

CREATIVE BENCHMARKING: A NEW ANSWER TO AN OLD QUESTION

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1. Background

“Any activity becomes creative when the doer cares about doing it right, or better.” John Updike

Media engagement is a hot topic, everyone is looking for an engaging media context but, just as importantly, the advertising itself needs to live up to the reading environment, to engage and involve.

Print advertising has traditionally been viewed as the poor relation to TV in terms of both creative investment and research. While we understood that the quality of the creative is the key driver of success, without a body of evidence to turn to, many clients and agencies found it hard to achieve outstanding creative work for the medium. In fact we found that this was the biggest barrier to clients using newspaper advertising.

In the UK the NMA were increasingly asked *“what makes a good ad?”* and *“do you have any examples?”*

Our solution was to develop Creative Benchmarking, the UK’s largest database of consumer response to national newspaper advertising (21,860 interviews and 800 ads in the first 18 months of its existence). In the field for almost two years at the time of writing we measure newspaper ads on a continuous basis and are rapidly building our understanding. The study provides advertisers with robust measurement of, and insight into, the performance of their own advertising and that of their competitors.

Since its inception we’ve developed the study; we add, adapt and develop new measures and new ways of analysing the data on a regular basis. With a large pool of ads and respondents we’re now able to apply more sophisticated multivariate analysis to really get under the skin of what makes great newspaper advertising in each category.

In this paper we outline the approach we have taken, our key learnings from the work to date and take a look at some real life case studies to see the work in action.

2. The approach: an overview

Our aims with the research were to focus on the *creative* rather than the media effects of the campaigns. The NMA already work extensively with Millward Brown on a series of cross media campaign evaluations to further our understanding of how newspaper advertising works alongside other media.

Most important is the *benchmarking* aspect to the study. We have now built a database of over 800 different ads across 14 different categories. Advertisers are able to identify how their own ad performs versus the overall norms, norms within their category and directly against their competitors. The full database is updated and reported upon monthly via a web reporting tool contained on the NMA website. Anyone can log on, search and create their own reports based on specific ads. As we build the database we’ve been able to dig into further analysis to help identify consistent patterns – what drives success overall and what are the differences by category?

Our aim is to assess reactions as *close to real life* as possible. Each month new ads are added to the survey so that readers’ responses are collected soon after initial exposure and often while campaigns are still live. The ads are shown to respondents in situ to reflect the environment in which they appeared and then solus on screen so that they are able to see the ad in full.

Our core metrics are based on an *established approach* (Kantar’s AdEval™) and transferable across different media channels. However we have customised additional questions to be sensitive to the medium and add depth and diagnostics that are relevant for newspapers and the role they play.

Finally, the mechanics of the study are carried out via a fast and cost effective solution underpinned by a highly automated, *efficient “machine”*. Data collection is online with much of the inner workings automated so that inputs and outputs are quickly and efficiently processed each month.

In the following sections we add some detail to the approach and give examples of how the study has been applied.

3. The measures

It was important to us that we could use metrics that were understood and accepted by the industry and that reflected the different aspects of advertising in the newspaper medium. Ideally we needed an approach that could be transferred to other platforms (reflecting newspapers’ migration to other forms of digital advertising) and that could be compared to other media such as TV.

3.1. AdEval™ - involvement and motivation

Our solution was to use Kantar’s AdEval™ approach as our core measure of response. AdEval™ was developed by TNS and is used around the world to evaluate advertising both as a pre-testing tool and as part of campaign evaluation. While much of the work has been around TV advertising it had been used extensively for print and was seen to be readily transferable across other media.

Our premise is that effective advertising is that which cements, reinforces or helps create a positive relationship between the brand and the consumer. So the key measures are not recall but those relating to the relationship with the brand itself and its positioning for the consumer. Does it *involve* them personally and does it *motivate* them - to feel more positively about it, find out more about it, or buy it? Great newspaper advertising creates involvement with the reader and motivates them to feel closer to the brand or to buy/find out more.

We use 6 simple questions to derive Involvement and Motivation scores for each ad:

Involvement = Positive answer to 2 out of 3:

