

# 10

## Believability sticks

### ORIENTATION

Yes, trust is the emotion of business. And being an emotion, trust is in essence a gut check that in this case weighs the potential gain of buying the offer against both the certain loss of cash (the offer's price) and uncertainty about whether or not the promised gain, the advertised gain, will in reality prove to be true. In other words, this final chapter of *About Face* is about persuasion and purchase intent, ie our internal, emotional battle between trust and reassurance versus scepticism about being over-promised.

While many factors enter into persuasion, the code word for making money, it's tempting to give clients a definite answer to the question 'Will this ad help me sell more?' But in reality it's not as simple as that because of factors like brand equity, price and distribution. Nevertheless, armed with facial-coding results I'll provide a sense of what ads appear to sell better – and why – using as my organizing principle three types of ads: argument, endorsement and narrative.

### THE BATTLE BETWEEN BELIEF AND PERVASIVE SCEPTICISM

Assertions of trustworthiness are everywhere in advertising. A Reynolds Wrap ad promises, 'Trust every delicious morsel to Reynolds.' A Duracell ad says, 'Trusted everywhere'. Not to be outdone, the computer consulting firm EDS states, 'Trust is not given, it's earned, and EDS earns that trust a million times a day.'

### ***Careful handling: hitting all the right notes***



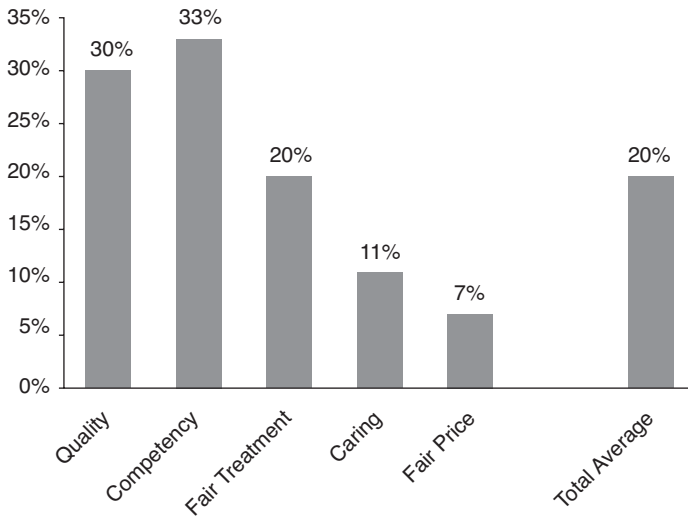
Advertising that can credibly claim that your precious belongings will be carefully treated can help to build market share, being persuasive by building trust.

The good news for companies is that we have an innate desire to trust, to find an ally, to believe in benevolent goodwill. How else to account for the fact that simply asserting trustworthiness – one time, in a single line of text – could lift research scores dramatically? The test in question involved a fictitious automobile service firm called TriStar Auto Care. Sixty undergraduates rated their degree of faith in TriStar, based on ads that did or didn't end with the statement, 'You can trust us to do the job for you.'<sup>1</sup>

Amazingly, adding this simple line lifted trust/confidence ratings by 20 per cent on average.

### ***What simply asserting your trustworthiness can do for a company***

However, there's also plenty of bad news when it comes to the issue of trust and advertising. In another study, a combination of undergraduate and graduate business students were asked to imagine themselves in the shoes of a fictitious character named Dave. Then test participants had four different scenarios described to them, involving two variables (the taste of the pizza advertised, and the amount of advertising exposure prior to eating it):



What kind of company is TriStar? By asserting its trustworthiness in a single line of copy, the company saw its quality and competency score climb by 30 per cent or more: further proof that trust is, indeed, the emotion of business.

- 1st scenario. The pizza is advertised only once, as tasty; and when it is eaten, the pizza proves to be tasty.
- 2nd scenario. The pizza is advertised only once, as tasty; but in fact tastes lousy.
- 3rd scenario. Prior to eating the pizza, test participants are exposed to advertising about the pizza three times. The pizza is advertised as tasty; and in fact is tasty.
- 4th scenario. Prior to eating the pizza, test participants are exposed to advertising about the pizza three times. The pizza is advertised as tasty; but in fact tastes lousy.

