

The State of Creative Effectiveness

📢 Social video 📢



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The world of video advertising has changed

Advertising used to be built largely around **big moments**.

A brand would develop a campaign idea, invest heavily in a hero execution and then distribute it across television and other channels. The goal was to create one powerful piece of advertising that could carry the campaign.

That still happens, but it's no longer the whole story. Today, brands are producing **more video**, for **more platforms**, in **more formats** with **more creators** and for **more audiences** than ever before.

A campaign today might include a hero film, but that film is also likely to be cut into shorter edits, vertical videos, product moments, creator-style executions, behind-the-scenes footage and dozens of other social assets.

And often there isn't a dedicated hero asset at all — just separate executions of a campaign idea.

In these cases, **brands are building campaigns from a collection of smaller pieces of content**, each designed to earn attention in a particular moment. In other words, the creative unit is often smaller than it was in the past.



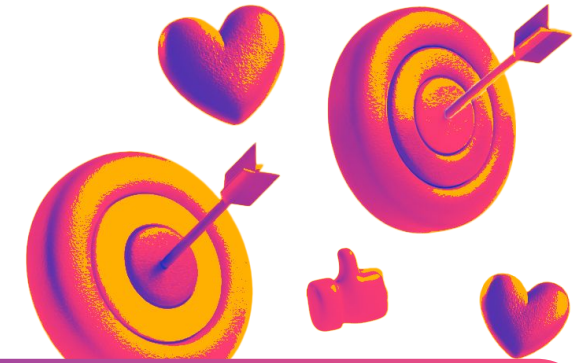
Our approach: Quantifying what makes an ad effective

We set out to understand the patterns that **make a great social video ad** and to give practical tips to brands about how to approach this kind of content.

We looked at a few common social video characteristics (see the full list on the right) and quantified the impact each has on creative effectiveness in digital channels.

This report will dive into what we learned across over **3,000 social video ads from four platforms** (YouTube, Facebook, Instagram and TikTok).

But first, we'll set the scene with a look into creative effectiveness across those four platforms.



We set out to understand the impact of:

1. Celebrities
2. The element of surprise
3. Humor
4. Visual hooks
5. Animals
6. Product demos
7. Distinctive brand assets
8. Ending on a high
9. Creator content

The challenge with the new world of advertising

When there are dozens or hundreds of social videos, **every asset creates another set of decisions.**

What is the role of creators in building the brand? What should the brand content do? When is the right time to use a celebrity? How should the product be woven in? How quickly does it need to get to the point? How should it end?

All of these decisions together determine whether a brand's creative ecosystem **gets noticed, remembered, attributed to the brand and ultimately makes people more likely to choose the brand.**

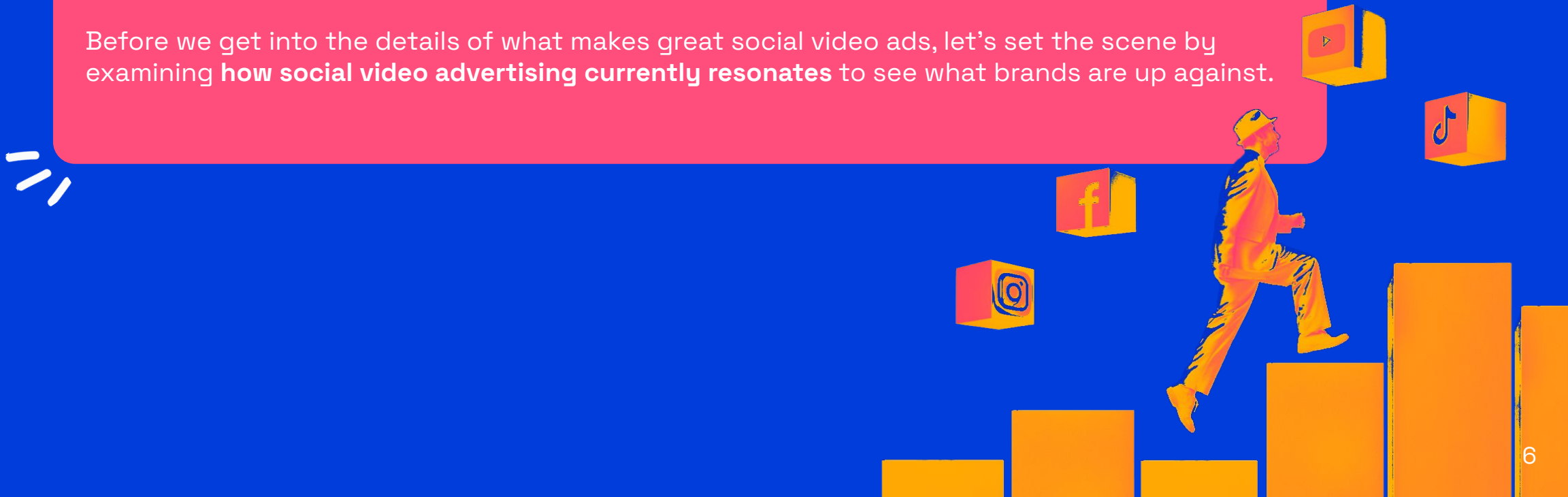
This is the world of social video advertising today.

And it creates a problem for creative effectiveness: how do you learn what works when there is no longer just one piece of creative to evaluate?



Setting the scene: A look at the social platforms

Before we get into the details of what makes great social video ads, let's set the scene by examining **how social video advertising currently resonates** to see what brands are up against.



TikTok drives the most intense emotional reaction, in both markets, at every age

As you'll see on the next two pages, across both the US and UK, **TikTok ads consistently show the highest percentage of "Love" and lowest percentage of "Indifference" of any platform**, and this holds true across every age group, not just younger viewers. YouTube sits at the opposite end in both markets.

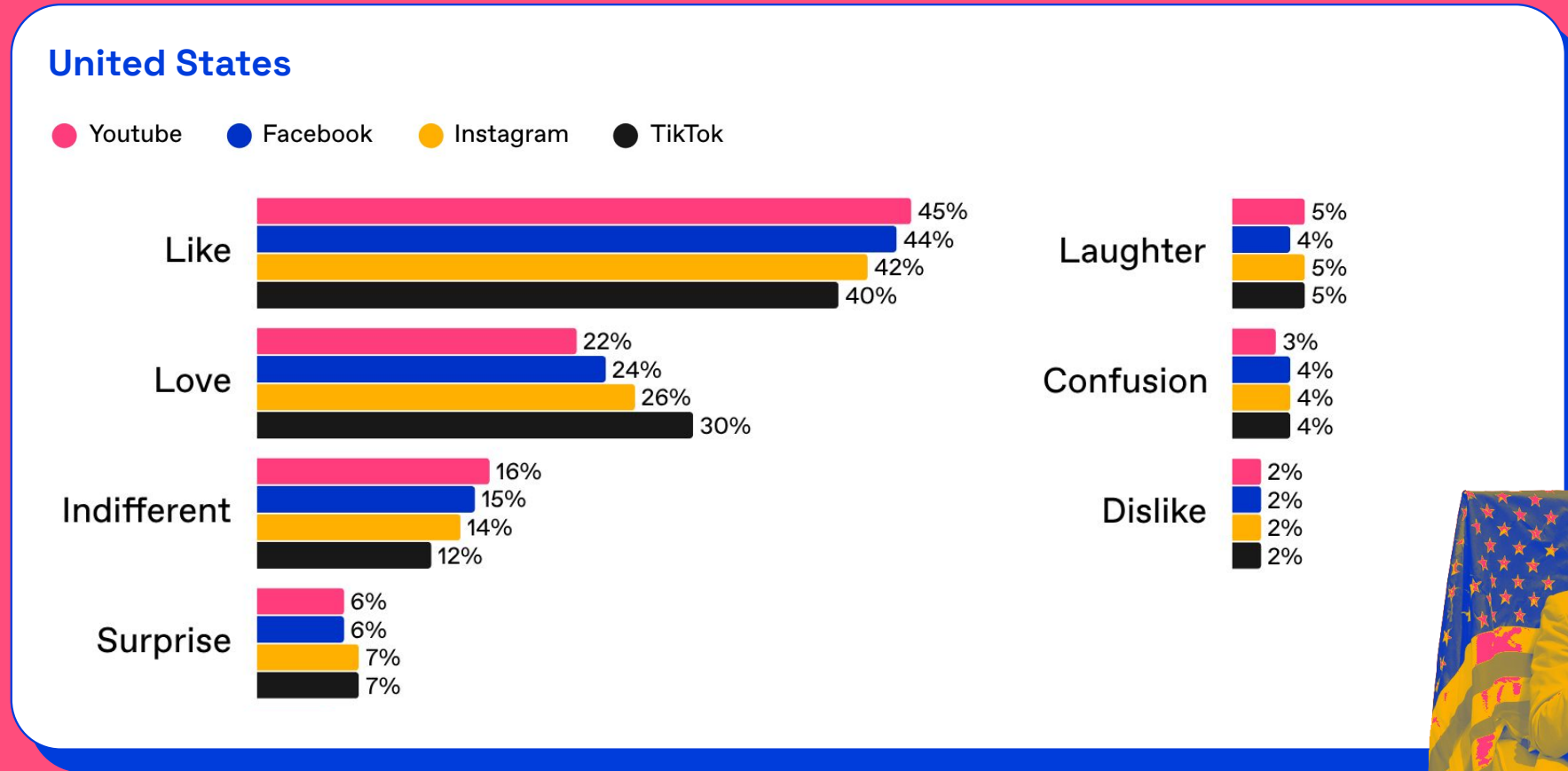
"Like" (the more lukewarm reaction) is flat everywhere at 40–45%, so the real differentiation between platforms lives in the Love/Indifference split, not overall approval.

Negative reactions (like Confusion and Dislike) are uniformly low across the board.

Compared to the US, **UK audiences show higher levels of Indifference** across every platform (15-20% in the UK vs. 12-16% in the US) and a flatter emotional profile overall. "Surprise," "Laughter," and "Confusion" are all a point or two lower than their US counterparts, with that difference showing up as Indifference instead.



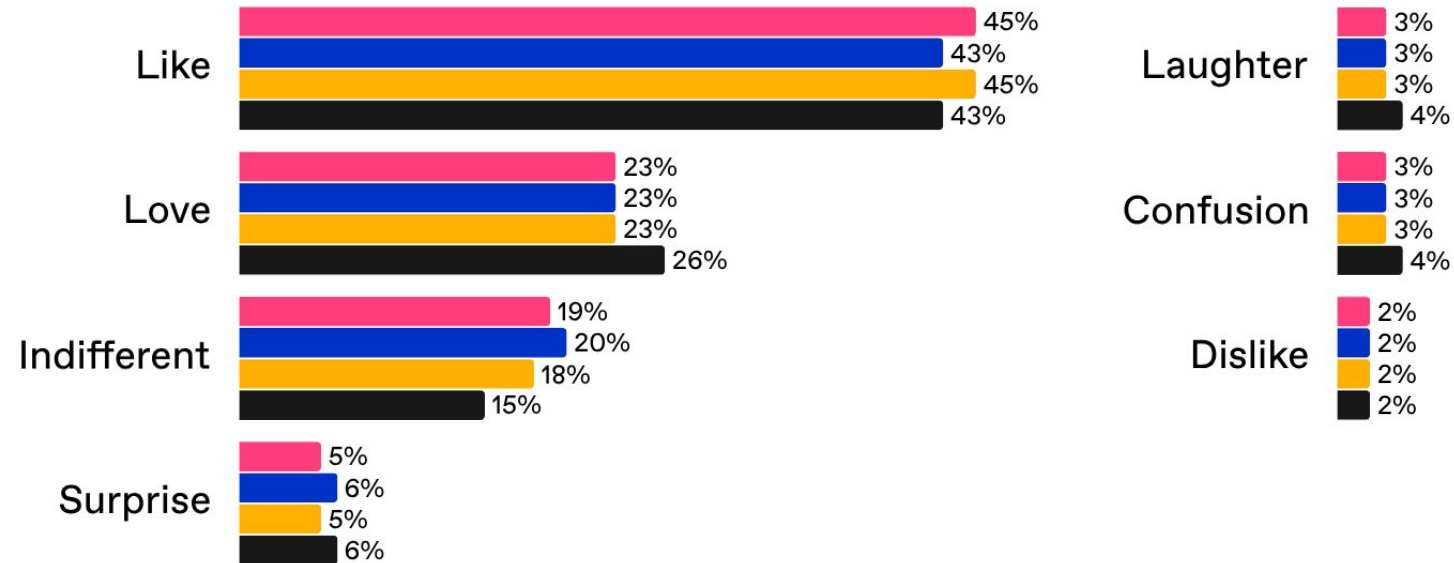
Emotion by social platform



Emotion by social platform

United Kingdom

● Youtube
 ● Facebook
 ● Instagram
 ● TikTok



Peak enthusiasm is at 25-34, not 18-24

Across all four platforms, “Love” is actually higher for 25-34 than for 18-24 year-olds.

We tend to think of social media as being most meaningful for young people, but we find that across the US and UK, engagement rises from 18-24, peaks in the mid-to-late 20s/30s, then declines steadily through 45-54 and 55+.

The US and UK diverge in how that peak plays out. **In the US, Love rises gradually** and stays elevated through 35-44 — though not uniformly: Instagram and TikTok hold their peak flat across 25-34 and 35-44 (staying consistent from 31% to 31% for Instagram and dropping from 35% to 34% for TikTok), while YouTube and Facebook already start easing off a point or two earlier (dropping from 28% to 26% for YouTube and 31% to 27% for Facebook).

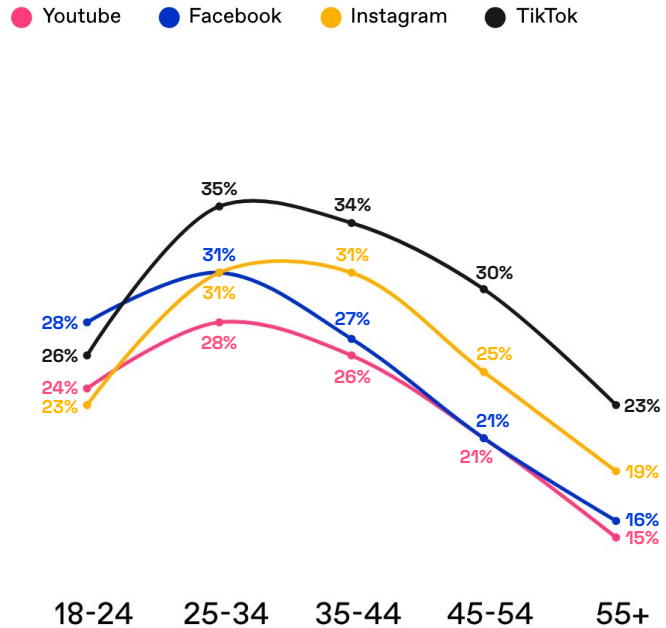
In the UK, the peak is far narrower — concentrated almost entirely in the 25-34 band before dropping off fast — and it’s driven almost entirely by YouTube and Facebook, which spike to 37% and 40% respectively at 25-34. Facebook’s 40% is the single highest number across either market. Instagram and TikTok’s UK age curves, by contrast, look much closer to their US shape.

In effect, the platforms that ease off earliest in the US are the same ones that spike hardest in the UK.

