

How social media builds brands

A new wide-ranging study, looking at the effectiveness of ads on Facebook and Instagram, underlines the importance of evaluating digital campaigns using longer-term brand measures such as awareness and affinity rather than just focusing on short-term measures. It's also important to remember that marketing effectiveness is not just about getting a consumer to buy something, it's more about building relationships between consumers and brands

By Professor Andrew Stephen, *Saïd Business School at the University of Oxford*

In recent years, marketers have tended to focus on evaluating the short-term impact of advertising campaigns run on social media channels. Understanding the impact of using social to build a brand in the long term hasn't been a focus – until now. A new study by Saïd Business School, based on Kantar Millward Brown and Facebook data from around the world, shows how important social can be as part of the brand-building process.

It is well established that consumers are more connected than they ever have been. This has happened in large part due to the popularity of social media, as well as the proliferation of smartphones.

The rise of the connected, always-on consumer means marketers now have access to more, and even richer, data. The greater availability of connected consumer data of course has also enabled newer forms of digital marketing, such as precision targeting and real-time, programmatic advertising that shows personalised ads to consumers at, hopefully, the right moments in terms of places, times, and intentions.

Digital advertising is now officially mature – it's been around for more than 20 years. So, while a lot of the current conversation still revolves around performance and sales attribution, we should also be thinking about how digital advertising can be successfully used to build brands. My colleagues and I at the Saïd Business School have recently looked into this with some new research we've conducted in collaboration with Kantar Millward Brown.

Our recent analysis of Kantar Millward Brown's digital ad effectiveness (Marketnorms) data, consisting of over 8,800 global campaigns across many digital channels, looked at the impact of desktop vs. mobile advertising on brand metrics for the seven years up to March 2017. It showed that while brands are now spending more on mobile advertising than desktop advertising, both are now about equally as effective in terms of brand impact. Mobile display effectiveness now shows an average lift across brand metrics of 3.8%, slightly below that of desktop display. Interestingly, over time, the average brand lifts for mobile display ads have varied a lot (whereas desktop, being the more mature format, has been fairly stable over time). In the early

days of mobile advertising, average brand lifts increased, probably because such ads were more novel to consumers at the time. Then, since around 2013, we have seen a decrease in average brand lifts for mobile campaigns up to the present, likely as consumers grew more accustomed to these ads and paid less attention to them. Importantly, though, these ads remain quite effective in a brand-building sense, despite the mobile format now being very much a mature one.

In another study, as part of the Oxford Future of Marketing Initiative (a research-focused consortium of leading marketing academics and companies that we convene at the Saïd Business School), with our partners Kantar and Facebook, we delved deeper into brand building through digital advertising with a specific focus on ads on Facebook and Instagram. Using data from Kantar Millward Brown and Facebook covering brand lift studies on ad campaigns run between 2015 and 2017, we sought to understand when social media ad campaigns are effective in lifting longer-term brand KPIs such as awareness and affinity.

Our research, which is the first study of its kind, examined 235 campaigns across 110 different brands, covering many different countries and product categories. All the campaigns in our study were mobile, and 80% of them included at least one ad unit that was a video. The high percentage of video content in the data set was not surprising, given the push in recent years towards video advertising, particularly on Facebook and Instagram.

The results revealed modest, but significant, average brand lifts. For saliency metrics such as brand awareness, the average lift was 5% (but it ranged between -5% and 30%). Average lifts were smaller for association metrics (e.g. message associations) and motivations (e.g. purchase intentions), being 4% and 2% respectively (and also with wide ranges). The variation

FIGURE 1: HOW BRANDS CAN OPTIMISE SOCIAL MEDIA ADVERTISING

- **Act like a human on social media.**

These findings are hugely important for businesses in understanding how they communicate on social media, with those who interact in a human and emotive manner able to capture greater awareness of their brands and products. It makes sense that if you're trying to be part of a news feed on social media, brands who come across in more human and social ways, lead to more effective ads. Context definitely matters and brands that can play to that context will perform better on average than those that don't.

- **Measure brand impact, not just short-term conversion outcomes.** In times of uncertainty, long-term brand-

building is key, and this study provides marketers with robust evidence that shows digital advertising is an effective means of long-term brand-building. Our results show that social media advertising can be a highly effective channel for driving long-term brand impact.

- **Keep innovating.** Marketers need to continually try out new formats and platforms as they appear to benefit from the brand lift effect: continual platform innovation keeps the experience fresh for consumers. Brands that innovate early on and start experimenting are the ones that are going to be the most successful in the future as they have tested what works and what doesn't.

FIGURE 2: THREE TIPS WHEN ADVERTISING ON SOCIAL MEDIA

- To deliver a human experience through social media, especially on Facebook, it's about being personable and personalising content. Brands who are human and adapt to the social news environment will have a stronger impact than those who don't.

- Advertisers can expect mobile to perform at the same level as desktop, so

marketers should consider their media mix carefully to reach consumers across these channels. The average lift for brand KPIs on mobile is now the same as desktop, so the 'new and shiny' of mobile may have worn off, and desktop is still heavily used for some categories such as travel when people want to look at different flight times on a bigger screen.

- Remember that social media is an opportunity to engage and interact with audiences. Advertising, particularly on social media, is an opportunity for brands to connect with people and build relationships. Talking like a real person is what matters, and this can have positive longer-term brand-building benefits.

in lifts across campaigns was something we then attempted to understand in greater detail. We didn't see strong differences across aspects such as country or category, for instance.

Instead, we decided to consider the brands themselves, based on our thinking that some brands might fit in better in social news feeds than others. In particular, we decided to home in on the extent to

which brands were more or less 'human' in how they positioned themselves and communicated. We figured that in a social environment, ads that do best might be those from brands that come across more as a social person than as a corporate entity.

Using natural language processing and machine-learning techniques, we analysed the advertised brands' own content on Facebook to come up with three scores

that characterised how 'human' each brand in our analysis was. Brands that communicated using more social (as opposed to, for instance, formal) language and used emotional words instead of functional words and phrases, were deemed more 'human' by our algorithms. Examples of brands that scored highly for being more human included haircare brand TRESemmé, beauty brand Dove and some of L'Oréal's brands. Ultimately, we found that the brands that were acting in a more 'human' manner on Facebook were the ones that had higher brand lifts, particularly on upper-funnel brand awareness and saliency metrics.

It seems that the context in which ads are placed still matters, even in social media. The important aspect for brands to remember is that the social news feed is intentionally a very human place (and will be increasingly so as Facebook tweaks its algorithms to try to increase the amounts of social content vs. news and other things in users' feeds). To fit into this human, social context, brands need to act that way too.

CAMPAIGN EVALUATION

This study underlines the importance of evaluating digital campaigns using longer-term brand measures such as awareness and affinity rather than just focusing on short-term measures. It's also important to remember that marketing effectiveness is not just about the end of the process (getting a consumer to buy something), it's more about building relationships between consumers and brands.

Understanding these metrics is fundamentally and strategically important for marketers and, therefore, this becomes the first study of its kind to look at the effectiveness of ads on Facebook and Instagram at this sort of scale, using these sorts of marketing performance outcomes.

For campaigns to reach their full potential, having the right research and evaluation tools is essential to provide valuable data. However, it is equally, if not more, important to have the expertise to interpret this data in order to provide actionable insights.

.....
This article was first published in Admap magazine June 2018 @Warc www.warc.com/admap