So what were the results of this test? Scepticism rules. In scenario three, where the pizza was as good as the advertising promised but the test participants were exposed three times to advertising for the pizza, they became nearly as sceptical as participants were in scenario four (when the pizza actually tasted bad). The conclusion? Scepticism serves as a coping mechanism, a way of pushing back, in reaction to a barrage of advertising – no matter how honest the advertising proves to be. Only good pizza rarely advertised (scenario one) helped to lower disbelief.<sup>2</sup>

*I think advertising has to respect women and our intelligence. Don't tell us an air freshener is going to transform our lives. I don't have a problem with advertising, but I want to find out about things via advertising in an honest way.*

Carrie Longton, co-founder, Mumsnet Ltd

Should that single test result worry advertisers? Yes, because other consumer feedback, such as surveys, has documented similar problems with scepticism. Earlier in this book, I referred to one US survey that found that under 10 per cent of us say we believe in (company/product) information that we learn from advertising. Welcome to a credibility gap that has reached crisis proportions.<sup>3</sup>

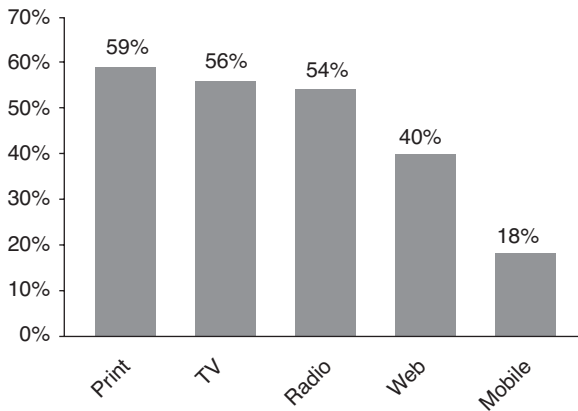
Meanwhile, overseas advertising does no better. In a global survey, the A C Nielsen company found word of mouth, not advertising, to be by far the most believable source of information about products or services. At the same time, however, Nielsen also found variances in levels of trust of ads by region and country.<sup>4</sup> The survey involved 47 countries, with each country's trust levels aggregated here by continent.



Across all of the regions shown here, our average trust level in advertising is only 53.6 per cent. Put another way, only half of us regard advertising as truthful.

So the sceptical pizza-eating students were hardly an anomaly. Doubt runs rampant. At the same time, the A C Nielsen survey found that trust levels also vary widely according to marketing medium. If newspaper and magazine

ads are combined to form the print category, and everything from brand websites to search engine and online banner ads are grouped in the internet category, then here's a five-category comparison:



Want your ad to be believed? Then print's your best bet, with TV and radio spots close behind. What's least trusted? For now, the answer is getting advertised to on your mobile device.

In summary, trust is a scarce commodity. Even your supposedly best combination here – using print, in Africa – would only get you into the 60 per cent range. Clearly, the goal of creating persuasive advertising presents a big challenge, but let's not give up. There's more to be said on the topic.

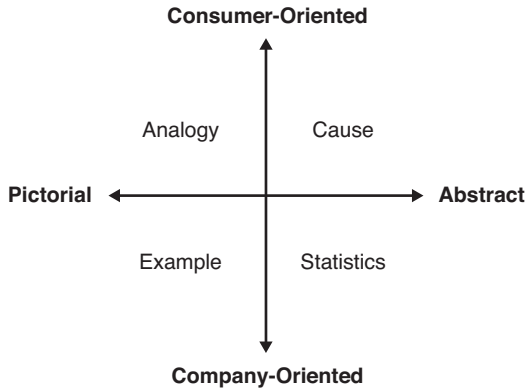
## DEFINING THE TYPES OF ADVERTISING

Erik du Plessis of Millward Brown has argued that 'Advertisements that work are advertisements that are liked.'<sup>5</sup> Is likeability the key? It's important, yes. But common sense would suggest that it's hardly determinant of an ad's success in the marketplace. I might enjoy watching a funny TV spot, for instance. But does that mean I'm now going to rush off to buy the offer being advertised?