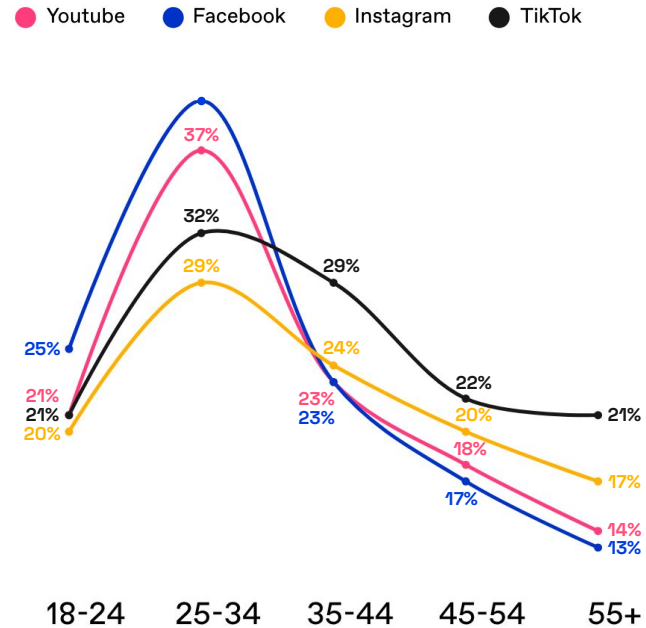


Love 🥰 by age

United States



United Kingdom

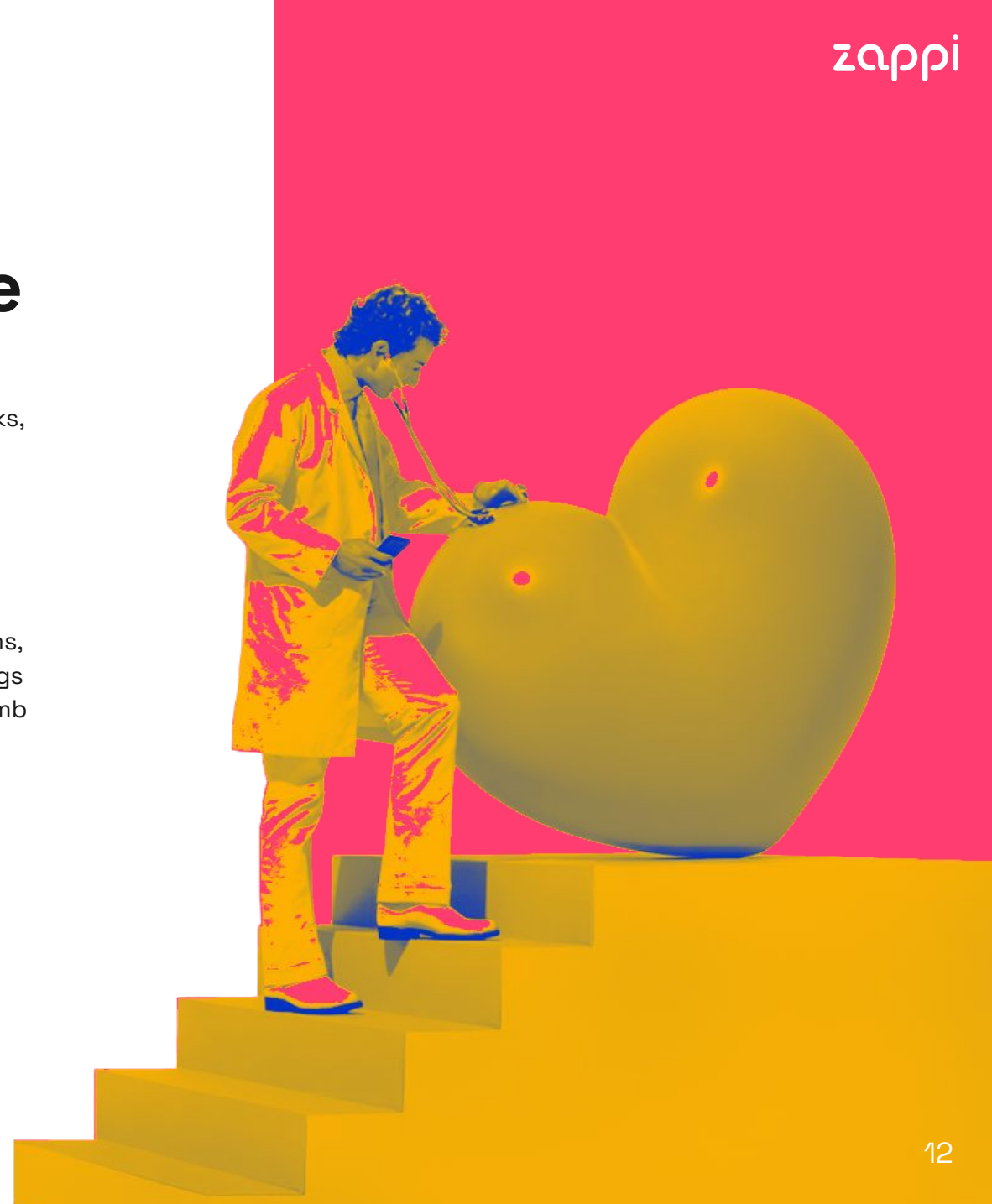


Indifference trends in the opposite direction from Love

Indifference is the inverse of Love, dipping in the 25-44 age range where Love peaks, and rising at both ends of the age spectrum — climbing highest of all at 55+.

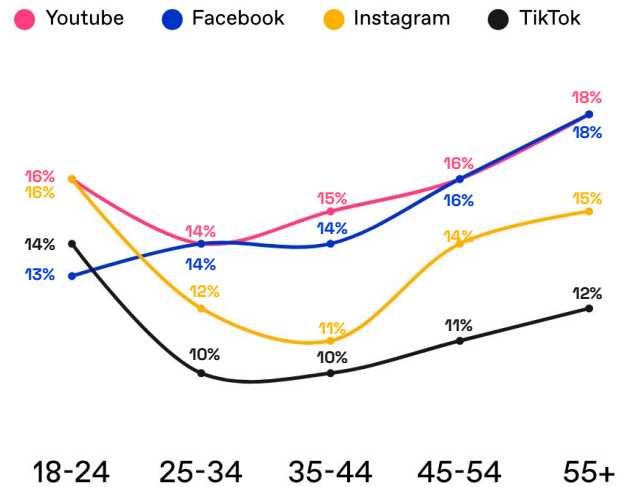
But **even at 55+, TikTok's indifference stays the lowest of the four in both markets** (12% US, 19% UK), reinforcing that TikTok's engagement edge holds across age groups, not just among younger users.

The UK's swing is far more extreme than the US's. Averaged across all four platforms, the US indifference curve is a shallow U, ranging only from 12% to 16%. The UK swings from a 13% trough at 25-34 to 23% at 55+ — nearly double, and a much steeper climb on either side of the peak.

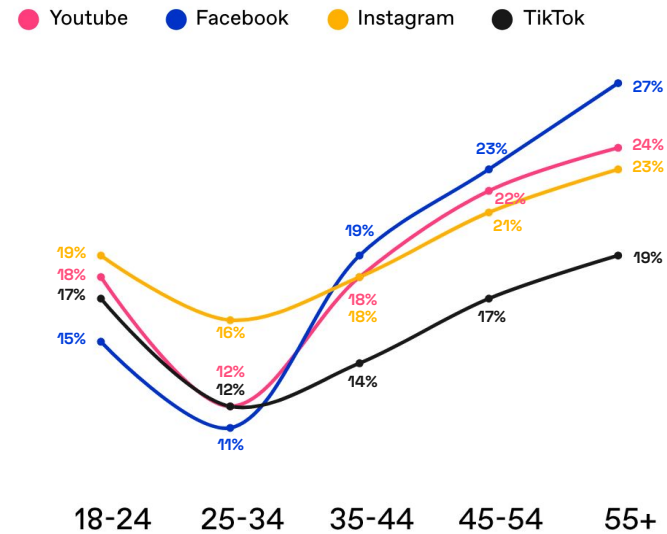


Indifference 🤨 by age

United States



United Kingdom



Two different age effects are at play

And when we look at effectiveness by age, averaging across platforms — two clear patterns emerge:

- **Strength of emotion & persuasion follow an inverted-U:** low at 18-24, peaking at 25-34/35-44, then dropping at 55+.
- **Ad distinctiveness & brand connection rise steadily with age,** peaking at 55+.

In other words, **the 25-44 cohort feels social video ads most intensely and is most persuaded** by them, while **older viewers see the ads as more distinctive and can more easily recall the brand** — but without the same emotional resonance or persuasive lift.

This most likely reflects ad-diet saturation: younger/heavier platform users have seen far more ads in this digital style, so any given ad might read as less novel. Older/lighter users see comparatively fewer, so the same ad might stand out more. Meanwhile, the 25-44 group is where an ad most reliably produces an immediate emotional and persuasive effect.

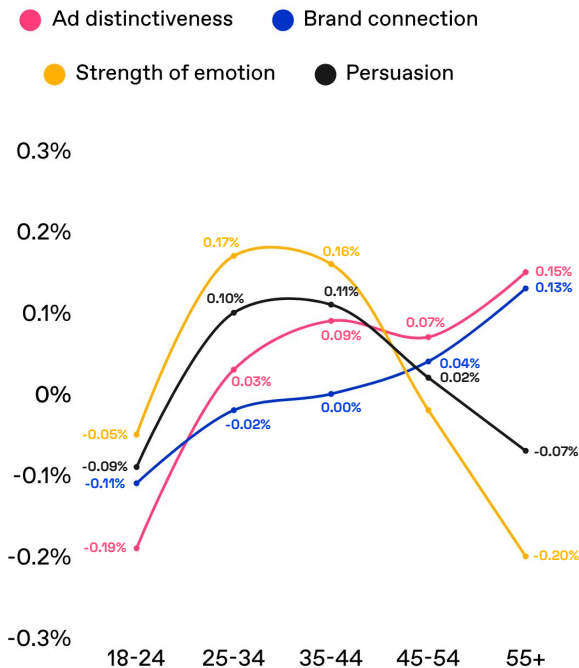
And as we saw in our [*State of Creative Effectiveness*](#) report for TV last year, older audiences have had more exposure to brand cues over time, so they're able to identify brands in ads more readily than younger audiences.

18-24 is notably low on all four metrics — not just the emotional ones. This group doesn't find the ads distinctive or the brand cues clear either, which could be also attributed to oversaturation of this type of content.

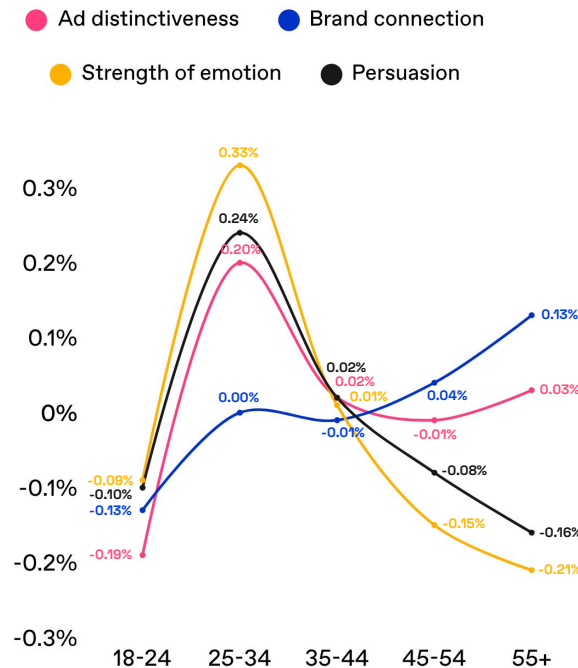


Creative effectiveness metrics by age

United States (average of all 4 platforms)



United Kingdom (average of all platforms)



Ad distinctiveness

How different the ad feels from other advertising people have seen

Brand connection

How clearly the ad signals which brand it's for

Persuasion

The ad's ability to generate a more immediate response and brand reappraisal

Strength of emotion

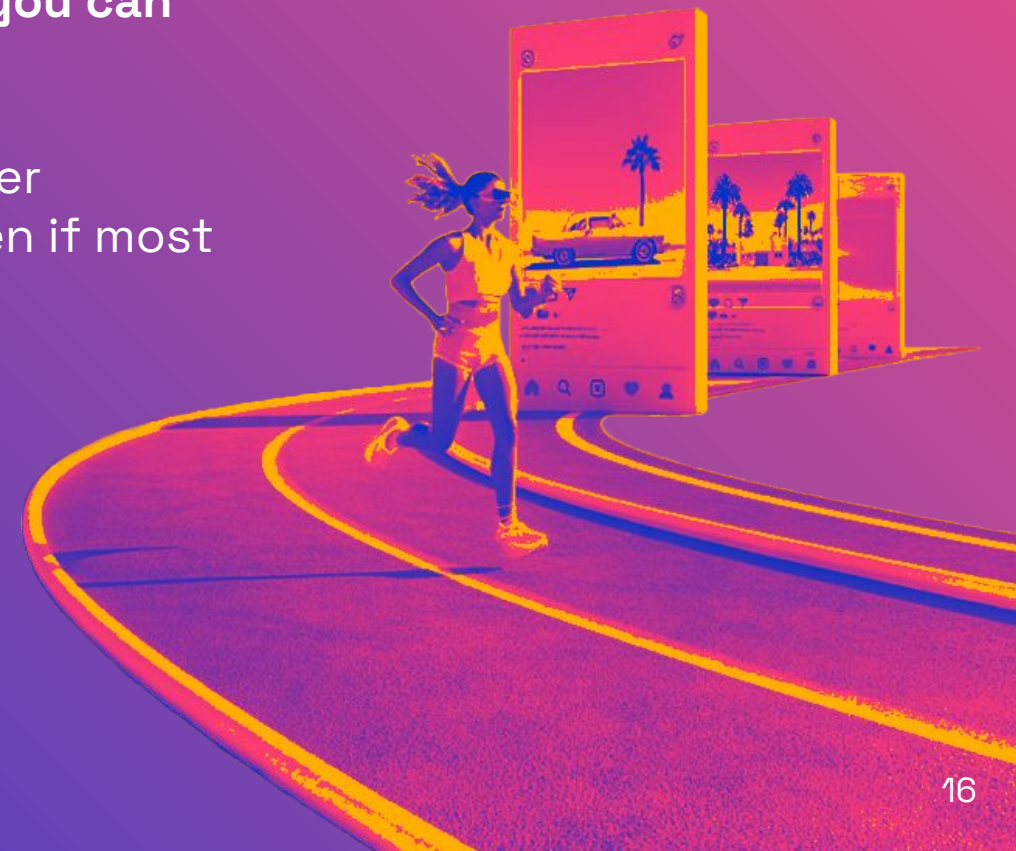
Intensity of emotional reaction to the ad

These numbers show us the social video advertising world as it is today and how the average ad resonates across the four platforms in both the US and the UK.

But when you know how social video advertising works, you can create content that beats these averages.

You can generate a strong brand connection with younger audiences or high persuasion with older audiences — even if most ads don't.

So now let's get into the **fundamentals of social video advertising.**



Methodology



Here's a look at how we approached our deep dive into the different advertising characteristics in social video.



Methodology & sample

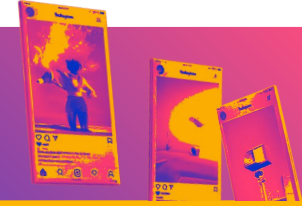
What's in the study: 3,303 social video ads, tested in the US and UK across TikTok, Instagram, Facebook and YouTube. 21 parent categories and 194 subcategories. Every ad was tested with real consumers through the Zappi platform.

How ads are tagged: We built a taxonomy of creative characteristics (does the ad end on a positive resolution, demonstrate the product, carry a surprise, etc.) and tagged all ads against it automatically with AI.

Every tag carries a confidence score. All the effectiveness figures in this report use only high-confidence tags, with anything less certain excluded from both sides of the comparison. Prevalence figures use all tags, since filtering would understate how common a characteristic is.

How the effects are calculated: For each characteristic we compare ads that have that characteristic against ads that don't, holding category constant. That matters because categories differ enormously in baseline performance. Without controlling for it, we'd be measuring which categories happen to use which techniques.

3,303
ads analyzed



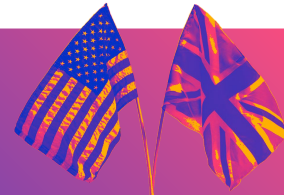
4 platforms

YouTube · Facebook · Instagram · TikTok

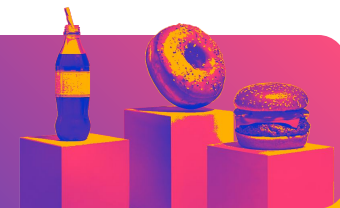


2 markets

US (1,994) · UK (1,309)



21
categories



How we quantify effectiveness: Creative Power

Creative Power is Zappi's headline creative score for social video, indicating how strong an ad is overall on a 1–6.9 scale.