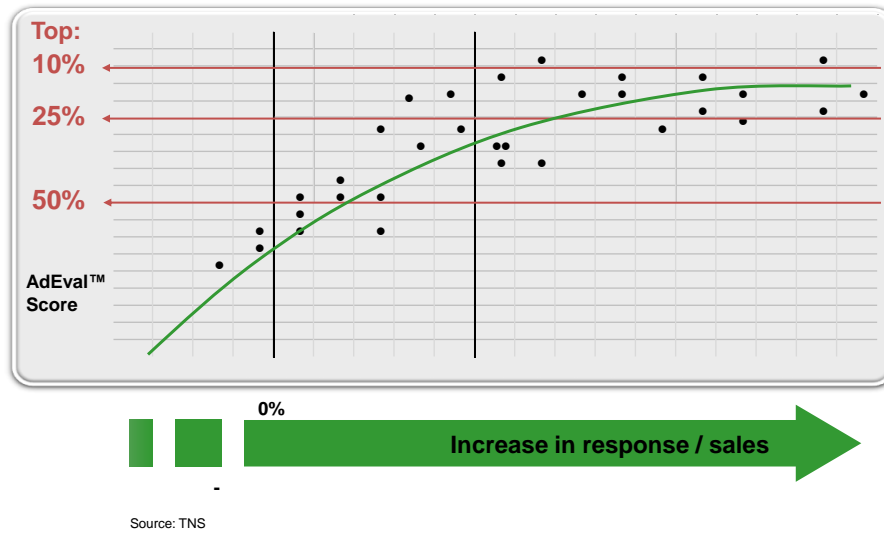
- *People like you would like this advert?*
- *Would like to see the ad again some time?*
- *Gives feeling that what was said about the brand was worthwhile?*

Motivation = As well as being involved, positive answers to 2 out of 3 of:

- *Increased interest in using the brand?*
- *Improved opinion of the brand?*
- *Would mention points/impressions from ad in conversation?*

Involvement therefore relates to how the consumer relates to the ad while *motivation* moves it on a stage. The metrics have been used on hundreds of ads worldwide and from past validation analysis that TNS carried out on those measures we know that there’s a link between brand advertising that creates high levels of motivation and levels of sales for those brands.

Figure 1: AdEval™ - a proven measure: the link between “motivation” and sales



The summary measure that we use as our key comparator across ads is therefore the AdEval™ motivated/involved score. It is expressed as a percentage of all respondents and therefore represents all of those that qualify as either involved or motivated by the ad. It has proved highly discriminating, to date the range of scores across all ads tested is from 20% to 85%.

3.2. Measures to add understanding and actionability

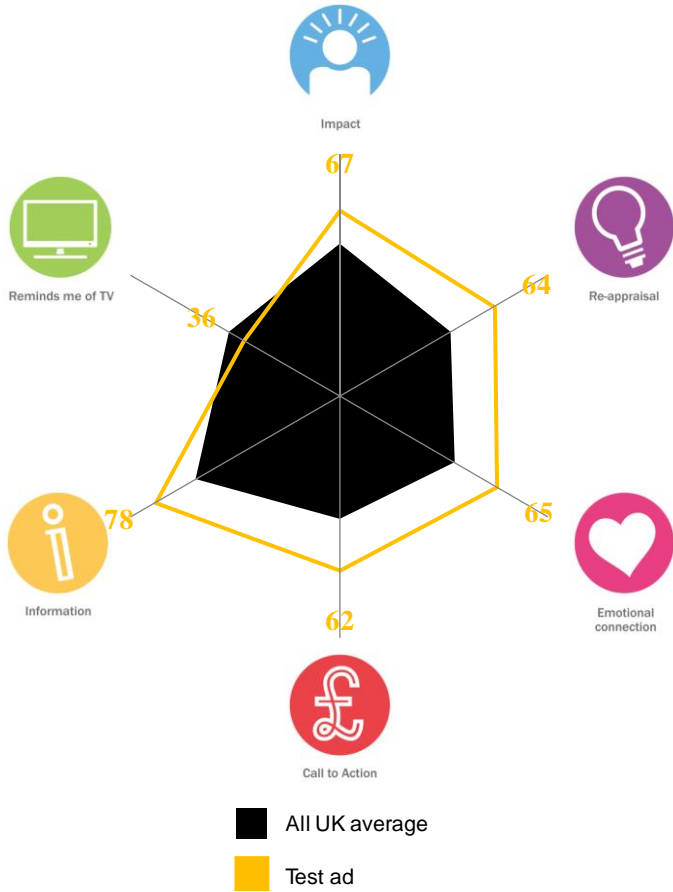
Beyond this core measure of involvement and motivation we have developed a series of questions that add diagnostic understanding and enable all of our varied users an actionable means for using the study.

Rolemap: impact and the strategic roles that newspaper advertising plays

These questions represent the impact and the varied strategic roles that newspaper advertising can play, from building brand connections to giving a clear call to action. An example of this is given below showing an ad for Green and Blacks ice cream, a recent strong performer vs the UK average for each measure.