In a moment, I'd like to use facial coding to help answer that and similar questions regarding what type of advertising is most persuasive. But to do so I must, first, define what types of advertising we're talking about. Aided by a pair of studies,<sup>6</sup> I've created my own framework of three types of ads, each seeking to be persuasive in different ways. One is the argument type, where the underlying goal is to provide *knowledge*. The second type is testimonials,

providing *confidence*, given the people who testify on behalf of a company's offer. Then there's the third type, narrative or storytelling, with ads that foster a sense of *affinity* between the situations depicted in the ads and the lives of the target market.

That's by way of overview. Of the three types, argument is easily the most complex. That's because the argument type divides into four subtypes of ads:



The argument type of ad varies. The analogy and example subtypes are more creatively oriented, as well as more sensory–emotive, relying on visuals to help make their points. That takes care of the pictorial/abstract axis. The other axis here is whether to argue based more on the offer's attributes (company-oriented statistical ads) or based on what the (emotional) benefits are for buyers of the offer (consumer-oriented cause ads).

Examples will probably best clarify what I mean here. From the top right quadrant, around the horn, here's an ad that fits each subtype:

- A cause ad would be something like the batch of direct mailers we tested for Duke Power, arguing for smart energy usage because of the environmental benefits for us all. In other words, 'X causes Y.'
- An example ad would be something like the Canon direct-mail pieces we tested because of their this-feature-equals-this-benefit approach.
- A statistics ad would be something like the famous example of dental health ads stating that '9 out of 10 dentists approve!'
- An analogy ad would be something like the print ad we tested for Astra-Zeneca, touting the solution's simplicity by showing, in contrast, the image of a hedge maze.

In my framework, endorsement ads have no subtypes. But narrative ads have two subtypes, the meanings of which should be fairly obvious from their names. There are humour ads as well as drama ads, with the latter including both problem–solution scenarios and slice-of-life depictions.

## WHAT TYPE OF ADVERTISING IS MOST EMOTIONALLY PERSUASIVE?

Okay. So how do ads of each (sub)type do in terms of persuasion?

To find out, my staff have looked through our database to assemble both emotional and rational results related to purchase intent. The emotional results come from facial coding and are based on the percentage of test subjects whose emotional response was predominantly positive in response to being asked about likelihood of purchase intent, as triggered by exposure to a given ad. As for the rational results, they're based on the percentage of study participants whose comments were predominantly positive regarding likely purchase intent, again in response to the advertising they were shown.

Here's what we found, with the results ranked from high to low based on the degree of emotional buy-in per (sub)type of ad:

Purchase Intent			
(Sub)Type	Emotional (Facial Coding)	Difference	Rational (Verbal Input)
Arguments – Analogy	61%	3%	64%
Arguments – Cause	53%	17%	70%
Narratives – Humour	46%	18%	64%
Arguments – Example	43%	19%	62%
Testimonials	42%	31%	73%
Narratives – Drama	39%	4%	43%
Arguments – Statistics	35%	33%	68%

The two sets of results (emotional and rational) produce very different rank orders. For instance, the statistics subtype comes in third rationally but in last place based on facial coding. The average results are also very different. Across all seven (sub)types of ads, the emotional results average 45.6 per cent buy-in versus 54.2 per cent for the rational results: evidence yet again, I believe, of people saying 'yes' when they really mean 'maybe' or even simply 'no'.

Overall, what's most noteworthy here? For starters, it's that three of the four argument subtypes of ads do really well, coming in first (analogy), second (cause) and fourth (example). Only the most hard-core, rationally oriented argument approach – statistics – fares poorly, coming in last. Meanwhile, the narrative and testimonial types run almost neck and neck because, among narrative's two subtypes, humour does relatively well (third place), while drama comes in sixth.

Before I move on to analyse the results, there's one other set of comparisons that will aid in the conclusions I draw. It involves how well each (sub)type of ad does on its first exposure (initial view) versus how we respond to it later, after at least one subsequent viewing, when purchase intent is at stake.