It's a weighted blend of five survey measures of how audiences respond to the ad:

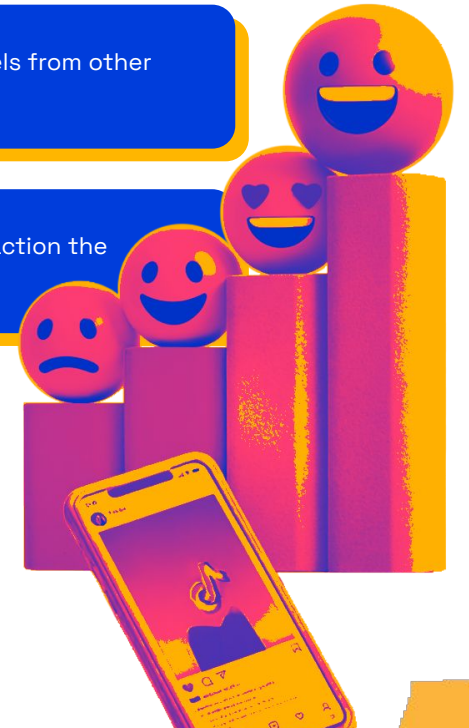
35% **Resonance:** The ad's ability to engage and trigger a positive emotional response, helping the ad go into memory and making the brand come to mind more positively in the future.

20% **Brand Connection:** How clearly the ad signals which brand it's for.

20% **Persuasion:** The ad's ability to generate a more immediate response and brand reappraisal.

15% **Ad Distinctiveness:** How different the ad feels from other advertising people have seen.

10% **Intensity:** The strength of the emotional reaction the ad produces.



Three numbers we'll look at

Prevalence

How common the characteristic is — the percentage of ads that use it.

Impact on Creative Power

The gap in Creative Power between ads WITH the characteristic and WITHOUT it. Remember that Creative Power only runs 1–6.9, so a half-point gap is a big move.

Likelihood to Be a top ad

How many times more likely an ad with the characteristic is to land in the top 20% of ads on Creative Power.

For each of the characteristics we studied, we calculated three numbers: **prevalence**, **impact on creative power** and **likelihood to be a top ad**.

With these numbers, we can understand how common the characteristic is, how it helps or harms overall effectiveness and whether ads that use this characteristic are likely to score in the top 20% of effective ads.

And we include examples for each characteristic

We also provide examples of ads that ran on any of the four platforms for each of the characteristics, along with how they scored on each of our metrics and an explanation of why these ads are good examples to learn from.

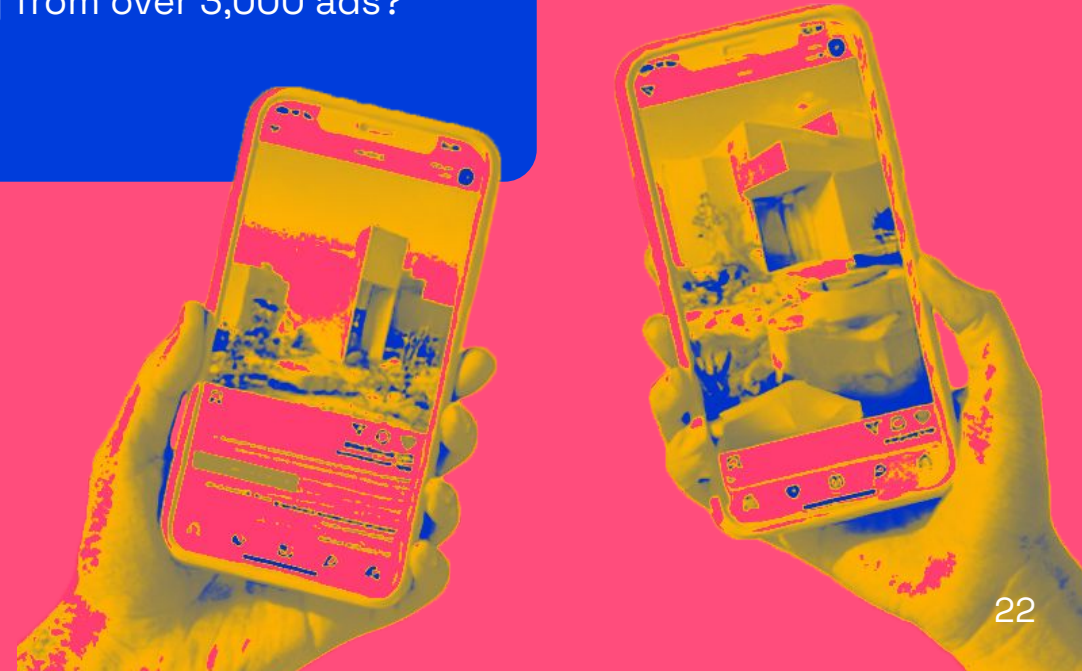
You can watch all the ads on YouTube as you read the report

[VIEW THE PLAYLIST](#)



What makes social video advertising work

What did we learn about social video advertising from over 3,000 ads?
Let's get into the analysis.



Celebrities & public figures

HOW WE MEASURED IT

“Does a public figure, influencer or familiar IP/character appear in the ad?”

Uses celebrity

A public figure, influencer or familiar intellectual property/character appears — at any prominence.

COUNTS

No celebrity

No apparent public figure, influencer or IP.

DOES NOT COUNT

WHAT QUALIFIES

Famous people, influencers and familiar intellectual property/characters. Any appearance of either of those counts — the figure does not have to be central to the ad.



What's the impact of celebrities?

Prevalence

7%

of ads feature celebrities

Impact on Creative Power

+0.28

points (1-6.9 scale)

Top 20% likelihood

1.5×

more likely to be a top ad

Only 7% of social video ads feature a public figure, a well-known influencer or a familiar character. **These ads score +0.28 higher on Creative Power and are 1.5 times more likely to rank in the strongest fifth of all social video ads.**

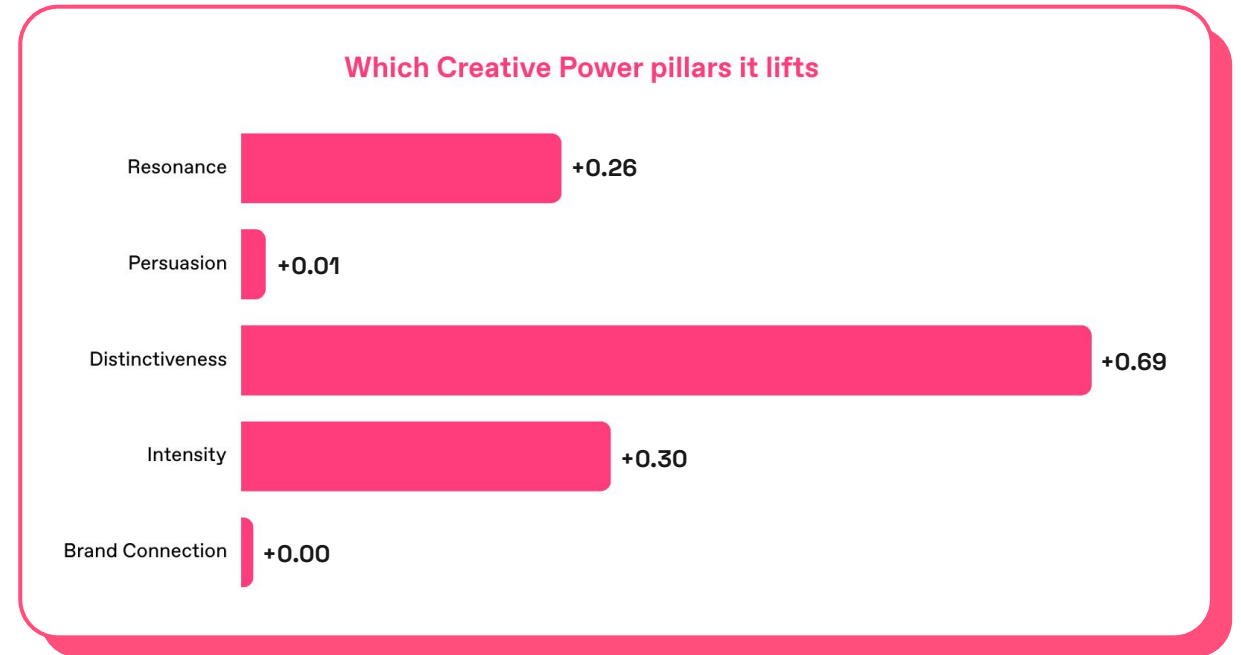
Familiar faces make an ad stand out

A celebrity first and foremost makes an ad stand out (+0.69 on distinctiveness).

However there's no effect on either persuasion (+0.01) or brand connection (+0.00). This means a famous face might get you attention, but won't necessarily give people a reason to buy or help anyone remember the brand in the ad.

In other words, **a celebrity can't carry an ad on its own**. You need other elements to drive branding and persuasion, and you'll see which ones work best later in this report. The **exception are the partnerships held for years** and used consistently over time. These celebrities can eventually cue your brand in the right circumstances.

It's always worth weighing the high cost of the celebrity against the outcome. **While celebrities do help an ad stand out, there are also other less expensive ways to stand out**. Just like in TV advertising, celebrities are never a necessity, but they can help!



A famous face isn't worth the cost when it outshines the brand

Just remember that when using a celebrity, they should never overshadow your brand.

As we've seen, ads that simply feature a celebrity lift Creative Power by +0.28. But diving a little deeper, we can also look at what people mentioned unprompted when asked what they remembered from the ads we tested. **When the celebrity is all people talked about from the ad, the lift to Creative Power was far lower (+0.03).**

This suggests that a familiar face gives an ad a head start, but once that face becomes the thing people take away from the ad, the value of the celebrity is gone.

The “vampire effect” describes what happens when a celebrity overshadows the brand they're endorsing — people remember the famous face and forget the brand.

But when the celebrity is used for what they're known for and is relevant to what the brand wants to be associated with, both the brand and celebrity can shine!

Impact on Creative Power when the celebrity becomes the story

+0.28



A celebrity is in the ad

+0.03



The celebrity is all people talk about

Warburtons' "150 Years in the Baking"

ABOUT THE AD

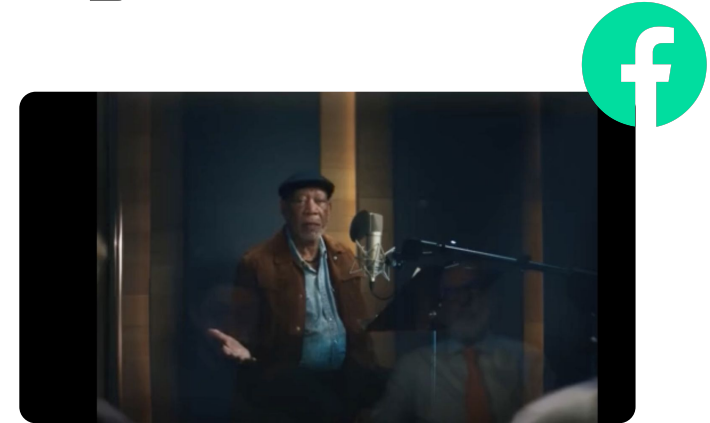
Warburtons marked its 150th anniversary by hiring Morgan Freeman to narrate its own history. [The full two-minute film](#) runs from the first loaf baked by Ellen Warburton in 1876 through a century and a half of British bread — including a Thanksgiving dinner made entirely of bread, a loaf-shaped spaceship and Paddington pulling a marmalade sandwich from his hat — along with Morgan Freeman breaking the fourth wall. [This 30-second cut](#) for digital platforms keeps the star, the heritage and the jokes.

WHAT WORKED

The biggest risk of using a **celebrity** is that people may come away remembering the famous face and not whose ad it was. This ad is a great example of how to avoid that.

Brand connection reaches 6.6 *even though* Morgan Freeman is what people mention most — he's named in 19% of comments about what they liked, often alongside the joke about the crumpet. But Freeman is there to narrate Warburtons' own story. If we take him out, we still have an engaging story. But if we take the story out, he would have no role.

It's also important *how* he's used. Freeman is doing the storytelling while the brand stays on screen, so the Warburtons brand is never lost.



Creative Power 6.6

Ad distinctiveness

6.6

Brand connection

6.6

Intensity

6.4

Resonance

6.8

Persuasion

5.9

Amazon Alexa+ “Scary Good”

ABOUT THE AD

As part of Amazon Alexa’s Super Bowl LX campaign, [this ad](#) features Chris Hemsworth walking into the house casually holding a giant snake. The moment he hears Alexa’s voice, the fearless action hero starts to spiral, imagining a ridiculous scenario where Alexa could kill him while he’s working out. After all that worrying, Alexa notices Chris seems tense and offers to book him a massage and a cinnamon scrub. Turns out, maybe she’s not so scary after all.

WHAT WORKED

This ad is another great illustration of what a **celebrity** can bring to a spot without overshadowing the brand. It’s distinctive (5.7), largely because of Hemsworth’s presence, but the joke only lands because we know who he is: an action hero. The fact that he’s afraid of a smart speaker is funny in a way that an unknown actor wouldn’t be.

Interestingly, the product is cast as the villain (until it’s revealed that Alexa is on Hemsworth’s side) which keeps Alexa in the spotlight. In the end, both Hemsworth and Alexa shine with clear roles to play in the story, eliciting a strong emotional response from viewers at 6.4.



Creative Power

5.8

Ad distinctiveness

5.7

Brand connection

5.5

Intensity

5.3

Resonance

6.4

Persuasion

4.9

⇒ Key takeaway ⇒

A famous face can make an ad stand out, but it can't do the branding or selling for you.

The best celebrity ads on social and beyond are those where **the celebrity and the brand shine together**. The celebrity shouldn't be the only thing people remember from the ad.



The element of surprise

HOW WE MEASURED IT

“Does the ad use a genuine surprise — a violated expectation that plays out in the runtime?”

Present

Uses at least one of seven surprise mechanisms.

COUNTS

None

The ad unfolds as expected.

DOES NOT COUNT

WHAT QUALIFIES

Seven mechanisms count (twist-reveal, unexpected premise, incongruous element, tonal swerve, brand-withheld, sensory jolt, ending-recontextualizes).
A standard reveal or pleasant novelty doesn't count.



What's the impact of surprise?

Prevalence

24%

of ads feature a surprise

Impact on Creative Power

+0.35

points (1–6.9 scale)

Top 20% likelihood

1.7×

more likely to be a top ad

Nearly a quarter (24%) of social video ads carry a surprise: a twist, a reveal, a subverted expectation, something that breaks the pattern the ad has set up.

The ones that do are worth **+0.35 on Creative Power** and are **1.7 times more likely to rank in the top 20%** of all social video ads we measured.

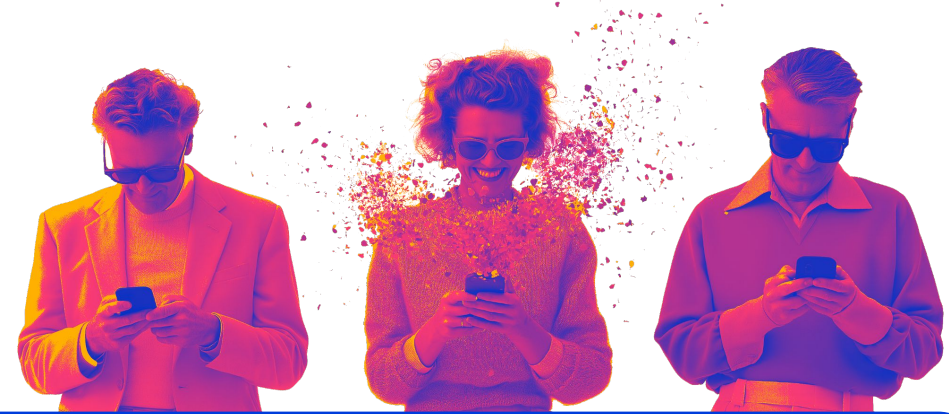
Surprise makes social video ads stand out more than any other characteristic

Surprise makes an ad stand out more than any other characteristic we measured. It lifts distinctiveness by **+1.65 points** — and on a scale that runs 1 to 6.9, that's a substantial lift.

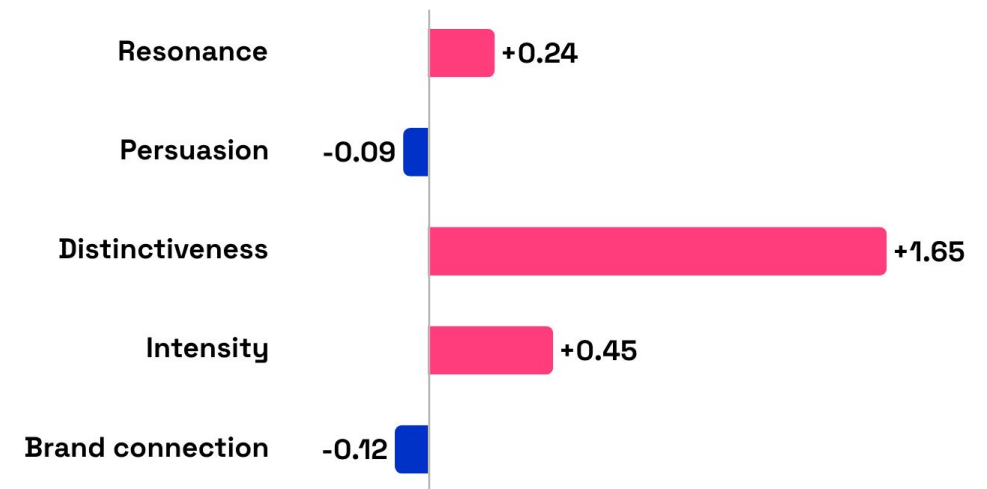
On the flip side, it costs a little on brand connection (-0.12) and persuasion (-0.09), which makes sense when you think about what a surprise really does.