Figure 2: Impact and Role for Advertising – Green and Blacks vs all UK ads





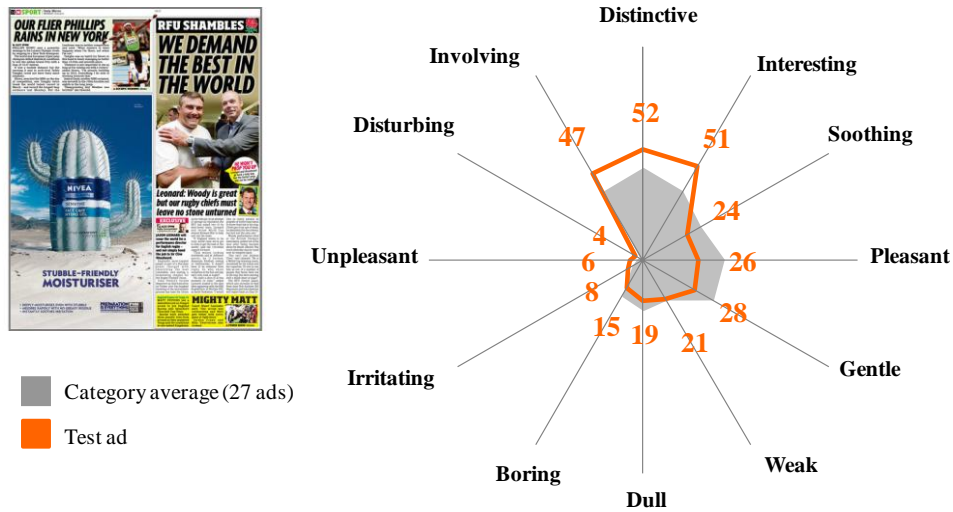
These measures have been on the survey from the start and have proved a useful diagnostic tool and a means of assessing performance against the overall communication strategy. More recently we have added further questions to add depth to this interpretation.

Advertising diagnostics and engagement

We have added these measures in 2011 in order to help to build a better understanding of how the creative itself is performing. The diagnostics relate directly to the creative and cover measures such as “eye catching”, “looks cluttered and/or confusing” or “has striking pictures/visuals”. The engagement measures add a further dimension to give an understanding of consumer take out of the emotional positioning. Each of these has enhanced our ability to provide deeper understanding for creatives.

The ‘involvement diagnostics wheel’ (see Figure 3) shows how actively engaging adverts are perceived to be by consumers. Respondents choose one word from a set of 4 words to best describe the advert. The preferred territory is generally the top of the wheel, where descriptors are both active and positive.

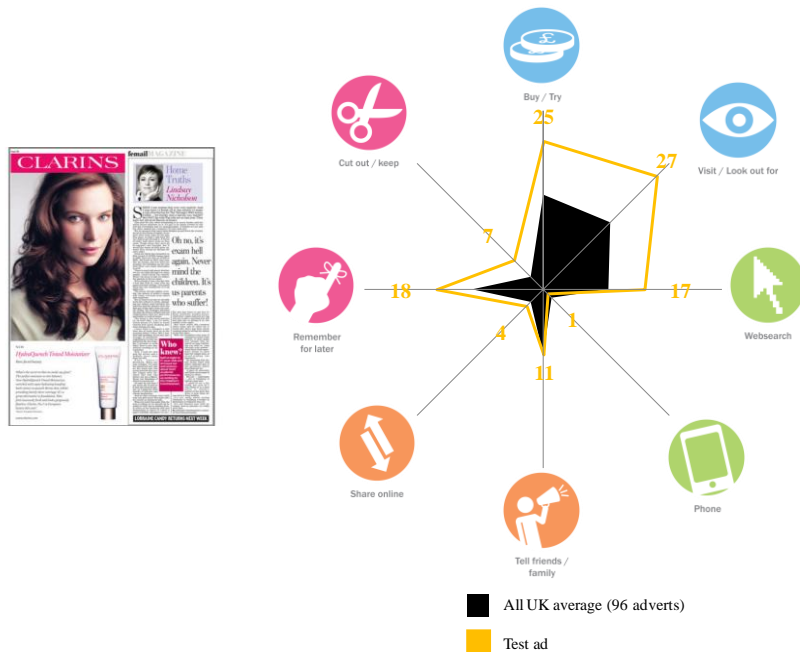
Figure 3: Involvement diagnostic measures – Nivea moisturiser vs cosmetics & personal care average



Action map

Newspaper advertising has long been recognised as a powerful medium in delivering a call to action. Increasingly though it is becoming clear that consumers’ paths to purchase are complex and often non-linear. As media inter-relate and the impact of mobile and social media grow we need to understand a whole range of different ways in which consumers react to and act upon newspaper advertising. Our “Action Map” questions are another more recent addition and allow us to plot people’s responses to newspaper advertising and the likely course of action they’ll take, providing vital feedback for creative development in order to meet communication objectives.

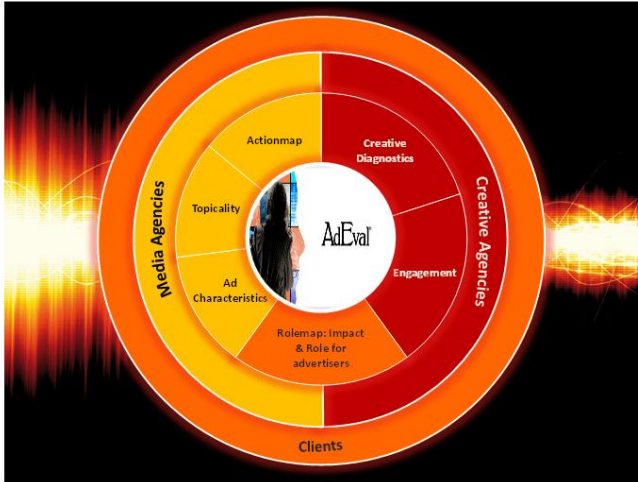
Figure 4: Action Map measures – Clarins HydraQuench Tinted Moisturiser vs UK average



Alongside these respondent derived measures we also code up the ads themselves by physical characteristics (size, colour vs black and white), topicality, use of celebrity in the ad etc.