Why should you care to know? The answer is because the results can help to either verify or refute Erik du Plessis's belief that a liked ad is, therefore, a successful ad. How we feel initially, after all, when not much more than our gut reaction is involved, may not reflect how we'll feel when the idea of giving up money for the company's offer is now at stake instead. Here are the results as they progress from first exposure to subsequent, purchase-intent exposure based on using facial coding alone to identify the percentage of test subjects whose emotional response is predominantly positive:

### **Does initial reaction predict likely purchase intent? Not exactly.**

	<b>Initial View</b>	<b>Difference</b>	<b>Purchase Intent</b>
<b>(Sub)Type</b>	Emotional (Facial Coding)		Emotional (Facial Coding)
Arguments – Example	51%	(8%)	43%
Arguments – Analogy	51%	10%	61%
Arguments – Cause	50%	3%	53%
Narratives – Drama	50%	(11%)	39%
Narratives – Humour	48%	(2%)	46%
Testimonials	43%	(1%)	42%
Arguments – Statistics	39%	(4%)	35%

Two (sub)types of ads improve their performance in the move from initial view to a test's concluding purchase-intent stage (when an ad is being experienced for the final time). Those that do better over time and when money's at stake are the analogy and cause ads. Statistics remain in last place both times. Meanwhile, both example and drama fare less well at the purchase-intent stage.



Again, what's most noteworthy here? In emotional terms, the first-exposure average is 47.4 per cent versus 45.6 per cent during the purchase-intent stage. So in that sense, the results remain remarkably stable across the two rounds of exposure. There is one big gainer and there are two big losers, however, with analogy climbing over 10 per cent in terms of the amount of positive feelings it generates when money's at stake, whereas example and drama both falter badly on subsequent, purchase-intent exposure.

To understand why, and how come all the results may have turned out the way they did, it's time now for some analysis of the results, knowing that du Plessis's conclusion – that (initial) likeability is the key – hasn't proved to be a very reliable barometer of whether the ad will help you make more money or not.

## **TIME FOR ANALYSIS: WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS OF THESE VARIOUS RESULTS?**

Now let's take a closer look at each of the three types of ads, including subtypes when they exist. My purpose here is to understand why each (sub) type fared as it did, and what kind of insights and guidelines advertisers might take away from it all. Here is what I believe, mixing data with instincts honed by over a decade of experience conducting emotionally oriented research projects.

### ***Argument***

The underlying rationale for using this approach is that there presumably exists *objective* evidence that the offer represents a smart, defensible, superior choice. How can the objective evidence be introduced? This type covers four choices, which in emotional terms performed in descending order of effectiveness as follows: analogy, cause, example and, finally, statistics. The question is, why?

Analogies win because the ads can reach you twice over. There's the message, the argument, but there's also the imagery that's allowed to play a major role in reinforcing the message. Remember how in Chapter 1, on simplicity, I cited a study that found that almost all of the award-winning ads fitted one of six templates? Of them, pictorial analogies were the lion's share at almost 35 per cent. Well, here's proof that analogies not only win advertising awards, they lift sales.

Cause-based argument ads come in second best because the chain-reaction logic of 'X causes Y' is easy to follow. Cause ads give consumers very concrete and, again, *simple* reasons why the offer will prove to be a benefit to them.

To be specific, was the artwork sophisticated for the Duke Energy direct mailers we tested? No. For example, the environmentally friendly statement ‘Be good to your mother’ was accompanied by (what else?) a photograph of earth shot from outer space. But as Bob Garfield notes in *And Now a Few Words From Me*, a review of the 25 ad campaigns anointed as best ever by *Advertising Age* brought him to the conclusion that 19 of them broke no rules and involved no great creative licence; but they broke sales records.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, cause ads are a close cousin to the consequences template used by nearly 20 per cent of all the award-winning ads in the study cited in Chapter 1.

By comparison, example-based argument ads go from specifics to a general inference (or more rarely, vice versa). Why does this type of features/attributes approach perform no better than average in regards to purchase intent (but tied for best during the first view)? Maybe it’s because when a company talks directly about its own product, at first we feel comforted by getting the picture. But then we find it rather self-serving and boring.