A surprise puts all the attention on the moment — the twist or the thing that shouldn't be there — and that moment is rarely the brand.

If the surprise involves your product or your DBA, it can have a **positive impact on brand connection or persuasion**. But if it's a great surprise that just ends on your logo, chances are the surprise sticks while the brand doesn't.



Which Creative Power pillars it lifts



7 different types of surprises

There are multiple types of surprises, and some are more common in social video advertising than others.

UNEXPECTED PREMISE

The whole idea is strange or original — not a familiar trope

42% of the ads with surprise we looked at

INCONGRUOUS ELEMENT

Something in the ad plainly doesn't belong, and it's played for surprise

33%

BRAND-WITHHELD

The brand/product is deliberately held back and its arrival is the turn or punchline (doesn't include a normal late logo sign-off)

3%

TWIST-REVEAL

The ad builds an expectation, then breaks it with a reveal you didn't see coming

16%

ENDING-RECONTEXTUALIZES

The ending changes the meaning of earlier scenes

2%

SENSORY JOLT

A deliberate visual or auditory jolt engineered to startle (a cut, scale change, sound spike, or image designed as a jolt)

<1%

TONAL SWERVE

A sharp deliberate swerve in tone mid-ad (like sentimental to absurd, calm to chaotic)

4%

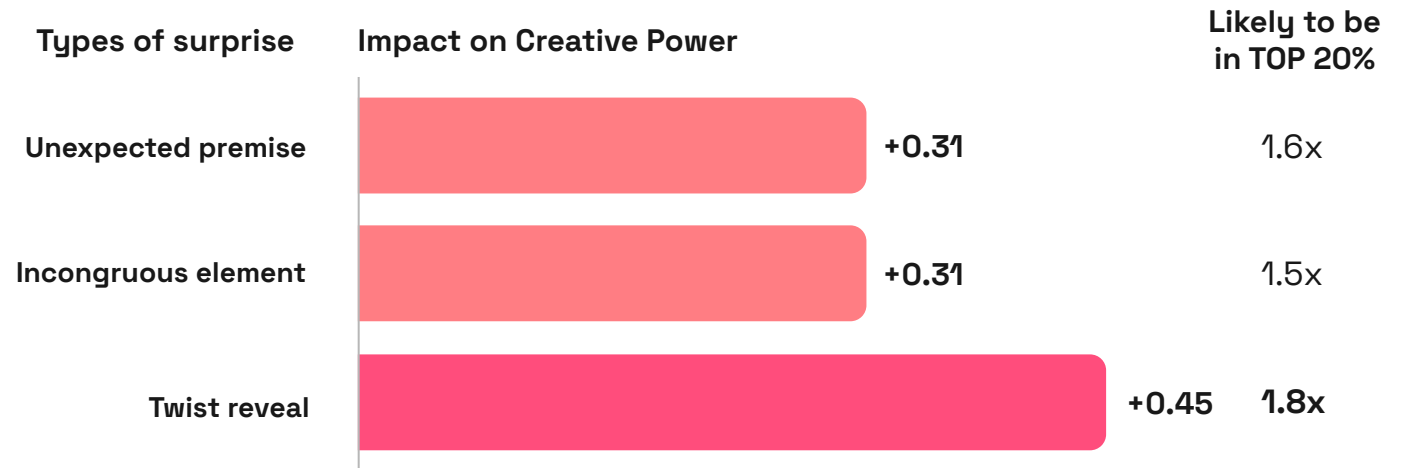
The most effective surprise mechanism needs people's attention

Which type of surprise is most effective? The two dominant mechanisms in social video are both instant hooks: an **unexpected premise** or an **incongruous element**.

Both can be visible immediately, which is why most social video ads use them — they get attention and are equally effective (+0.31 impact on Creative Power).

But **building an expectation and breaking it makes an ad 1.8 times more likely to be in the top 20%** — the strongest of the three types. It's also the least used because it's the only type that needs the viewer to keep watching to see the reveal.

But surprise mechanisms don't have to be mutually exclusive. A strange premise is already a question in the viewer's head that grabs the attention — you can use a twist to answer it.



Jersey Mike's "Can't Fake It"

ABOUT THE AD

"Can't Fake It" is part of Jersey Mike's long-running "It's A Jersey Mike's Thing" campaign, built around how fresh the brand's sandwiches are. Danny DeVito (who has starred in the brand's campaigns for several years) starts by pointing out how much can be faked these days, like his outfit — a green screen suit. His body is then swapped for a transformer, a centaur, and finally, a bodybuilder. The ad closes on how Jersey Mike's subs can't be faked, switching to real footage of bacon sizzling, turkey being sliced and a sub coming together.

WHAT WORKED

This ad is both highly distinctive (6.2) and emotionally resonant (6.8) — an excellent example of what **incongruous surprises** do best. DeVito transforming into a transformer, a centaur and a bodybuilder are strange things that have no business in a sandwich ad. Nothing else in a QSR ad looks like this, and that's the point — an incongruous element is something that doesn't belong in the ad's own world, played for surprise.

But here the shapeshifting carries the message, which is why brand connection is unusually high for a surprise ad — at 6.7 it's one of the strongest scores here. Surprise often detracts attention from the brand, but this ad avoids that because the special effects are there to make the real product stand out by contrast.



Creative Power

6.6

Ad distinctiveness

6.2

Brand connection

6.7

Intensity

6.4

Resonance

6.8

Persuasion

6.3

Freshpet's "Dinner Date"

ABOUT THE AD

Freshpet's ad opens on a man cooking dinner at home for his date. When she opens the fridge, she's confronted with a pack of Freshpet sitting alongside the human food. She's visibly thrown that anyone would keep dog food in the fridge. He insists it isn't dog food exactly, because it's made with real meat and real vegetables. She still isn't having it so he shows her the door. The ad closes on him serving his dog dinner and telling the dog he was right about her all along.

WHAT WORKED

What makes this ad so emotionally resonant (6.8) is **the twist** itself. Viewers say they specifically find the ending funny because the man chooses his dog over his date.

The whole ad sets up an argument about whether Freshpet counts as real food, with the date playing the skeptic the brand needs to win over. But by the end, it turns out the ad has no intention of winning her over — she was the one being judged, and the dog's verdict was the one that mattered.

That's why persuasion is high (6.0), well ahead of distinctiveness (4.5), because the surprise here is in the narrative, unlike Jersey Mike's ad where the surprise is visual.



Creative Power

6.2

Ad distinctiveness

4.5

Brand connection

5.8

Intensity

6.0

Resonance

6.8

Persuasion

6.0

⇒ Key takeaway ⇒

Surprise is one of the strongest ways to get attention — but the surprise needs to work for the brand, not distract from it.

The most effective surprises **make the product or brand part of the unexpected moment** so it's part of what people notice and remember.



Humor

HOW WE MEASURED IT

“Is the ad attempting humor,
and of what kind?”

Present

Any of five humor types.

COUNTS

None

Not attempting humor.

DOES NOT COUNT

WHAT QUALIFIES

Five types tagged (classic wit, absurd/surreal, slapstick, sarcasm, self-aware). Pleasant or upbeat vibes do not count as funny.



What's the impact of humor?

Prevalence

25%

of ads are funny

Impact on Creative Power

+0.33

points (1–6.9 scale)

Top 20% likelihood

1.7×

more likely to be a top ad

A quarter (25%) of social video ads attempt humor of some kind. Those that do are **1.7 times more likely to rank in the top 20% of all ads, and score +0.33 higher on Creative Power.**

Humor is a distinctiveness lever

Humor lifts distinctiveness by +1.33, but works against persuasion (-0.22) and does nothing for brand connection (-0.05), meaning it can make an ad noticeable but it doesn't necessarily make it convincing, and it doesn't help with branding either. So **it works the same way surprise does by amplifying an already strong ad.**

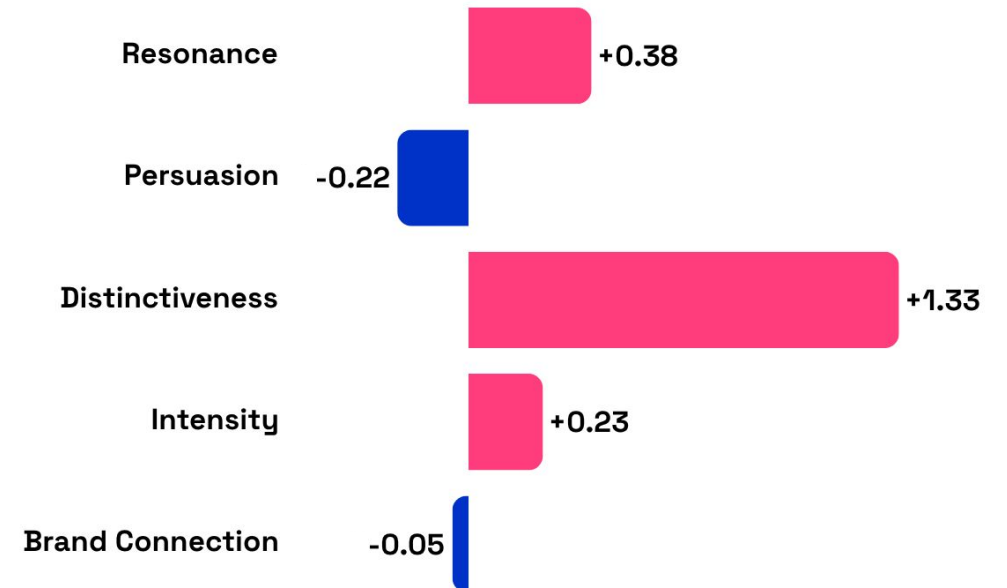
But it only works if the humor is the kind that grabs attention.

We looked at five different types of humor:

- Classic wit
- Absurd/surreal
- Slapstick
- Sarcasm
- Self-aware

Which kind works best in social video?

Which Creative Power pillars it lifts



Absurdity makes ads stand out the most

Absurd humor lifts Creative Power by +0.46, vs. +0.01 for a classic joke.

It's all about the effect absurd humor has on distinctiveness. A classic joke lands at 1.1x — no more likely to stand out than an ad with no humor in it at all, while absurdity reaches 2.9x.

A well-made joke is enjoyable but not that memorable: people laugh and move on with nothing to distinguish it from the last ad that did the same.

But absurdity is not recognizable and that's what allows it to stand out as distinctive. As we saw in the last section, an unexpected premise was one of the two strongest surprise mechanisms, and absurd humor is an unexpected premise that also happens to be funny.



Types of surprise	Impact on Creative Power	Likely to be in TOP 20%	Likely to be in TOP 20% on Distinctiveness
Classic joke / wit	+0.01	1.3x	1.1x
Absurd / surreal	+0.46	1.8x	2.9x

Why absurd humor wins

We can see this in our data: Humor and surprise are the two most closely associated characteristics in the whole report — **more than half of humorous ads are also tagged as surprising.**

Absurd humor probably isn't more distinctive because it's funnier than any other kind of humor, it's more distinctive *because it's surprising.*

We can see this playing out beyond advertising. Since it doesn't require a build-up, absurd humor has become the default comedy of short-form video more broadly. [Academics studying TikTok comedy](#) argue the platforms actively encourage it as the algorithms reward whatever catches people off guard.



Meow Mix's "Gravy's Greatest Hits"

ABOUT THE AD

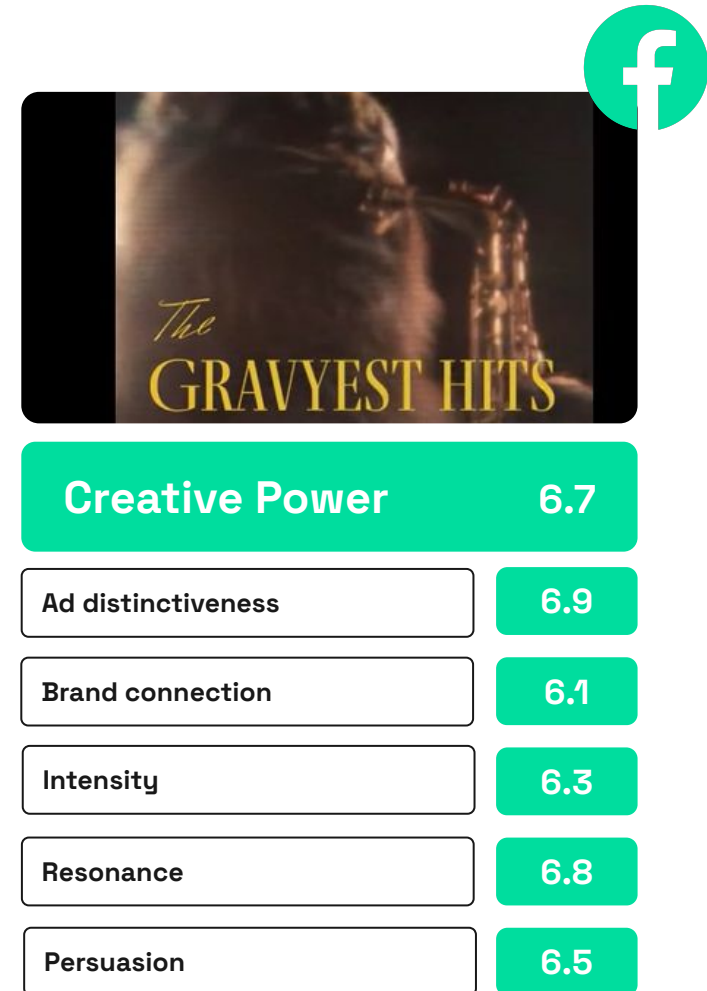
"Meow Mix Remix" is Meow Mix's long-running campaign that reimagines the brand's iconic jingle into different musical genres. It has already produced a cat boy band, a country duo and a Latin pop star. [This spot](#) takes it to its logical conclusion: a compilation album. It opens exactly like a late-night TV album ad. A narrator announces the Gravy's Greatest Hits collection while a cat performs a saxophone solo, with product claims scrolling up the screen in the style of film credits and closing on a call to order now.

WHAT WORKED

The ad is a fantastic example of **absurd or surreal humor**, landing an incredible 6.7 Creative Power score, with distinctiveness at 6.9 and resonance close behind at 6.8!

Done in the format of a compilation album ad that dominated American TV in the 70s and 80s, the parody of a cat with a recording career makes the ad funny, while the format is what makes it look like nothing else in the feed.

Brand connection is also high at 6.1, which is unusual with humor this strange, but since the joke is made out of the brand's most distinctive asset — the iconic jingle — it maintains a clear connection.



Pull-Ups' "Le Scent de Yureen"

ABOUT THE AD

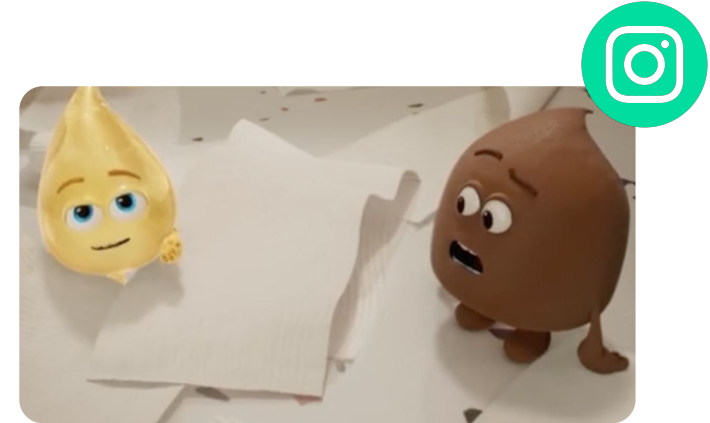
Pull-Ups has two animated characters for the two things potty training produces: Terd and Yureen. [This spot](#) begins as a luxury fragrance commercial starring Yureen. It opens the way luxury fragrance ads do, with a golden droplet falling in slow motion. Then we find out where the fragrance is coming from — Yureen and Terd standing in the aftermath of an accident, with dad arriving at the bathroom door. It closes on a pack of Pull-Ups with the brand's new Learning Layer.