The study is designed to be both flexible and actionable for different users. Media agencies will focus on the actions taken and ad characteristics while creative agencies can dig into the diagnostics and emotional positioning. AdEval™ and the roles for advertising are used by all.

Figure 5: Actionability for our varied users – how different parts of Creative Benchmarking are used



We regularly review what works and what additional insights we can add as the study evolves and we are in regular contact with others around the world who are also exploring similar themes. Most relevant of these is the Australian study which operates on very similar lines (run by the Newspaper Works in Australia).

4. Learnings

The study has been running for almost two years and in that time we have been able to explore many different themes. For example we've been able to demonstrate the way in which good newspaper creative can build a strong emotional connection with readers and to provide examples of ads where this has worked well. This is key for a medium that can be wrongly pigeon holed as performing only as a direct response or information-giving vehicle. The ability to emotionally engage with readers and build brands is clearly seen in many of our best performing ads to date.

We've been able to look at creative that reflects and builds on TV campaigns and for some creative to find examples of both the newspaper and TV execution. We have also built a series of special studies around key topical events such as sporting or seasonal events. In this way we can demonstrate the unique values that newspaper advertising can bring by tapping into the collective mood around key events and topical issues.

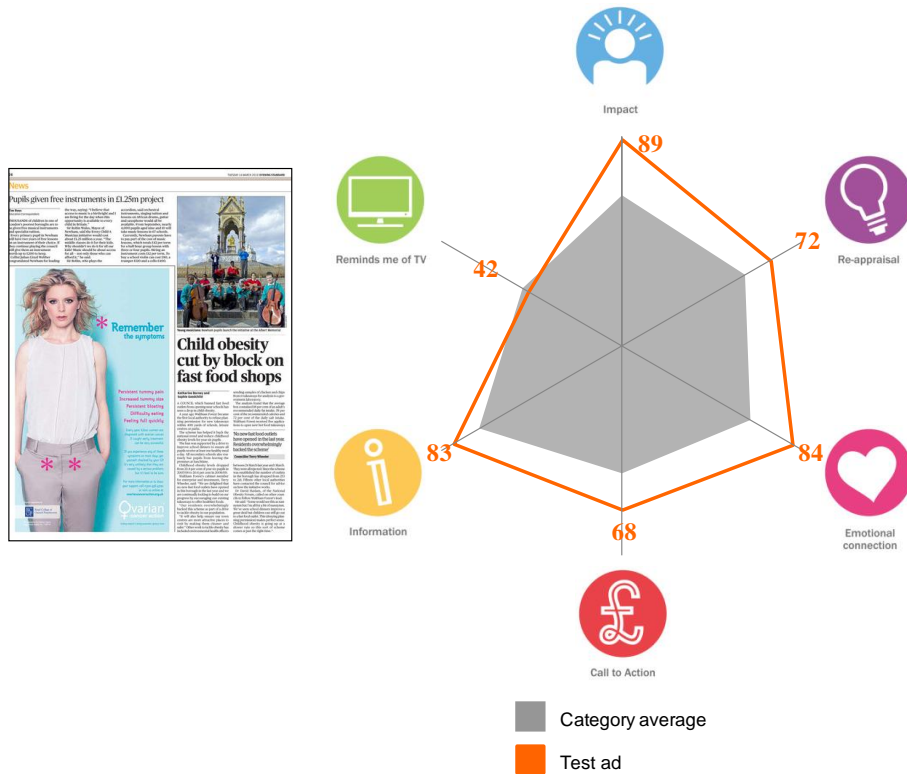
4.1. Some topline examples from the database

As mentioned earlier the motivated/involved scores show high levels of discrimination from 20% to 85% to date.

The top scoring ad to date is a powerful ad to highlight the symptoms of Ovarian cancer tested among women only. This execution was one of the first tested but remains at the top of the list over a year later¹. It achieves an overall involved/motivated score of 84%.