Finally, it isn’t surprising that the statistics type of argument ad comes in last emotionally (while in third place, rationally). After all, statistics are quite often dull, abstract and complicated. And, as noted in Chapter 8, numbers can numb us. Moreover, statistics are in trouble when it comes to trust, the key emotion necessary for persuasion. After everything from Enron to the latest financial meltdown, who really trusts how numbers can get spun?

In summary, simplicity, tangibility (‘seeing is believing’) and presenting arguments from a consumer’s point of view rather than using a company’s own terms (and numbers) work best here. We want to know what’s in it for us, not the company. As a result, the more the argument gets presented in terms where the company’s self-interest becomes evident, the harder it is for us to reach the point of an emotionally oriented licence to *believe*.

## **Testimonials**

As already discussed in Chapter 4, celebrity endorsements and the appearances of CEOs, experts or average Jane/Joe Doe consumers testifying on behalf of an advertised offer are all meant to be persuasive, too. In the first three cases, the goal is to draw on the influence of authority figures. As for Jane or Joe Doe, they’re meant to provide the social proof that your ‘neighbour’ finds the offer worthwhile, and so should you.

*Expert opinion always feels insincere. If the average person can deliver the message in an authentic, humorous way, I generally like the advert.*

Sacha du Plessis, South Africa

Of relevance here is research indicating that if your goal is to boost attitudes toward an offer among people strongly interested in it, famous endorsers are of only marginal help.<sup>8</sup> In short, paying for celebrities to appear in ads may not be worth the expense. Results show famous endorsers to be as effective as ‘strong arguments’ among low-involvement prospects, but of less help than non-famous endorsers when high-involvement prospects are focused on.

Indeed, neither type of endorser, famous or not famous, turns out to be as helpful as all but the statistics version of an argument ad. Indeed, our results found testimonials to be subpar (whereas the rational results put it in first place). Why? It is doubts about authenticity, an inability to believe, that threatens endorser effectiveness in these cynical times.

### **Narrative**

Any concerns about the effectiveness of more rationally oriented, argument ads are inversely related to reasons why emotionally oriented narratives might have promise. As described by careful advertising analysts ranging from John Philip Jones to Gerard Tellis, among others, the comparison looks something like this, if told from the perspective of why emotional ads should work well:

First, they’re more likely to grab attention (rather than require it, like example or statistics ads do). They operate in a subconscious or peripheral way, thereby being better able to cut through the media clutter and engage low-involvement prospects.

Second, they’re likely to be more vivid and memorable than drier, rationally oriented ads.

Third, they don’t invite resistance from us as we evaluate the merits of an argument and draw our own, potentially different conclusions.

Finally, and perhaps most decisive of all, they leverage the emotional brain’s biological importance and do so twice over. For starters, evaluation requires emotions to kick in, intuitively weighing the alternatives. Otherwise, there’s analysis paralysis. Moreover, as mentioned earlier in this book, only the older sensory and emotive brains link to the body’s muscles, making an emotionally triggered call to action literally more actionable.<sup>9</sup>

No wonder then that in *Effective Advertising: Understanding When, How, and Why Advertising Works*, Gerard Tellis concludes that ‘emotional appeals are probably the most effective’.<sup>10</sup> Not only are there the advantages already cited, but Tellis’s research also leads him to believe that emotionally oriented ads tend to wear out more slowly and are more likely to benefit from increased media exposure.

In principle and by instinct, I agree with Tellis. Narrative ads of either the humour or drama type should do fairly well. So why not here, in this case, based on our results? Why is humour fifth in initial-view responses and merely third for purchase intent? And why is drama tied for third in initial view and sixth in purchase intent?

The plausible answer lies in the executions of the ads themselves.

In regard to humour, it's something of a high-wire act. Sometimes the humour works wonders. Sometimes it doesn't work at all. Still other times it works but doesn't translate well in regards to its relevancy to the offer for sale (potentially overshadowing it or, worse, undermining it).

