independently of cognition and can indeed override it. Since then, emotions in advertising have been shown to enhance the emotional connection consumers have with brands (Mehta and Purvis 2006), ad likeability (McDuff, et al. 2013), engagement (Teixeira, Wedel, and Pieters 2010), recall (Hazlett and Hazlett 1999, Ambler and Burne 1999) and decisions to share (virality) (Berger and Milkman 2011). These relationships suggest that a strong link should exist between emotion responses to advertising and sales. By creating ads that surprise, that entertain, and even make you cry, advertisers aim to help you remember the product, build positive associations with the brand and ultimately drive sales.

But are ads that are successful in evoking emotions also successful in driving sales? This is precisely the question MARS Marketing and Affectiva aimed to answer in this research partnership. Like many advertisers, MARS is faced with the challenge of assessing which ads are more likely to be effective from a sales point of view. It is critical to understand why, for instance, only one of two humorous ads that MARS had produced in the Chocolate category succeeded in boosting sales. What are the emotion profiles of the ad that led to sales success?