WHAT WORKED

We've seen time and again that **toilet humor** — though a little off putting to some — tends to be funny to most people when done right. And it certainly stands out. This ad lands at 6.3 Creative Power, with distinctiveness right at the top of the scale at 6.9.

Importantly, there's a twist-reveal surprise built into it. The ad opens as a luxury fragrance commercial and only reveals what the fragrance really is at the end.

The characters of Yureen and Terd make a subject most brands would tiptoe around light enough to laugh at. Plus, it's convincing. Persuasion it reaches 6.4, because what's funny about the ad is also the problem Pull-Ups solves.



Creative Power 6.3

Ad distinctiveness	6.9
Brand connection	5.4
Intensity	6.1
Resonance	6.2
Persuasion	6.4

Fireball's "Blazin' Apple"

ABOUT THE AD

Fireball launched Blazin' Apple, its first flavor extension, with [a campaign](#) that rewrites famous apple moments from history and mythology — spanning Snow White, William Tell and Isaac Newton — each with comedian Ben Schwartz inserting himself into the scene. This spot opens on the witch offering Snow White a poisoned apple. Schwartz turns up to talk her out of it and produces a bottle of Blazin' Apple instead, while teasing her about her living arrangements with the seven dwarfs.

WHAT WORKED

This ad is another brilliant example of **absurd humor** landing a 6.0 Creative Power score!

The absurdity here starts with the setting. A children's fairytale is not where you'd expect to find a whisky ad, after all. But this absurdity is built on a scene everyone already knows so it lands instantly and allows the ad to accomplish a lot in a short time.

What's more, brand connection is the strongest metric in the whole ad at 6.7 — normally the one area humor doesn't help with. It works because Blazin' Apple replaces the poisoned apple (the most important object in the whole fairytale) as the better offer for Snow White, placing the brand at the center.



Creative Power 6.0

Ad distinctiveness

6.4

Brand connection

6.7

Intensity

3.0

Resonance

6.5

Persuasion

3.5

➤ Key takeaway ➤

Humor makes ads more distinctive, and **absurd humor in particular is the most distinctive because it surprises people.**

The strongest funny ads use the attention to make the brand and product memorable too.



A visual hook

HOW WE MEASURED IT

“Is there a single salient, highly recallable image or attention-grabbing beat?”

Yes

A distinctive, memorable image is present.

COUNTS

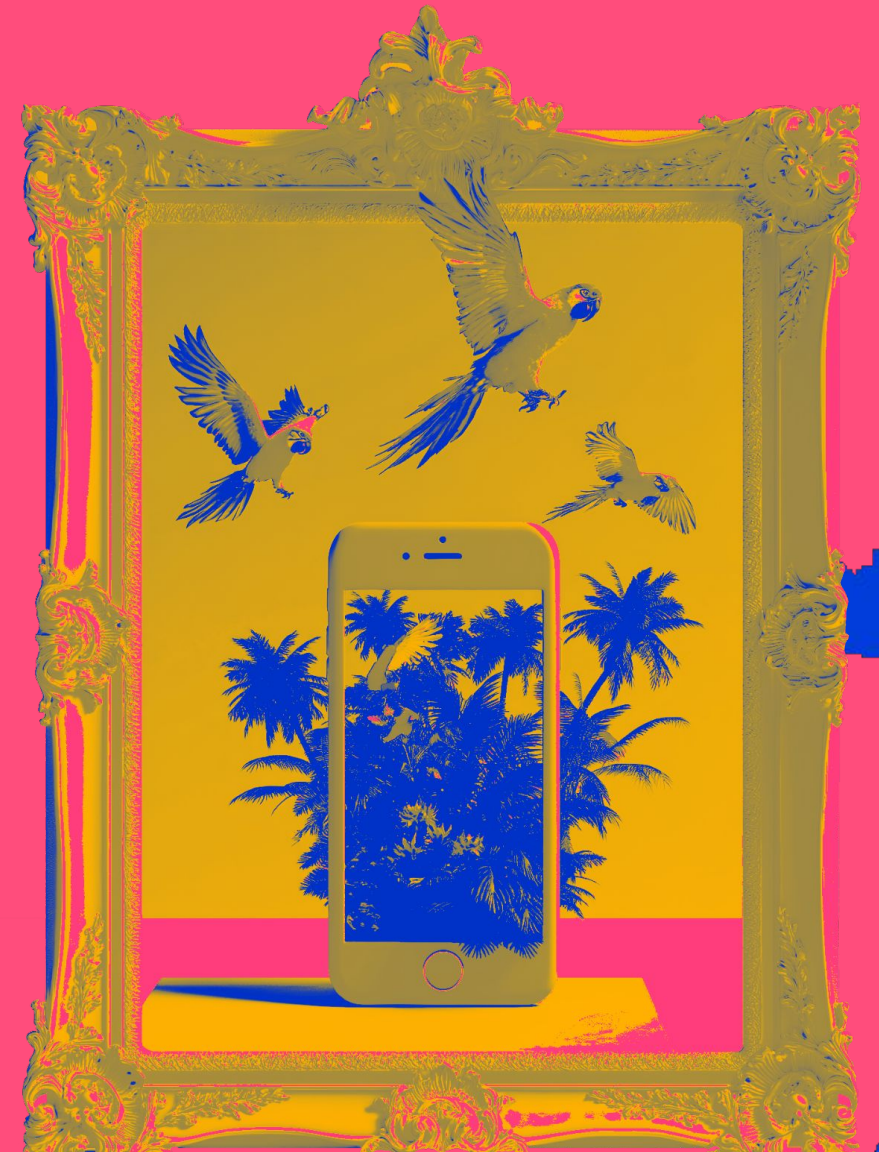
No

No single standout image or beat.

DOES NOT COUNT

WHAT QUALIFIES

A standout image a viewer could describe afterwards. An ordinary product close-up or pleasant scenery does not count.



What's the impact of visual hooks?

Prevalence

48%

of ads feature visual hooks

Impact on Creative Power

+0.40

points (1–6.9 scale)

Top 20% likelihood

2.4×

more likely to be a top ad

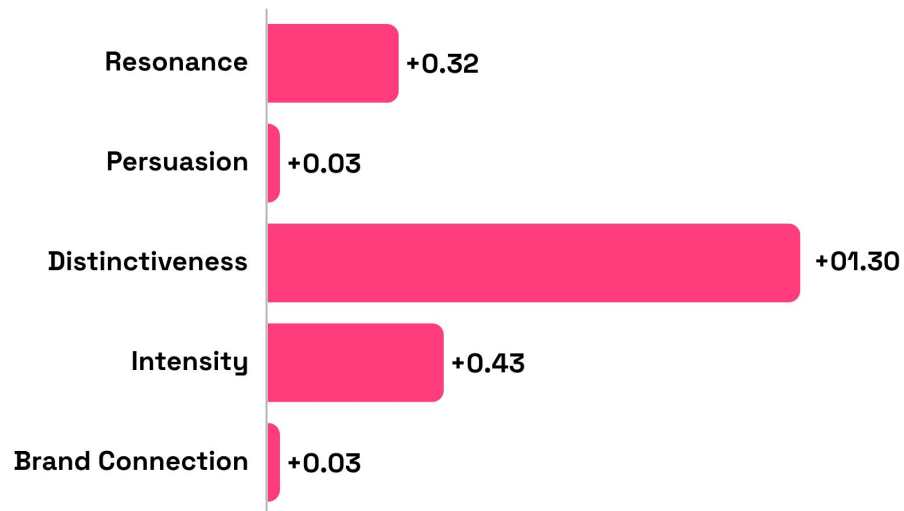
Just under half of social video ads (48%) carry a distinctive visual hook — a single memorable image the ad is built around. These ads score **+0.40 higher on Creative Power** and are **2.4 times more likely to rank in the strongest fifth of all social video ads**.

In fact, this is the most likely characteristic to get an ad into the top 20% of everything we measured — ahead of surprise and humor at 1.7×.



Similar to surprise, a visual hook is a driver of distinctiveness

Which Creative Power pillars it lifts



A visual hook works the way surprise does: it gives people a reason to pay attention. **Distinctiveness is where nearly all of the effect lands at +1.30**, with intensity (+0.43) and resonance (+0.32) picking up some of it.

Importantly, **surprise almost never occurs without a visual hook**. More than 8 in 10 ads with a surprise also carry a visual hook, because the unexpected thing usually needs a striking image to land. This is also part of why both score so highly on the same measure!

The reverse isn't true — only a quarter of ads with a visual hook have a surprise in them. That's what sets a visual hook apart: it's an image you can design into the ad, and it works on its own. Surprise is an effect you're hoping to create, and it tends to need a hook to carry it.



Applebee's "Too much cheese? Never"

ABOUT THE AD

When Applebee's launched the O-M-Cheese Burger — a burger served split in half, each side sitting in a sizzling skillet of molten cheese — it became so popular online that the brand added even more cheese and built a whole menu platform around it. The [15-second ad](#) features close-ups with lots of cheese pulling away, the patty, the bacon and the first bite, with the narrator dismissing the idea that there could ever be too much cheese. The ad closes on the burger's name, the Applebee's logo, the price and the promise of more cheese.

WHAT WORKED

This is a **purely sensory ad** — there isn't any story, a joke or a twist of any kind. All we see is mouthwatering close-ups of a cheeseburger. And it produces one of the strongest emotional reactions of any ad we feature in this report, with intensity at 6.9 and love and like dominating the response at 40% each.

What makes it so effective is that the visual is reinforced by what we hear. The word cheese is said 7 times in 15 seconds, so the image and the audio are repeatedly hitting the same note.

And because the visual hook is also the product demo, the brand is present throughout, making this ad score very well on persuasion and brand connection.



Creative Power

6.6

Ad distinctiveness

5.0

Brand connection

6.7

Intensity

6.9

Resonance

6.6

Persuasion

6.3

Twizzlers' "Roadtrip"

ABOUT THE AD

Twizzlers has spent years turning familiar worlds into Twizzlers — The Wizard of Oz, Star Trek, King Kong — all rebuilt out of red twists. [This ad](#) takes on the great American road trip. It opens on a pack of Strawberry Twizzlers, one of the twists unfurls, and we're inside a world made entirely of candy: roads, hot-air balloons, the Golden Gate Bridge, Mount Rushmore and the Statue of Liberty. A car drives through it to "Holiday Road," the song from National Lampoon's Vacation. It closes back on the pack and the line: "The twist you can't resist."

WHAT WORKED

The Applebee's ad showed us the product, while Twizzlers' ad is built out of it. **The visual hook here is the product turned into a world** — every road, bridge, statue and balloon is a red twist, so the brand's most recognizable assets (the shape and the color) are built into every frame of the spot.

It's also what people took away. Lots of the comments about what people liked named something visual like the colors, the animation and the graphics.

And because the brand is in every frame, brand connection (6.3) and persuasion (6.5) come out as the two strongest scores here — the measures a visual hook normally does least for in our data.



Creative Power 5.9

Ad distinctiveness

6.0

Brand connection

6.3

Intensity

6.0

Resonance

5.1

Persuasion

6.5

➤Key takeaway➤

A **memorable visual** can be the difference between an ad that gets scrolled past and one that gets remembered.

Visual hooks are the strongest predictor of reaching the top 20% of ads in our study. But just like everything else, they need to be paired with good advertising fundamentals in order to work for the brand.



Animals

HOW WE MEASURED IT

“Does a real, live-action animal feature meaningfully in the ad?”

A real animal

Any live animal (pets, farm animals, wild animals, etc.)

COUNTS

None

No real animal features on screen.

WHAT QUALIFIES

Only real, live-action animals count (a photorealistic animal presented as real also counts). And a fleeting background animal doesn't qualify.



What's the impact of animals?

Prevalence

10%

of ads include animals

Impact on Creative Power

+0.29

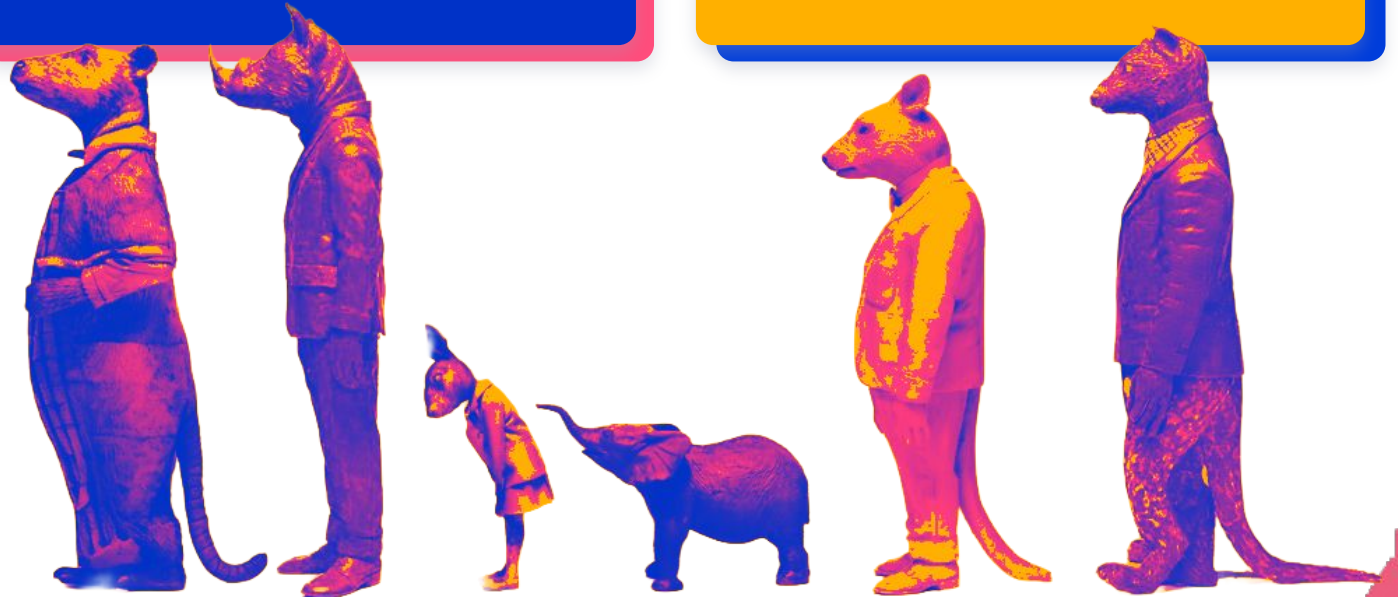
points (1–6.9 scale)

Top 20% likelihood

1.2×

more likely to be a top ad

10% of social video ads feature a real animal. These ads **lift Creative Power** by **+0.29** and are **1.2 times** more likely to rank in the top 20% of all ads.



Animals have no downside

Other than a visual hook, animals are the only other amplifying characteristic we looked at that lifts all five Creative Power pillars without any downsides, **with the biggest impact on resonance (+0.44) and intensity (+0.36).**

Ultimately, animals act as **emotional triggers** — they'll make people feel more strongly and more connected to the ad. Understandably, they have a lesser effect on brand connection and persuasion.



Which Creative Power pillars it lifts



Regardless of category, animals work when they have a clear role to play

Unsurprisingly, **animals appear in 95% of pet care advertising**. In every other category they're the exception: 20% in personal and home services, 14% in home care and under 10% everywhere else.

It's also why we controlled for category in this analysis. Animals cluster in pet care and baby, the two strongest categories in the study, so if we didn't control for that they'd look 2.6× more likely to produce a top ad instead of the 1.2× they actually deliver.

But the lift isn't just confined to those categories. Animals pay off in retail (+1.24), financial services (+1.16), consumer healthcare (+0.98), home care (+0.39) and travel (+0.21) — all categories that have little in common. What they share is that the animal has a role: in financial services it's mostly pet insurance, in consumer healthcare mostly allergy medication, where a pet is often the reason someone needs the product.