Figure 6: Top ad on motivated/involved – Ovarian Cancer Action – tested March 2010

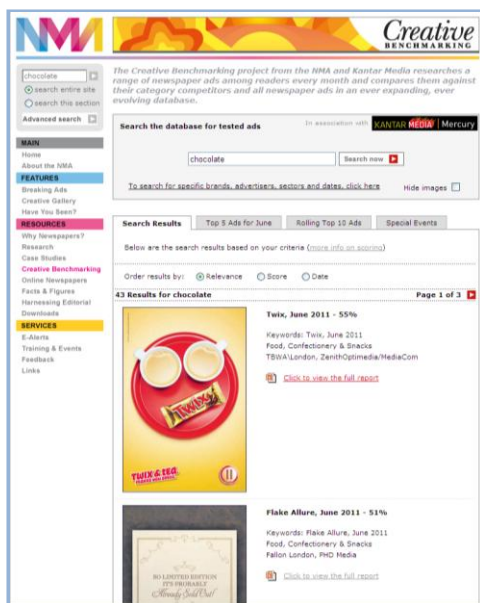
¹ We also test campaigns with several ads some of which have tested at this level or slightly higher, this is the highest scoring single execution tested to date



This ad succeeded in getting readers to stop and look and in provoking reappraisal, clearly a key objective for the campaign. It was 38% more effective than others in the same category at making an emotional connection with the reader (84% vs 61%). Alongside it clearly generates a strong call to action, higher than others in the category with 68% agreeing that it gives them a reason to take action.

Our users can readily access all of the information we collect with a searchable reporting system that sits on the NMA website (see Figure 7).

Figure 7: A searchable database of all ads tested



In this way users can identify their own brand, competitors or ads in a particular category as well as looking at the top performers overall. Each report summarises all the key measures against the benchmarks collected to date for every ad.

4.2. Digging deeper

With a wealth of ads covered and a significant base of interviews we’ve started to analyse the data in more depth, to understand any themes or patterns that could help us advise our clients on their best creative strategy in each category. Some fascinating insights have emerged.

Our first step was to conduct some correlation and key driver analysis on the database so that we could identify those aspects of the advertising that were really driving readers to engage. Throughout our analysis we’ve used our summary measure of involvement/motivation as our key dependent variable. We then carried out a correlation analysis using the advertising metrics and those that describe the physical characteristics of the ad itself (size, colour etc). A summary of the variables with the closest relationship with motivated/involved is summarised below.

Figure 8: What drives effectiveness? Correlation analysis to identify the strongest relationships with motivated/involved score

| Variable | Correlation with Motivated/Involved Score (shown as correlation coefficient) |
|--|--|
| <i>Emotional connection:</i> Helps me to connect and identify more strongly with the brand | 0.66 |
| <i>Call to action:</i> Gives me a reason to go out and buy /take further action | 0.65 |
| <i>Impact:</i> I would stop and look at rather than turning the page | 0.65 |
| <i>Re-appraisal:</i> Surprising and gets me to think differently | 0.63 |
| <i>Depth of information:</i> Gives me enough information to decide | 0.50 |
| <i>Reminds me of TV:</i> Reminds me of the TV adverts | 0.46 |
| Branding clarity | 0.38 |
| <i>Public agenda :</i> Makes an important issue or cause more relevant to me ² | 0.30 |

While this gave us a great steer on the most important themes and objectives for newspaper advertising to fulfil this was only a start, the analysis was still quite blunt. In fact we found that several of our measures were closely correlated with each other, they effectively shared some common meaning for respondents. We therefore took the decision to take the analysis forward using a regression analysis this draws apart the individual variables so that we can see the relative impact that each has in isolation.

So if we apply the regression analysis across all ads tested we see that the single most important aspect to get right is *impact* – an ad must get readers to stop and look. Beyond this we found that a clear call to action – giving readers a reason to buy or take action – is also highly significant as is establishing an emotional connection with the brand and that the branding in the ad is clear.

Figure 9: What drives effectiveness? Key drivers from regression analysis across all ads covered

| Variable | Regression co-efficients |
|--|--------------------------|
| <i>Impact:</i> I would stop and look at rather than turning the page | 0.24 |
| <i>Call to action:</i> Gives me a reason to go out and buy /take further action | 0.21 |
| <i>Emotional connection:</i> Helps me to connect and identify more strongly with the brand | 0.19 |
| Branding clarity | 0.16 |
| <i>Re-appraisal:</i> Surprising and gets me to think differently | 0.08 |
| <i>Public agenda :</i> Makes an important issue or cause more relevant to me | 0.02 |

² Used only on ads with a public agenda message or theme e.g. government information advertising