For instance, some supposedly funny print ads we tested for a furniture maker involved sexual innuendos. The advertising agency's all-male senior creative team thought the ads made for a good laugh. But in reality they made some of our female test participants so uneasy that words like 'sexual harassment' and 'rape' were said, with profoundly negative feelings also appearing on the women's faces to underscore the emotional depth of their aversion.

As for drama, the casting is as important as the plot. An off-emotion, bad acting job will undermine the outcome as badly as an off-colour joke will undermine a humour ad. Emotionally dull acting ruins the effect. Think of the telecommunications example I described in Chapter 2. You know: the 60-second radio spot with the huge bald spot where emotional engagement disappears once the generic voice-over enters the picture.

## **THE TWO ENDS OF THE SPECTRUM FOR CREATING PERSUASION**

When all's said and done, there are two basic pathways to persuasion. There's argument and there's emotion. Testimonials fall in between rationally oriented arguments and emotionally oriented narratives, while drawing on both ends of the spectrum. As described and verified through independent testing,<sup>11</sup> the criteria for argument versus emotion provide a framework for judging success.

A successful argument ad must create belief without inviting counterargument. As for narratives, they must create engagement and provide authenticity in order to create affinity and win us over. That's it in essence. Here's a full checklist of the goals that each separate end of the spectrum must follow to be persuasive:

## Argument/Rational Ads

## Narratives/Emotional Ads

**Bolster Belief****FAMILIARITY**

- Familiar is true
- Ads need to fit both offer category & brand expectations

**Bolster Belief****FAMILIARITY**

- Familiar feeds comfort
- Ads need to enable relating to people & situation

**Bolster Belief  
&  
Dispel Objections****FAIRNESS**

- Ads show respect, sense of reciprocity, and humility; give reason to believe new claims or uniqueness
- Practice simplicity, specificity
- Show pain/gain contrast
- Avoid giving sense of company as predator

**Build Empathy  
&  
Avoid Fakery****DESIRE**

- Ads leverage core motivations, involve aspirations, hope, passion, purpose, personality
- May involve sensory pleasure, interactivity
- Utilize suspense
- Avoid being outside social norms, or blurry, hard to follow

**Dispel Objections****CONSISTENCY**

- Offer value is consistent, assure via repetition
- Use personal pronouns
- Avoid gyrating strategy, confusion, lack of transparency

**Avoid Fakery****CONSISTENCY**

- Remain in character, on-emotion, true to plot/situation and target market values
- Non-verbals must be handled well
- Avoid gyrating tonality, plot, being impersonal

What does it take to succeed? In essence, rational ads aim for us to objectively weigh the evidence and yield to it. We evaluate the information provided, and if we resist it's because we conclude the company is misbehaving in how it has selected the information being provided. In other words, we're getting spun. Meanwhile, in essence, emotional ads aim for us to subjectively process their content and get engaged. We're empathetically involved, and if we resist it's because we sense the actors are misbehaving as part of a script we dismiss as contrived or off-taste. In other words, we either get offended or become dubious.

There could never be a single definitive answer to the question, 'What does it take to create believable, persuasive advertising?' But by drawing on a few sources as well as my own professional judgment of what works, and why, here's some context to explain the chart I've just given you.

## FAMILIARITY: WHAT WE KNOW AND LIKE, WE TRUST

First up is familiarity. The rule in Chapter 3, keep it close to home, is a good place to start. Remember what I said then: we assume that what's familiar is true.<sup>12</sup> There's a lot to be said for making us feel comfortable, which familiarity aids. In a study about persuasion, one of the conclusions was that 'commercials that jolt the viewer by their unexpectedness' belong to the lowest category of advertising effectiveness, ie persuasion. In contrast, ads that were seen as fitting expectations about the offer's category were high in persuasiveness.<sup>13</sup>

*If it's a good company and I have tried one of their products or hear a friend or family member talking about a good experience they had with a product, I trust. Secondly, I generally trust companies that have social responsibility as part of their strategy. BP has endorsed and sponsored so many initiatives and are pioneers of cleaner fuel, which buys my trust.*

Themba Ndlovu, South Africa

Advertising (counter)application: Contrary to leveraging familiarity, General Motors put out a print ad apologizing for previous quality lapses in their motor vehicles. As our facial-coding results showed, brand loyalists took the news hard because it told them that what they thought was familiar and true ('I've been making good choices by buying GM products') wasn't necessarily true at all.