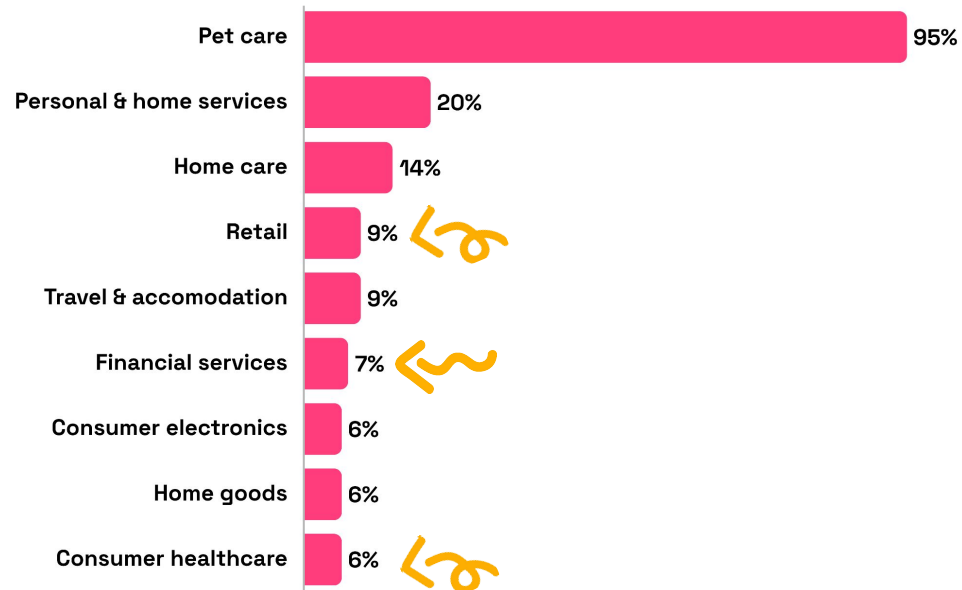
But it doesn't have to be that literal. **An animal can carry an idea** rather than a product — demonstrating something or embodying a feeling. It just can't be there for its own sake.

Adding an animal isn't a shortcut to a strong ad. Whatever the category, an animal only earns its place when it has a genuine role in the story you're telling.

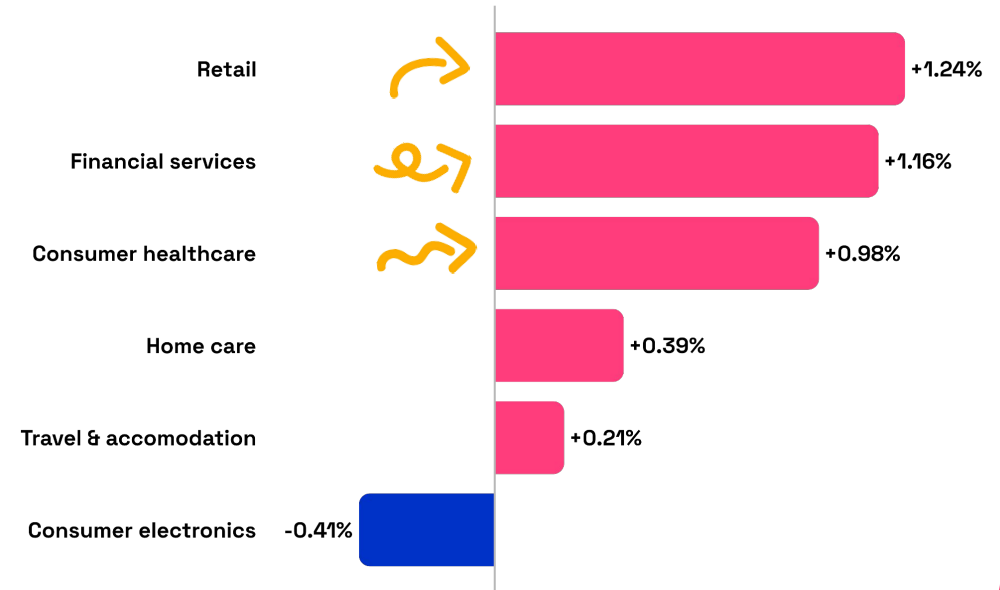


Animals lift Creative Power well beyond pet categories

How often an animal appears in each category



Creative Power uplift by category*



*Only categories with enough animal and non-animal ads to compare. Pet Care is excluded at 95% prevalence.

Dulux's "Life is What You Paint It"

ABOUT THE AD

Dulux brought back the Dulux Dog for the brand's 65th year, this time as a puppy named Dorothy with a magical ability — she shakes Dulux colors out of her coat. As Dorothy grows, so does her gift, and what began as something that caused chaos as pup becomes something purposeful — each shake of her coat marking a different moment in the lives of the people around her. By the end she's fully grown and in command of it, painting a room around a woman who's ready for a fresh start. The ad closes on the line: "Life is what you paint it."

WHAT WORKED

We've seen that **animals** make an ad more effective when they have a clear job to do — it's the connection to the story or to the brand that makes it work. And Dorothy is a very good example of this. Every shake of her coat is a Dulux color going onto a wall, so the animal and the product benefit are one and the same. That's why persuasion lands at 6.7, the highest measure for this ad. This isn't easy to pull off in a category like home improvement where animals have no obvious place!

And since this isn't something you usually see, it stands out as very distinctive (6.6) and makes people feel something too!



Creative Power

6.2

Ad distinctiveness

6.6

Brand connection

4.2

Intensity

6.5

Resonance

6.1

Persuasion

6.7

Pup-Peroni's "Treat the Best to the Best"

ABOUT THE AD

Pup-Peroni's "Treat the Best to the Best" imagines what dogs would be like if they were food influencers. Four of them sit in a trendy restaurant doing everything you'd expect — live-streaming from the table, posing for selfies, fussing over filters and explaining to the camera that the treats are slow-cooked. Then the food arrives and the performance collapses. The dogs knock over the phones and microphones and simply eat. The ad closes on the pack, the fact that the treats are slow-cooked for 2.5 hours and the line: "Treat the best to the best."

WHAT WORKED

There's only one thing better than a **dog in an ad**, and that's four of them! Creative Power lands at 6.7, with resonance at the top of the scale at 6.9 and intensity right behind at 6.7. Unsurprisingly, the emotion comes from the dogs — they were mentioned in 39% of people's comments about what they liked in the ad.

Dogs behaving like food influencers is an absurd premise. And as we know, absurd humor stands out (6.4). But this ad also persuades (5.8) because it shows what happens when the dogs get the Pup-Peroni's treats — they can't resist them!



Creative Power 6.7

Ad distinctiveness 6.4

Brand connection 6.5

Intensity 6.7

Resonance 6.9

Persuasion 5.8

➤Key takeaway➤

Animals can add warmth and emotion to almost any category — when they have a reason to be there.

The best animal ads make the animal part of the idea, rather than using them as decoration.



Product demos

HOW WE MEASURED IT

“Does the ad show the product producing a visible result that explains how it works?”



Visible outcome

Shown working —
a clear result.

COUNTS

Demonstrated in use

Shown being used /
handled.

DOES NOT COUNT

Not shown

Product not shown in use.

DOES NOT COUNT

Shown, not used

Appears but isn't used.

DOES NOT COUNT

WHAT QUALIFIES

The product must be actively used and shown producing a clear result. Just having the pack on screen is not a demonstration.

What's the impact of product demos?

Prevalence

28%

of ads feature product demos

Impact on Creative Power

+0.40

points (1–6.9 scale)

Top 20% likelihood

1.6×

more likely to be a top ad

Ads that show the product being used with a visible result from using it **lift Creative Power** by **+0.40** and are **1.6 times more likely** to rank in the **top 20%** of all social video ads.



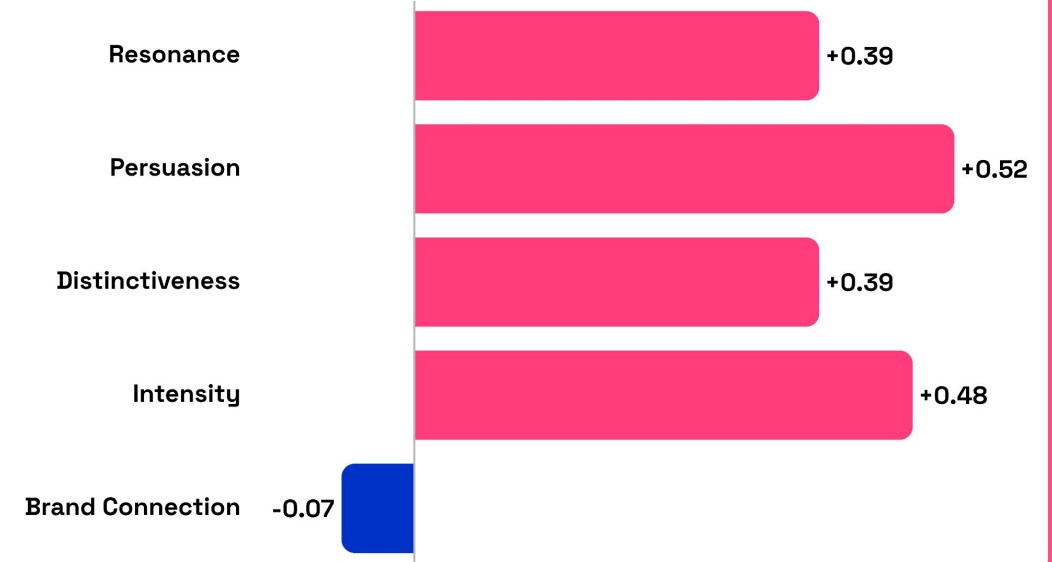
One of the few characteristics that drive intent

A product demo is one of the few characteristics we measured with a strong effect on persuasion (+0.52).

Almost everything else you can add to your ad makes it more noticeable, but won't have as much influence on purchase intent.

But showing how the product works makes people more likely to be interested in buying it.

Which Creative Power pillars it lifts



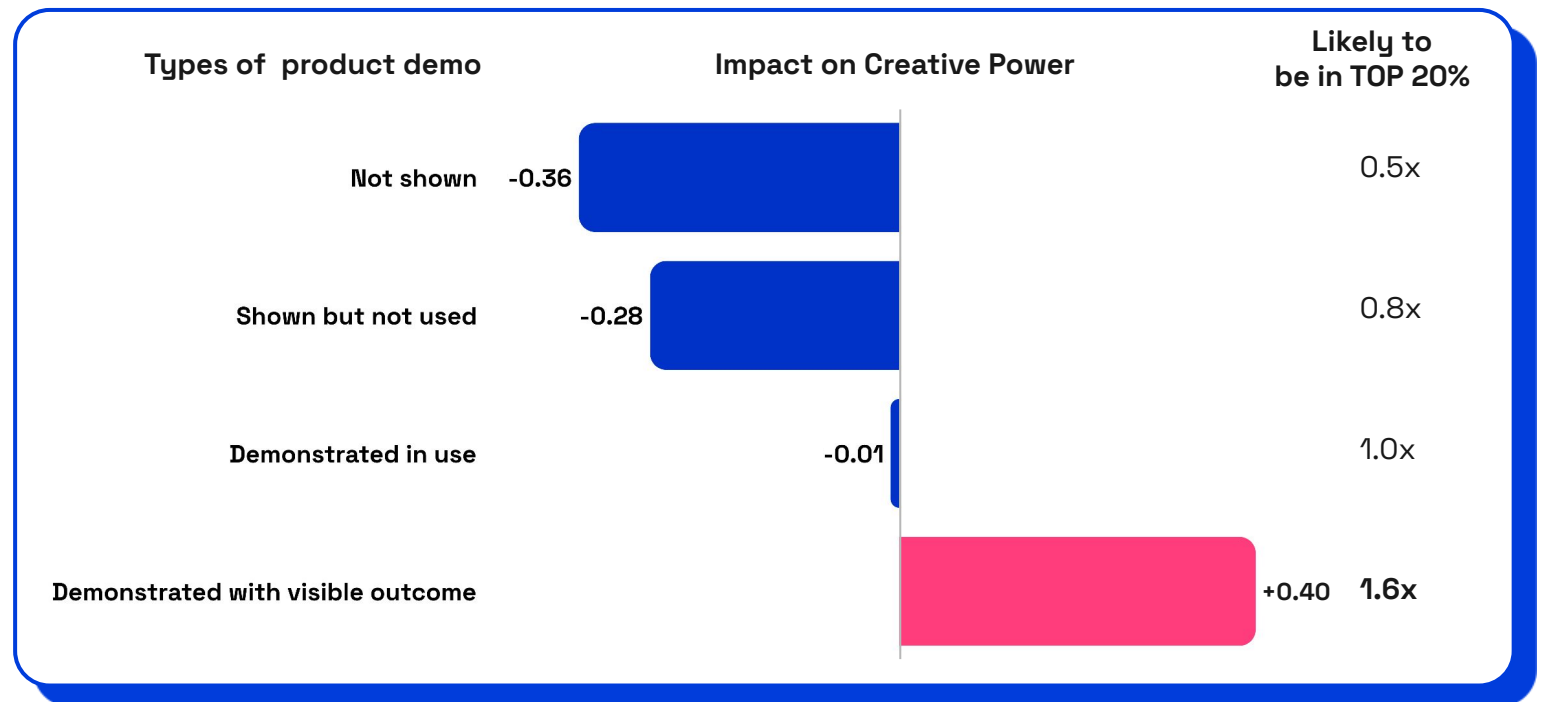
It's the =>outcome=<= of the demo that counts, not the demo itself

But there is one important caveat. An ad that shows the product being used — someone drinking it, spraying it, wearing it — performs no better than the average ad (-0.01).

What moves the needle is showing *what happened because the product was used*. For example, the floor that's now clean or the shirt that comes out of the wash unmarked.

It's the **visible outcome that lifts Creative Power** with +0.40 and has a 1.6 times greater chance of reaching the top 20%.

In a way, a demo works like a story arc: showing the product is only the first step and the outcome is the payoff and a reason to buy.



But don't neglect your branding just because you're showing the product in use

Interestingly, showing the product in use may not be enough to cue your brand. The product itself does help people identify the brand — **but the more elaborate the demo gets, the less focus there is on the brand.**

Compared to ads that don't show the product at all, simply having it on screen lifts brand connection by +23%, showing it in use by +20%, and showing it with a visible outcome by +17%. Persuasion runs the other way over the same four levels, climbing from +10% to +35% as the demo becomes more elaborate.

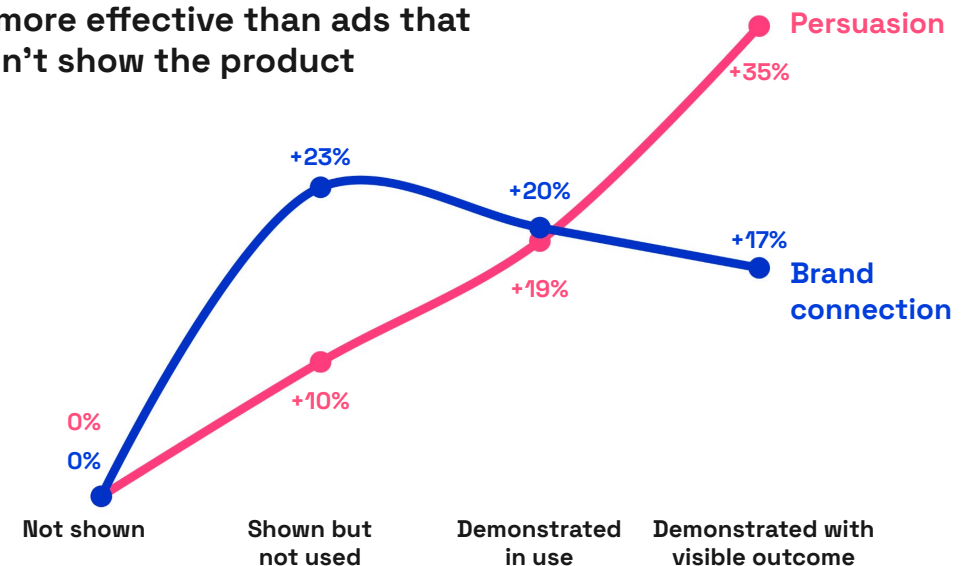
A product sitting on screen unused is usually a pack shot, so the distinctive packaging and logo are prominently displayed. The pack is doing branding work via distinctive brand assets (DBAs).

But a demo can be conveyed in any number of ways and most of them don't involve looking at the packaging, logo or any other DBA.

So just remember that if you're going to show the results of using your product in the ad, your branding still needs to be present.