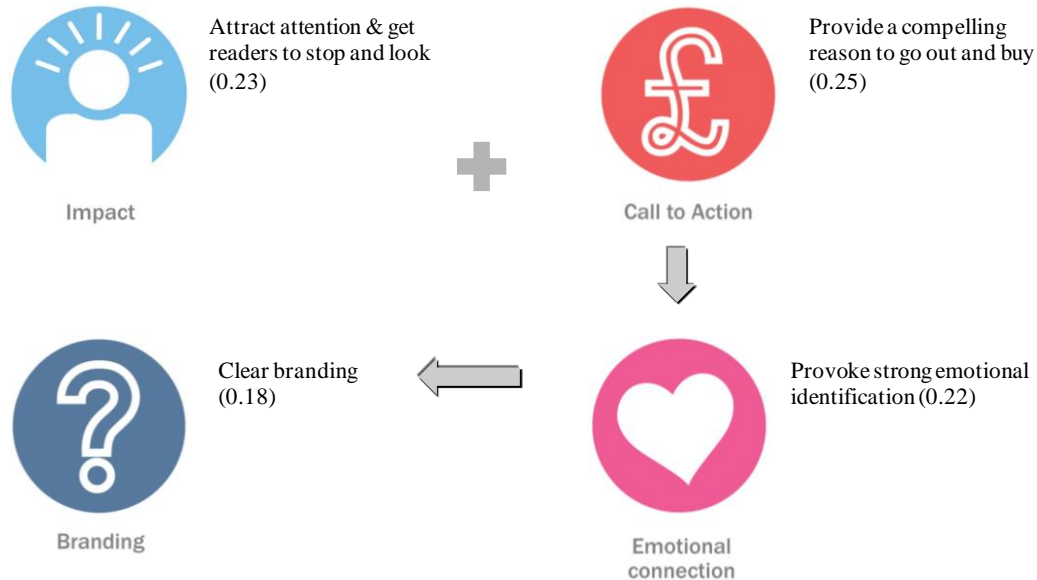
When we compared categories we identified interesting differences in the data. For example for ads in the motors category “impact” is the single most important determinant (0.27) and establishing a strong emotional connection with the brand is also key (0.21) whereas having a strong call to action is relatively unimportant (0.14). In categories where purchasing is frequent for example food, cosmetics and personal care or in the retail category itself having a strong call to action in the ad is *the* most important driver of success.

4.3. The research in action: cosmetics and personal care

So, while there are learnings to be drawn across the entire study, we see some interesting differences by advertising category. In this way we can develop a deeper understanding of what works for our clients and to identify specific case studies for individual brands. In this section we look in depth at cosmetics and personal care advertising. The ads were taken from those appearing in newspapers between January 2010 and April 2011. Of the total 663 ads tested in this period 77 were from the cosmetics and personal care category (with around 100 respondents per ad).

So what are the keys to unlocking great creative in this category?

Figure 10: Key steps to ad effectiveness for cosmetics and personal care ads

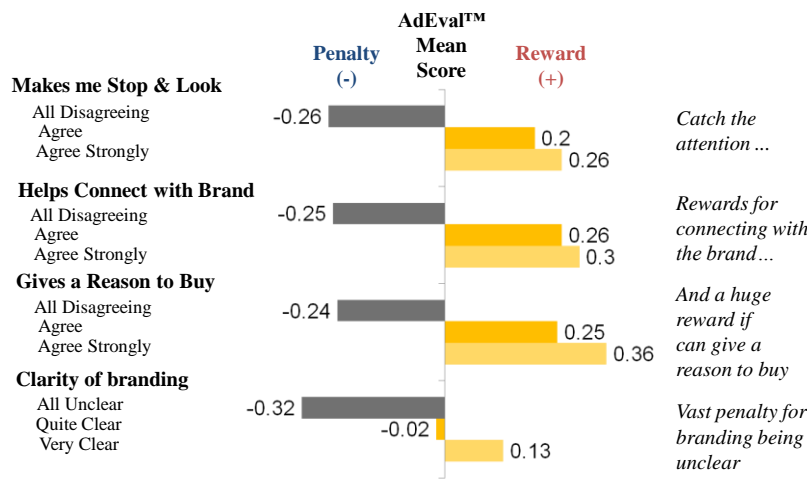


Consistent across all categories is the need for creative to attract attention so that readers stop and look. However, for cosmetics and personal care brands *the* most important driver of effectiveness is giving the reader a *reason to take action* – to go out and buy. There is a similar story across other FMCG categories such as retail or food where purchasing is relatively frequent and a clear call to action can be a compelling message. This could be a message about the product itself (a clear benefit and proof), special offer or something that is topical (suncream is great example).

Creating a strong *emotional connection* with the brand is also important for cosmetics and personal care ads. Clearly then the *clarity* of that branding is also vital, to make it easy for readers to know who is talking to them.

If we look at these factors in more depth we can identify the relative reward of getting them right vs the penalty in failing to deliver (Figure 8). This analysis shows how by improving one variable we can identify the amount of “reward” we would see in overall engagement (the motivated/involved score) or alternatively, if an ad fails to deliver on a key metric, what is the “penalty” on overall reactions?

Figure 11: “Penalty-Reward” analysis on cosmetics and personal care ads



So in this category, while there is little positive enhancement for branding being clear, the penalty should that branding be unclear is significant. It’s a hygiene factor but a very important one. Advertisers have a very short time, just a matter of seconds to grab attention and stop people from moving on. We have found this to be especially important for brands that are less familiar to consumers. In fact most ads in this category are considered to be well branded, on average 83% say the branding is clear (vs the average across all ads of 79%).

