

Characteristics Of The World's Most Successful TV Advertising

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Now that we have over 55,000 ads covering 90 countries in the Millward Brown database, we are undertaking an analysis to explore the characteristics of the world's most successful TV ads.

In the current economic climate, marketing budgets are being heavily challenged, and now, more than ever, it is vital that advertising is effective, and able to justify the investment required. Learning from this analysis can help provide guidelines for actions and evaluation.

We are able to compare the styles, content, messages and devices associated with the most and least successful ads for each of 31 separate countries. Although there are a few interesting differences, it is clear that there is considerable consistency in what tends to work well around the world.

Two factors that are identified with successful advertising are persuasion and impact. The characteristics that drive the most impactful ads and those that drive the most persuasive ads are shared by the majority of these countries.

Ads with greatest impact

We've long recognized that impactful, memorable advertising aids sales. And impact is reliant on creativity. The most impactful ads are those which stimulate the emotions – ads which communicate in an emotional way, contain humor, and use prominent music (the role of music in stimulating emotions has been recognized for centuries).

However, impact alone is not sufficient; the associations generated by the advertising need to be linked to the brand. There are many ways this can be achieved, but it is of note that ads which contain established branding devices, existing slogans or distinctive creative styles are all more likely to be impactful.

Including celebrities in ads also aids impact – in some countries but not in others.

Most persuasive ads

Ads which generate an immediate interest in a trial are also more likely to generate sales. But such immediate persuasion tends to require strong product news. The majority of the most persuasive ads communicated rational news, with around half of them featuring new brands or variants.

These ads tended to focus closely on the brand news, with the use of voice-overs, showing the product, and demonstrations of the product in use.

In some countries, featuring children in the ad can also aid persuasion. This is most notable in China, and is perhaps related to the one child policy.

Characteristics which can aid impact could hinder persuasion (and vice versa)

There are many differences seen in message, style and ad content between those ads which have the strongest branded memorability and the most persuasive ads. This highlights the challenging task of producing an ad that is both memorable and also highly persuasive. In most cases, factors that affect one might detract from the other.

It is clear that the ad's objectives should be clearly defined. Nonetheless, we do have enough examples of such ads to show that it is possible to achieve both.

Not a formula

Of course, these observations are no recipe for success, because for every pattern there are exceptions – including a child in an ad does not guarantee persuading the viewer. Advertising is not a precise science, and creativity is required to produce great advertising. The structure of the ad is the key. We know that the best ads are those where the most involving elements relate to both the brand and the message.

Different countries use different styles and messages in their advertising

The styles, content, messages and devices of all the ads we have evaluated do vary considerably. They are influenced by the position of the brands in these countries as well as the advertising culture.

Despite these differences, we still see the same characteristics featuring in the most successful ads. For example, a much lower proportion of the ads evaluated from China contained humor compared with those in other countries. The advertising culture and task in China is geared more to the rational and news giving.

However, the humorous ads evaluated from China were significantly more likely to be among those with greatest impact.

The majority of ads we worked on in each country were for established brands. However, around a third of ads in India, Japan and Taiwan, and almost half of all ads in Korea were for newer brands, reflecting the dynamism of these economies.

Similarly, ads with new claims or featuring new products made up a high proportion of ads tested in Asia.

It seems the funniest ad breaks can be found in Sweden, Canada, the Netherlands and the UK where around two thirds intended to be humorous.

In China and Korea this falls to just one third. Canada, the UK, Australia and Turkey had a high proportion of ads with prominent music; however, music is least likely to feature in Indian ads. Slogans featured much less in ads in the Far East than in other countries, least so in Japan, Korea, Taiwan and Thailand.

Finally, while the use of celebrities or their voices was relatively low in most countries, their use is most common in Korea, China and Japan where they featured in around a quarter of all ads.

However, while this does seem to aid impact in some parts of China, the use of celebrities was no more likely to enhance either persuasion or impact in Korea or Japan compared to any other advertising approach