## FAIRNESS VERSUS DESIRE: FULFILLING ON PRACTICAL NEEDS OR WANTS AND DREAMS

Second, let's look at fairness versus desire. Fairness pertains to argument ads because we always wonder whether the company selling to us is truly an ally or merely a predator. Is it being honest and upfront, or manipulative, about the information it's giving us? Meanwhile, desire is an important element in narrative ads because they work best if we're drawn into the action in a way that we find meaningful because our personal goals and the value of the offer get linked. In other words, relevancy is confirmed based on desiring and believing that happiness – not merely utility – is what the offer will deliver.

## FAIRNESS: WHY HUMILITY AND SPECIFICITY WORK WONDERS

A natural part of buying is, again, to make sure you feel like you're gaining an ally. Put another way, is the company caring, reciprocal and respectful? Robert Cialdini suggests that a little corporate humility (admit your shortcomings) can do wonders to reinforce a sense of honesty.<sup>14</sup> That's because arguing against your own self-interest suggests you're interested in a win-win outcome.

For example, Progressive Insurance's advertising showcases its willingness to make the rates of competitors accessible to us by visiting its website. That's far better than the flip side of humility: condescending ads that trigger reactions of disgust and spur rejection.

*The actual product makes me trust it, not the ad. It has to do with the company as well. I think Aveda and Origins are great because they bring back to the earth and I like what they stand for. They do not advertise a lot, don't over-expose themselves, and you trust the company.*

Jennifer Jenkins, United States

Tactical considerations: While simplicity means there's less to object to, specificity adds the virtue of making it easier to be believable. As Claude Hopkins says in *Scientific Advertising*: 'A man who makes a specific claim is either telling the truth or a lie.' As a result, 'No generality has any weight whatsoever.'<sup>15</sup> What might work even better? Specifics showing a pain-gain contrast because the original, sensory brain is a pattern-matching machine that readily absorbs contrasts.

Moreover, as hackneyed as it may seem, the use of rhymes like 'Gillette – the best a man can get' aren't just easy to memorize and repeat. The ease with which they flow makes them feel right and lifts the perceived trustfulness of the messaging.<sup>16</sup>

## DESIRE: IT'S ALL ABOUT THE THREE PS OF PASSION, PLEASURE AND PURPOSE

Let me touch again here on the three Ps described in the Introduction. Narrative ads must create an immediate, intuitive emotional response; that's passion. Next, they will work best if they reflect the target market's values,

providing a sense of purpose. Third, they will also work best if both the actors in the ads and the company's brand are presented in a way that has some real character or personality, thereby engaging us.

In support of that goal, advertising that's both sensory in nature and interactive in style can heighten the three Ps. So is it any surprise that one of the new frontiers in advertising involves video games? About 60 per cent of online Americans play the games, often obsessively, so gamers are a highly sought-after market.

Advertising applications: In Unilever's case, its Suave brand has worked with the online game 'The Price Is Right', sponsoring free play and running promotional ads while the game is loading. Not to be outdone, Progressive has integrated itself into Electronic Arts' game 'Need for Speed: Undercover' by having itself billed as the game's racing-stadium owner, complete with its logo and name plastered on in-game billboards. Look for more to come.<sup>17</sup>

## **CONSISTENCY: NOBODY'S WON OVER BY FICKLE COMPANIES AND MONO-EMOTION ACTORS**

Finally, there's consistency leading to assurance. Since the pattern-matching, sensory brain looks for safety in repetition, we naturally interpret 'inconsistency as possible danger'.<sup>18</sup> How might inconsistency manifest itself? With argument ads, that can happen when a company is forever changing its strategy, forever repositioning itself. As for narrative ads, there the problem arises when the talent is emotionally inauthentic.