The greatest rewards are reaped when the ad clearly gives a reason for the reader to go out and take action. The cosmetics and personal care ads we have tested score well on this key measure – on average 46% of respondents agreed that the ad gave them a reason to take action vs 41% for UK ads tested. The oral care ads we’ve tested scored highest of all with an average of 57% across the 12 ads we’ve tested. One of the best examples, for Oral B is shown overleaf, 63% of respondents agreed that it “gives me a reason to buy or take action”.



What is fascinating is that in this category having a powerful reason to go out and buy is particularly important for women, it is 33% higher as a driver than for men. In this category rational, hard based evidence is *the* most important factor for women rather than emotional arguments and branding. This finding tallies with other research that we have done in this category in the past. Women are highly interested in the scientific evidence behind toiletries and cosmetic products. There is a huge requirement from them for evidence of scientific claims and therefore a clear role for newspapers to provide objective verification.

Figure 12: Findings from Cosmetics and Personal Care study- the importance of facts and objective verification for women



Source: BMRB/Cosmetics & Toiletries Sep08 (Women 1378)

For cosmetics and personal care products brand values and identification are key. Consumers want brands that they can trust to deliver but importantly also those with which they can personally identify. The ability for an ad to create an emotional connection with the reader is therefore an important driver of success. Indeed it is more important for ads in this category than for newspaper ads overall (regression co-efficient of 0.22 vs 0.19). In fact, as we will see, it is the single most important driver for brands targeting men.

It can be created in a number of ways: from shocking people with new information (Corsodyl ad below) to feeling good and confident (Nivea) and demonstrating a sense of humour (Head and Shoulders).

Figure 13: Ads with a strong emotional connection (Agree "It helps me to connect and identify more strongly with the brand")



Interestingly, while men may like to think that they make rational choices in this category the most important driver for a successful ad is to establish emotional connection. Men's ad responses are more emotionally driven than women's in all categories and this difference is even more marked in the cosmetics and personal care category. This fits in with work we conducted in the past into the men's grooming market which showed that the way in which a rational benefit was expressed emotionally, the tone of voice and brand personality were highly important factors. This is a difficult category to get right for men, it is fraught with difficulties around perceived masculinity. We have found that the more "feminine" the product, e.g. moisturisers, the greater the requirement to balance with strong masculine cues.

Figure 14: Cosmetics and Personal Care Advertising - key drivers by gender

| | Overall category | Men | Women |
|---|------------------|-------------|-------------|
| Impact: I would stop and look at rather than turning the page | 0.23 | 0.23 | 0.23 |
| Call to action: Gives me a reason to go out and buy /take further action | 0.25 | 0.21 | 0.28 |
| Emotional connection: Helps me to connect and identify more strongly with the brand | 0.22 | 0.24 | 0.21 |
| Branding clarity | 0.18 | 0.18 | 0.18 |
| Re-appraisal: Surprising and gets me to think differently | 0.05 | 0.04 | 0.06 |

(Shown as regression coefficients)

Ads created for Nivea have performed particularly strongly on this aspect. For example, the left hand ad shown below appeared in the Daily Mirror in June this year and tested well above the overall norms. Agreement that the ad was effective at establishing a connection with the brand was also well above average for men at 63% (vs 46% for the category overall).



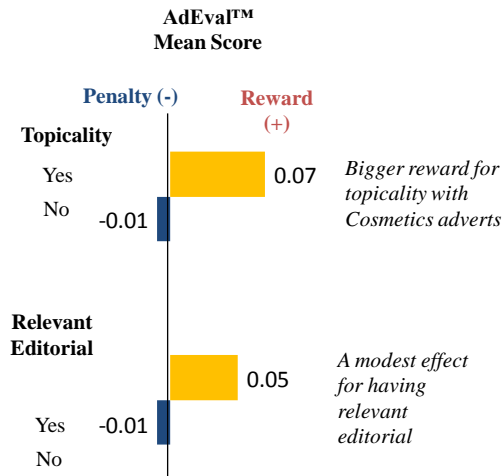
Sport or other energetic activity, the harshness of exterior factors such as weather (especially for sportsmen) and creating the problem rather than an internal need for pampering all work well. We have also found that executional factors such as the use of strong bold packaging, giving a sense of invigoration and “tough” cues in the visuals all enhance ad performance. The right hand ad above with its clear sporting references ran in advance of England’s build up to the 2010 World Cup and demonstrates many of these factors, it achieved high levels of emotional connection for the brand (61%).