**The more the demo shows, the more it persuades.
But it does less for your branding.**

% more effective than ads that don't show the product



Deliveroo's “Unexpected Guest”

ABOUT THE AD

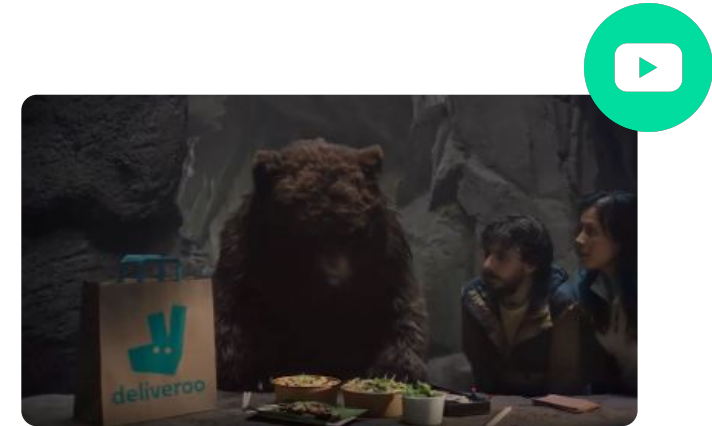
Deliveroo's second spot under its “Now Just Got Even Better” platform opens on two hikers sheltering from a storm in a cave. When they realize the cave is already occupied by a hungry grizzly bear, one of them pulls up the Deliveroo app and hits order. A hand holding a Deliveroo bag instantly appears through the cave wall, then a second delivery of snacks appears and finally a Bluetooth speaker. By the end, the three of them dance together to a remix of the Vengaboys’ “We Like To Party.”

WHAT WORKED

This is a great example of an ad with a **product demo with a visible outcome**. The moment the order arrives, the whole situation changes. The bear stops being a threat and the cave stops being a scary trap — it becomes somewhere everyone wants to be. A visible outcome doesn't have to be functional — it can also be emotional!

And notice that there isn't a single claim made about the service in the ad. Nobody says the service is fast or that app has a wide range, we just see it for ourselves.

Brand connection holds strong at 5.3 because the brand shows up throughout the whole ad: the bag comes through the cave wall three times and the logo is worked into the hillside itself!



Creative Power

6.7

Ad distinctiveness

6.8

Brand connection

5.3

Intensity

6.4

Resonance

6.9

Persuasion

6.5

Nanit's "The Nanit Effect"

ABOUT THE AD

Nanit's "The Nanit Effect" is built around the idea that understanding your baby's sleep makes parenthood feel less overwhelming. The ad captures the tiredness and uncertainty of those early months, and Nanit steps in with a daily sleep score and a prediction of when the next nap is coming. As the parents begin to understand their baby's sleep patterns, the parents start to sleep better and worry less. The ad closes on the Nanit logo and the line: "Parenthood looks different here."

WHAT WORKED

This is a prime example of an ad that **shows the product in use** with all its features, with a key differentiator.

The ad shows viewers the *result* of what it does: parents peacefully sleeping through the night. That's why the scores run so high across the board, landing Creative Power at 6.5.

And while brand connection lands at 4.1, it's important to remember that Nanit is a specialist in a category most people pass through for a couple of years, so there's much less prior awareness to build on than a household name.



Creative Power

6.5

Ad distinctiveness

6.8

Brand connection

4.1

Intensity

6.9

Resonance

6.4

Persuasion

6.8

⇒ Key takeaway ⇒

Showing a product is good, but **showing what it can do is better.**

A visible outcome is what drives persuasion, giving people a tangible reason to want the product.



Distinctive brand assets

HOW WE MEASURED IT

“Which distinctive brand assets does the ad use — and how many?”

Asset-dense (3+)

Three or more distinctive assets.

COUNTS

Sparse (0-2)

Two or fewer.

DOES NOT COUNT

WHAT QUALIFIES

Distinctive brand assets (DBAs) include a logo, brand colors, pack, slogan, mascot, website, store and more. We compare asset-dense ads (3+) with the rest.



What's the impact of DBAs?

Prevalence

35%

of ads feature 3 or more DBAs

Impact on Creative Power

+0.30

points (1–6.9 scale)

Top 20% likelihood

1.3×

more likely to be a top ad

Just over a third of social video ads (35%) carry three or more DBAs. These ads **lift Creative Power by +0.30** and are **1.3 times more likely to rank in the top 20%** of all social video ads.



The only characteristic that lifts brand connection

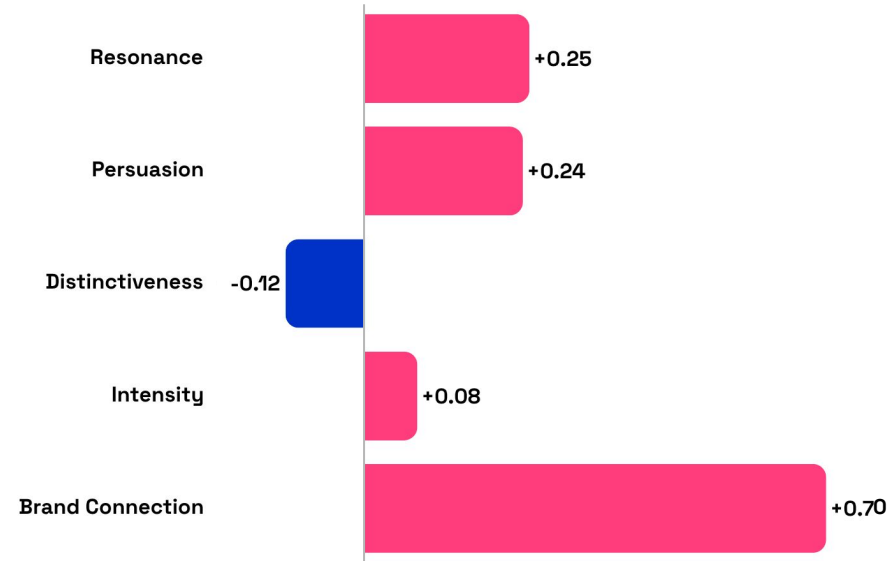
DBAs have a modest lift on Creative Power overall, but **this is the only characteristic we measured that moves brand connection substantially**. It lifts it by +0.70 — the largest effect on any pillar we've seen in this report outside of distinctiveness.

But this is also the only characteristic that has a negative impact on ad distinctiveness (-0.12). That makes sense because DBAs rely on familiarity. Using familiar assets is critical to ensuring the brand comes through in the ad, but they'll do less to grab attention on their own.

You need the other characteristics we've looked at to hook people in.

A good ad does both at once — grabbing attention and connecting back to the brand — and that's where the craft comes in.

Which Creative Power pillars it lifts



The assets brands use most are the ones that work least

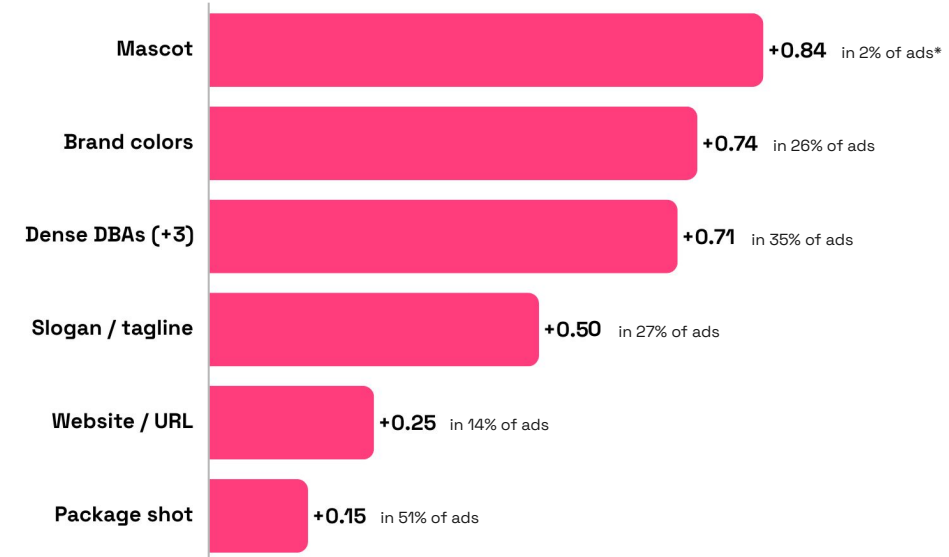
Half of all social video ads carry a package shot. Outside of the logo itself, it's the most common branding device in advertising, but it lifts brand connection by only +0.15 — less than any other asset we measured.

The assets that work best are used far less. **Brand colors appear in a quarter of ads and lift brand connection by +0.74. A slogan appears in a quarter and lifts it by +0.50.**

It's worth considering what each asset stands for. A package shot is more about what's being sold, while brand colors, a mascot or a slogan carry the brand as a whole.

It also helps explain why ads that show a visible outcome work so well on persuasion (+0.52) and score lowest on brand connection (-0.07), as we saw in the previous section. Once the ad moves to the result, the pack leaves the frame. So if there are no other DBAs present, the link back to the brand is gone.

Which brand assets lift brand connection most



**Only 32 ads in our study feature a mascot, so treat that figure as directional. Logos are excluded as 97% of ads have one, which leaves too few ads without a logo to make a fair comparison.*

Dawn Platinum's “The Better Grease Getter”

ABOUT THE AD

The ad opens on two ducklings standing together on a kitchen counter before pulling back to reveal a couple cleaning up around them. The ducklings — Dawn’s mascots for decades — watch as a baking dish and a heavily soiled frying pan are cleaned, narrating about how effective Dawn is the whole time. The ad cuts between the couple washing up, close-ups of the cleaning performance and the ducklings beside the product. It closes on the pack and the line: “The better grease getter.”

WHAT WORKED

As **DBAs** of the Dawn brand, the ducklings make the ad unmistakably Dawn’s — so it makes sense to see this spot from Dawn has the highest brand connection (6.8) and persuasion (6.9) scores of any ad we feature in this report.

Plus, people love them! The ducks are mentioned in 39% of comments about what people liked, and they carry the product claim: gentle enough for a duckling, tough enough for grease.

Ultimately this ad relies on a strong DBA which is what turns an ordinary demo into a very persuasive ad.



Creative Power	
Ad distinctiveness	5.7
Brand connection	6.8
Intensity	6.6
Resonance	6.7
Persuasion	6.9

Dos Equis' "The Most Interesting Man in the World"

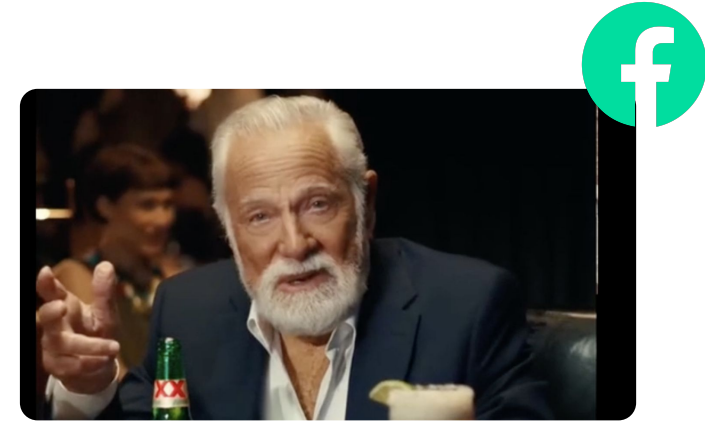
ABOUT THE AD

Dos Equis retired the iconic "Most Interesting Man in the World" campaign in 2016. But in January 2026 they brought Jonathan Goldsmith back and built the comeback into the story. [The ad](#) finds him with amnesia, living an ordinary life as an "uninteresting man," until he opens the fridge and finds a bottle of Dos Equis and his memories return. A helicopter arrives to collect him and he returns to the life he'd forgotten. The ad ends with the classic lines: "I don't always drink beer, but when I do, I still prefer Dos Equis" followed by "Stay thirsty, my friends."

WHAT WORKED

There's **more than one DBA at work** here but two are most important: the man and his catchphrase.

People remember Jonathan Goldsmith as the Dos Equis guy even after ten years off air, saying things like *"The Dos Equis guy is back and he said the thing," "He is an icon for the brand" and "He has been the face of Dos Equis for years."* Viewers immediately recognize him as the brand's character, rather than the actor, which is why both Creative Power and brand connection reach 6.7, in line with both intensity and resonance!



Creative Power 6.7

Ad distinctiveness 6.9

Brand connection 6.7

Intensity 6.7

Resonance 6.7

Persuasion 6.6

⇒ Key takeaway ⇒

Ads are only effective **if audiences know whose ad they saw.**

Distinctive brand assets are the strongest — and only substantial — driver of brand connection we studied. Branding needs to be built throughout the ad in a way that fits with the creative and the narrative, not left to the final frame.



HOW WE MEASURED IT

“Does the ad leave the viewer on a positive emotional high — an uplifting or satisfying resolution?”

Ends on a clear positive / uplifting note.

COUNTS

A neutral, unresolved or downbeat ending.

DOES NOT COUNT

It's the exit emotion that's judged — not the overall mood through the ad. An upbeat ad that fizzles out or ends flat doesn't count.

What's the impact of the way an ad ends?

Prevalence

74%

of ads end on a high

Impact on Creative Power

+0.46

points (1–6.9 scale)

Top 20% likelihood

1.5×

more likely to be a top ad

Of every characteristic we tested across 3,303 ads, none moves Creative Power further than how an ad finishes. **Ads that resolve on a positive or uplifting note score +0.46 higher than ads that don't** and they're **1.5 times more likely to land in the top 20%** of all advertising.

What a positive ending means

It's important to note that what we're measuring here is the last thing viewers feel, not the overall mood. An ad can be warm, funny and beautifully made for 20 seconds but if it fizzles out or simply stops when the runtime does, we wouldn't count this as positive resolution.

It's about making your ad's ending deliberate: the moment the tension breaks, the payoff lands, the joke pays off or the problem is solved.

And when your ad resolves on a high and make people feel good at the end — the data shows that it's likely to have a strong impact on overall effectiveness.



Ending on a high makes an ad better liked, better remembered and more persuasive

Positive resolution lifts 4 of the 5 measures behind Creative Power.
Distinctiveness leads at +0.60, with resonance close behind at +0.54.

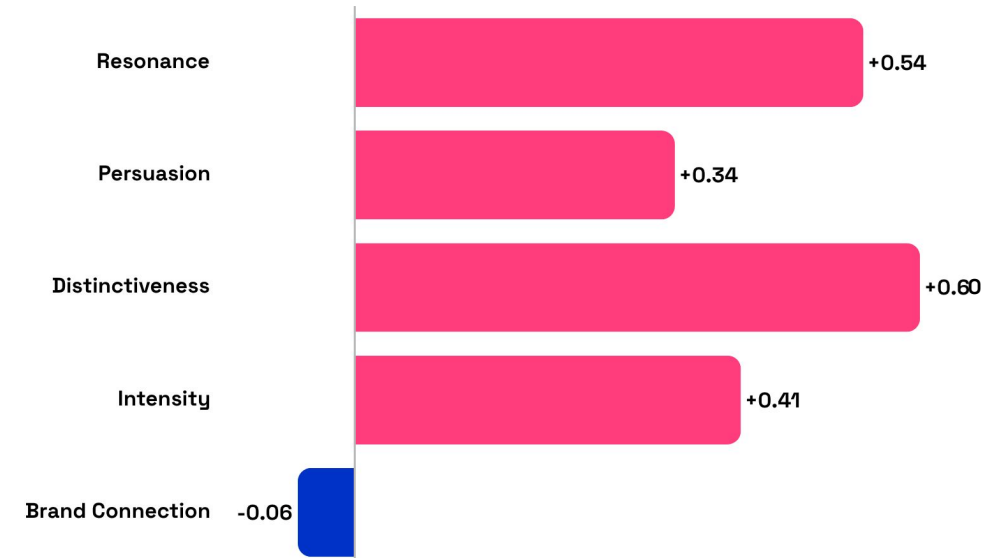
When people judge an experience, they normally remember its most intense moment and its final one, and weigh those relative to everything else. Kahneman and Fredrickson called it the peak-end rule. An ad is no different in that respect.