*Any time a company talks about a warranty, you feel safe. It if backs you up, then that helps trust. Information also makes you feel safe and when you know they are there to help. A confident voice in an ad helps with trust, too.*

Hugo Martin Feu, Argentina

Let's tackle the companies first. Want to enhance persuasion potential, instead of destroying it? Don't create a feeling that you're 'pulling a fast one' by changing campaigns and brand positioning so frequently. That approach brings the agency new billings, but it doesn't do much for us in deciding whether a company's a solid, stable ally or a desperate chameleon.

Meanwhile, related to consistency is a tip I gave earlier in *About Face*: using 'you' and 'we' in ads. That tactical tip is relevant here because the use



of personal pronouns helps to signal a committed, intimate, one-to-one relationship with us. In doing so, a company provides a sense of solidarity with potential customers by portraying the speaker as a member of the target market to be served by buying the offer.<sup>19</sup>

As for the acting talent, facial expressions can be decisive. Here's proof. In studying the impact of political advertising from the 2000 US presidential race, researchers concluded that the candidate's affect, while shown on screen, was the *only* variable that consistently explained changes in voters' preferences in the battleground states they investigated.<sup>20</sup>

One of the pitfalls of the current version of most casting is that it gets decided based on photographs, ie still images. But somebody who 'looks good' is probably almost by definition a person with a social-smile-type personality. Their ability to act and be on-emotion, exhibiting authentic 'looks' both positive and negative, may be inherently limited. Who suffers? The company that pays the bills because its ads won't be nearly as effective, since everyone on the planet is instinctively on the lookout for phonies – and never wants anything to do with them.

## SUMMARY

Market researchers love to test for message comprehension. Yes, that's important. But in the end, it's the emotional verdict of message believability that matters most. Nowadays, advertising faces a serious credibility gap. Pushing harder won't solve it. Only trust can overcome either innate or learned scepticism and lead to persuasion. Reassurance is a feeling, or perhaps more specifically it's the absence of negative feelings that warn us, 'Caveat emptor,' to *beware* of buying. First impressions, peaks and endings matter the most. So it figures that Sensory Logic's persuasion data verify that how we feel during the last five seconds of exposure to TV spots correlates highly to positive emotional purchase-intent levels.

Understanding what we have internally, privately, emotionally endorsed is not yet a core competency in the business world. Too often, the unchallenged assumption at corporate headquarters is, 'Give consumers enough features and reasons to be convinced of utility, and faith will follow.'

Not necessarily. Not when so many other purchase options exist in today's global, internet-linked marketplace. On the other hand, some things don't change. Want to goose purchase intent? Then heed Bill Bernbach's words: 'You've got to say it in such a way that people will feel it in their gut. Because if they don't feel it, nothing will happen.'<sup>21</sup> An on-message focus alone fails to grasp the deeper reality that emotions serve as an inner source of energy, information *and* influence.

Takeaways include:

- Persuasion involves an internal, emotional battle between an innate desire to trust the benefits the company's offer will provide and scepticism about being over-promised. While assertions of trustworthiness lift levels of belief remarkably well, scepticism still remains pervasive.
- Three major types of advertising were reviewed to determine relative ability to be persuasive. Argument ads provide knowledge. Testimonial ads use the people who are testifying as a means of instilling confidence. Finally, narrative ads foster a sense of affinity between the situations depicted and the lives of the people exposed to the ads.
- Of the three types, Sensory Logic found that argument ads are the most persuasive because the less hard-sell approaches of both analogy and cause ads work so well. In contrast, narrative ads do only slightly better than testimonial ads, both of which suffer at times from emotional miscues involving either authenticity or sensitivity.
- Emotional responses on initial exposure to an ad weren't found to be entirely predictive of purchase intent/persuasion. Analogy ads did far better on repeat exposure, whereas example and drama ads did significantly worse.
- As to the keys of being persuasive, simplicity, tangibility, and presenting arguments from a consumer's point of view proved to be most important. Successful rational ads avoid inviting a counterargument. Meanwhile, successful emotional ads get the audience empathetically involved.