Media factors: the icing on the cake

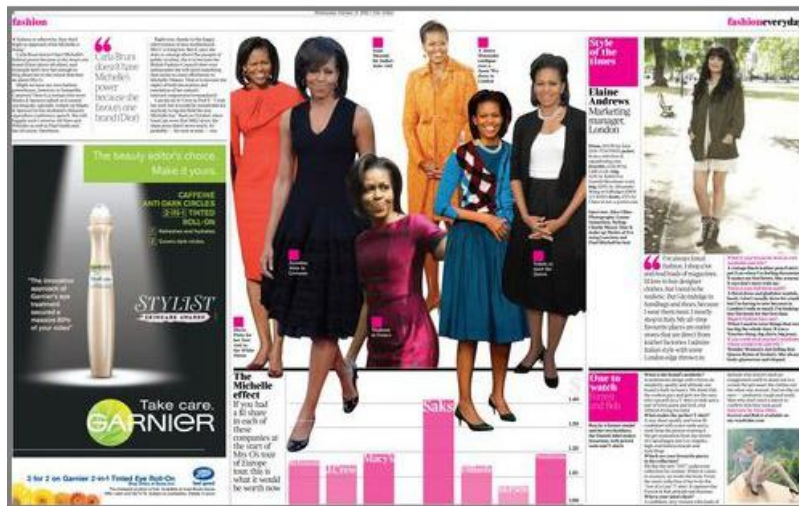
The Creative Benchmarking study is not designed to measure media factors specifically, our focus is on the strength of the creative rather than the media plan. However, we do know that environment and placement will have an impact on the way in which the creative is received. Within the study we code up ad characteristics: the size of the ad, use of colour vs black and white, placement in relevant editorial and topicality.

In the cosmetics and personal care category we have found that placing the ad in relevant editorial and reflecting topical issues can really enhance performance. Of course creative treatment far outweighs these influences but they can have a small but significant impact in boosting effectiveness.

Figure 15: The Impact of Media Characteristics (Cosmetics and Personal Care)



Placing the ad in relevant editorial has some enhancing impact and therefore worth considering at the strategic planning stage. Those that had appeared in relevant pages scored on average 58% motivated/involvement vs the category average of 54%. Here we see an example of where this treatment has worked very well:



We also know that newspapers are ideal vehicles for tapping into the public mood and providing the flexibility to react fast to events in the news. Ads might be planned in advance or created on the hoof to quickly capitalise on events; whether that's big sporting occasions like the Olympics, World Cup or Wimbledon or big news stories such as the Icelandic volcanic ash cloud, swine flu or the British royal wedding in 2011. By tapping into the collective mood and juxtaposing advertising with highly relevant editorial advertisers can leverage the advantage that newspapers bring.

Topicality is certainly significant in this category both in terms of tapping into current events and being able to react to changes in season and consumer demand (for example for sunscreen). Ads that have a topical element score an average of 58% vs 54% motivated/involvement for the category overall.

We have done a significant amount of testing around big sports events and this example is a good one providing stand out and relevance at a time of heightened awareness and emotion last year's football World Cup.

Topicality isn't restricted to sports events. The ad shown below was shown at the time of the 2010 general election when for the first time in British history the three main party leaders participated in a series of televised head to head debates. Again this ad also benefits from the highly relevant editorial context around it.

5. New developments

So where do we go next? The study is constantly evolving with new questions added in 2011 and benchmarks being built around them. Our multivariate analysis is being applied across the categories so that we can take new learnings to the market in each. Our colleagues across the Kantar network are also applying the core approach to work that they do for media owner clients so that in time there will be learnings from many markets around the world.

The most significant development is moving the study to cover digital advertising. Newspapers are rapidly becoming multiplatform, no longer is their advertising and readership confined to print but increasingly online, via apps on tablets or mobile phone access. The creative treatment of an ad to engage, encourage response and build brand perceptions is just as important in the digital environment as in print. However, the reading environment and the media environment will be different. Digital creates different challenges and opportunities – the role of increased targeting, the ability to click through, the range of different formats and use of rich media.

We are in the throes of adapting the current print model to online newspapers. The questionnaire is readily adaptable and the framework itself can be replicated to cover online ads. We have carried out initial tests on the number of ads that we can test with respondents and are developing a means of representing rich media ads within a realistic environment online. Our plans are to launch this new development in the coming months and thereby create a new pool of benchmarks while maintaining consistency with the print version so that we can make direct comparisons and parallels.

6. Summary

One of the most valuable aspects of the Creative Benchmarking study is the sheer number of ads we've been able to test on what it is a relatively cost effective and time efficient basis. It has given us a significant body of evidence that we've been able to analyse in some depth in order to generate both specific and generic learnings for our clients. Certainly in the UK this is the first time that we've been able to apply such findings on such a wide ranging and rigorous basis.

The study is dynamic and continually evolving as we build benchmarks across category and add to both the survey coverage and analytics that we can apply. Plans for the next year will move it into the digital environment so that we can truly represent the range of advertising that newspaper publishers now deliver.

The study has been conducted very much on an "open source" basis. Reports are available to generate on the NMA website with an intuitive and searchable database facility. It is designed to be highly actionable for all potential users, for application to both creative development and media planning. After a year and a half we've started to see a genuine improvement in the quality of the creative in newspapers. Clients who have actively deployed the learnings are seeing a real uplift in performance. It is effectively raising the standards of newspaper advertising in the UK. Most of all, we've been able to put print on a level playing field with TV, giving clients the same level confidence in its delivery.

References

The Newspaper Works, Australia: Creative Benchmarking study