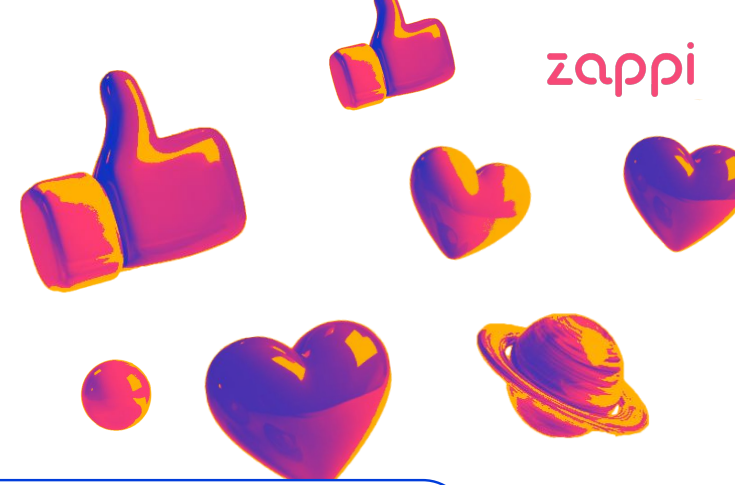
An ad's last two seconds carry more weight in memory than its middle ten.

The exception is brand connection, which dips slightly at -0.06. A great ending makes people feel something and remember the ad but it doesn't, on its own, link it to the brand — which is the same pattern we've seen throughout this report.

Nothing lifts brand connection except the brand assets you build in deliberately!

Which Creative Power pillars it lifts





A full story arc takes a strong ending one step further

Any ad can end on a high, regardless of format, like a demo, a montage or a feature list. It's about the feeling you leave people with.

Yet nearly every ad (99%) that has **a full story arc** (a problem set-up, tension that builds and a clear on-screen release that settles it) is also an ad that has a positive resolution.

Ads built as a story have more to deliver — setting up a tension, letting it build and releasing it while the viewer watches. **Only 15% of social video ads do all of that.**

99%

of ads with a full story arc also end on a positive note

End on a high
74% of ads

Full story arc
15%



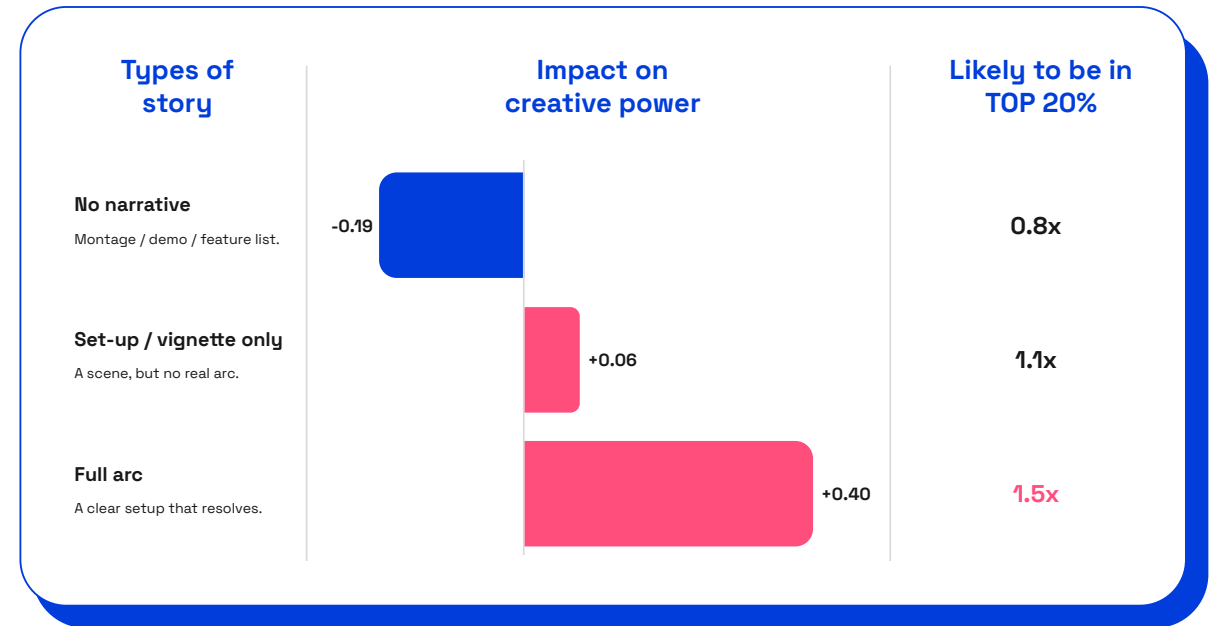
A story only pays when the tension resolves on screen

What moves the needle in an ad with a story is the **release** — the moment the tension breaks on screen. An ad that opens a tension and never closes it lands at +0.06, or not much better than the average ad.

An ad with a full story arc and a tension that resolves on screen **lifts Creative Power by +0.40** and it's **1.5x more likely to be in the top 20%** of social video ads.

At first glance, this seems to contradict everything short-form best practice says about front-loading — leading with the hook and landing the promise early. That's how you stop the scroll and get attention. But **what stops the scroll is a different question from what makes an ad land once you have people's attention.**

It isn't a choice between the two — you can hook someone in the first three seconds and still build to a story that resolves.



Scrumbles' "When Life Gets Tough"

ABOUT THE AD

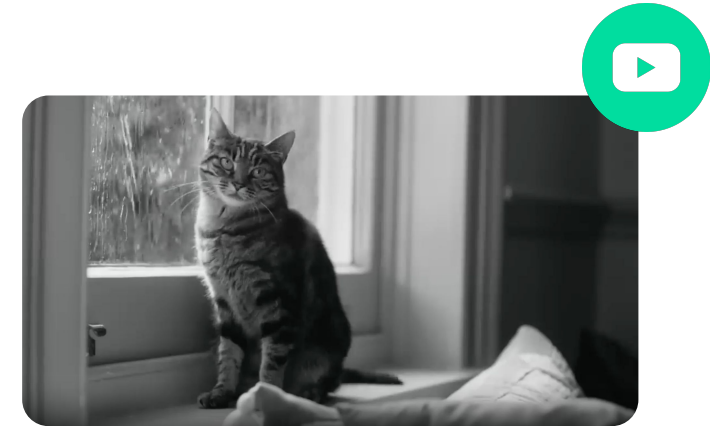
Scrumbles, a London pet food brand, gave its cat a film noir. [The ad](#) is black and white and narrated by Smokey, a cat with grievances: catnip is overrated, his owners are a couple of schmucks and Luna — the only reason he hasn't thrown himself to the dogs — is out there with the chump next door. Then his owner opens a pack of Scrumbles (hope in gravy form) and the picture turns to color. The rain still falls and Luna still isn't his, but he has Scrumbles. It ends on him enjoying the food with the two packs on screen.

WHAT WORKED

This ad is a great example of a **full story arc** — we've got a character and a problem that resolves on screen in just half a minute. Only 15% of ads manage a full arc and nearly all of those land a positive ending too.

Here the product *is* the resolution and it shows up in the high resonance score (6.0) — the strongest measure in the ad. The product only appears at the moment everything changes and it's the thing influencing the change, including visually with the picture turning to color.

What's clever about this spot is how realistic the product is positioned. Scrumbles can make Smokey feel better about his problems — even if it can't really fix them.



Creative Power

5.4

Ad distinctiveness

5.8

Brand connection

5.0

Intensity

5.1

Resonance

6.0

Persuasion

4.3

Patrón's "The Signature Cork Pop"

ABOUT THE AD

Patrón made [an ad](#) out of the noise its own packaging makes. Mustard, the three-time Grammy winner, recorded seven sounds from a bottle of Patrón EL ALTO and turned them into a beat. [In his words](#): "a lot of these sounds are me ripping open the plastic off the cork, or the kick is opening the PATRÓN box." The film shows him performing the finished track on stage at UCLA's Royce Hall. It launched in March 2026, just ahead of the Grammys, where Patrón is the official tequila partner.

WHAT WORKED

This ad makes us wait, which is rare on social. It opens on a cork pop and builds the music up until the beat is finished. It also shows us that you don't need a complex narrative for your ad to **end on a high**. The satisfaction here comes from watching the process and hearing the final result.

Sound is also a differentiator in this spot and the ad stands out for its unique approach. Importantly, the beat is the noise Patrón's own packaging makes which connects it straight to the product and the brand. That's part of why the ad still persuades without making any claims about the tequila, and still has a strong brand connection at 5.2!



Creative Power

5.5

Ad distinctiveness

6.6

Brand connection

5.2

Intensity

5.4

Resonance

5.2

Persuasion

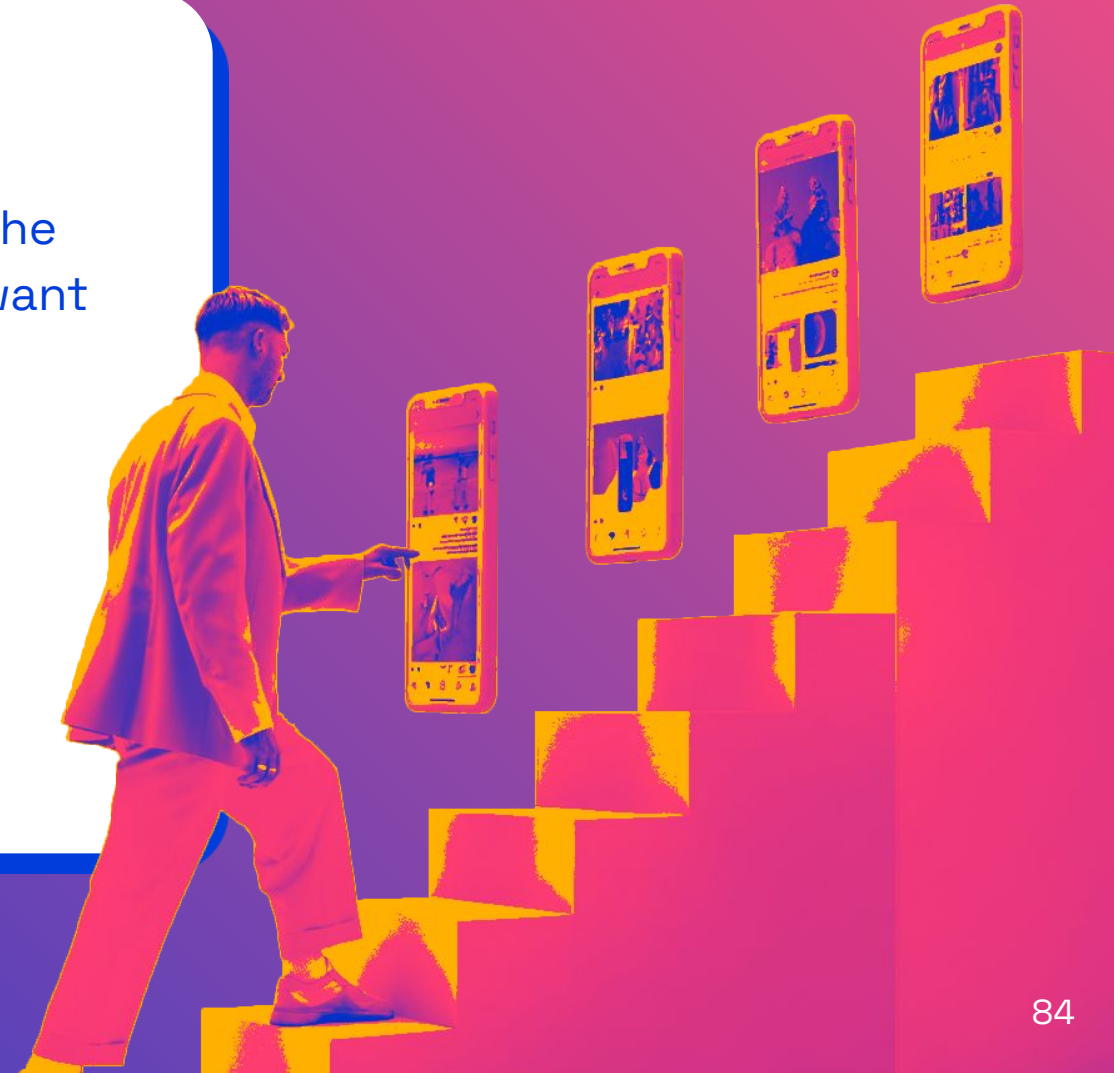
5.3

⇒ Key takeaway ⇒

How an ad ends is very important.

Give people a **satisfying payoff** — and make sure the final moment reinforces the positive feeling you want them to take away.

Of course, this doesn't take away from the importance of hooking people early, since you still need to get their attention before they scroll away! But leaving them with a positive feeling is just as critical.



How the characteristics overlap

Now that we've explored each characteristic individually, let's take a look at all the characteristics together.



Most characteristics don't show up alone

The characteristics in this report don't work in isolation. Some of them show up together so often that they're really one creative decision rather than two.

The clearest example is surprise and humor. **More than half of the funny ads we looked at were also tagged as surprising** — nine times more often than you'd expect if the two were unrelated. It's worth keeping that in mind as we talk about what each one drives, because a lot of what humor does for standout may well be the surprise inside it.

Both of them also lean on a visual hook. 83% of surprising ads have one and 71% of funny ads do, which suggests neither really lands without a strong image to carry it.

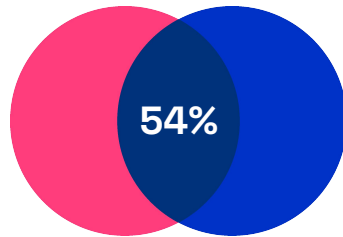
99% of ads with a full story also end on a positive note, so a full arc isn't really a separate technique, it's a positive ending with a little bit extra.



Which characteristics appear together?

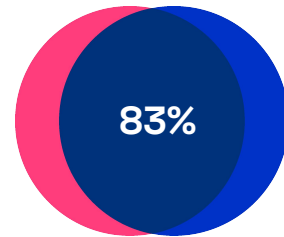
Circle overlap shows the share of ads with the first characteristic that also carry the second

Surprise | Humor



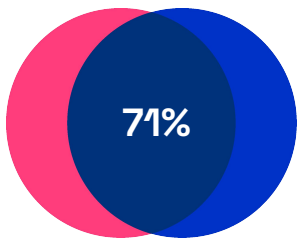
8.9x more often than chance
Strongest link in the study

Surprise | Visual hook



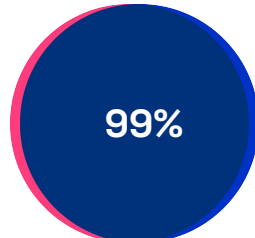
4.1x more often than chance
Surprise rarely works without one

Humor | Visual hook



3.5x more often than chance
Same story for humor

Narrative arc | The ending



2.2x more often than chance
Effectively one characteristic

How to read the chart

The percentage shows how often two characteristics appear in the same ad. The multiple tells us whether that's meaningful, by comparing it to how common each characteristic is on its own.

Creator content

///

Social platforms offer more opportunities for brands beyond traditional brand ads. In this section, let's look at **native content** — content that matches the look and feel of the platform it's on — very often made by creators.



Traditional advertising has its limits on social

In the social media feed, the first job of any ad is to avoid being scrolled past on instinct, and it's not an easy bar to clear.

We looked at in-market brand lift outcomes across nearly 4,000 scroll-format video ads, alongside their three-second view-through rates.
Only about 1 brand-made ad in 8 held viewers for at least three seconds.

Of course, people don't open social media to watch ads. They come to be entertained, to learn and to see what people like them are doing. They have learned what an ad looks like, and they scroll past it often without thinking.

And as we saw earlier, 18–24s, the heaviest social media users, rate social ads as the least distinctive and the least clearly branded of any age group. That's not ideal for brands targeting social media users.



The native look stands out most

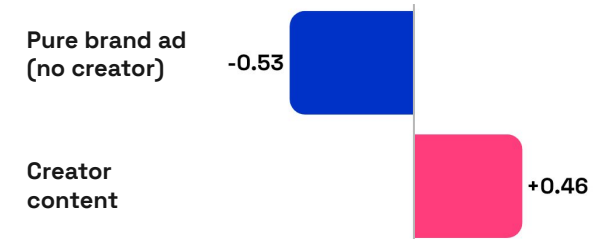
But content that looks as if it belongs in the feed, otherwise known as native content, gets a better reception. In particular, content made by creators in partnership with a brand scores +0.46 on Ad Distinctiveness, while polished brand ads score -0.53.

Native, creator-style content stops the scroll because it doesn't look like an ad. Content that's distinctive like that is likely to get attention and keep people watching — which is critical to an ad's effectiveness. An ad that isn't watched for at least a couple of seconds can't build or refresh a brand so that it comes to mind more powerfully in the future and in more use cases.

In other words, your first step in social is to clear the scroll hurdle before the creative can do its job for the brand.

And creators clear that hurdle for a living. They know how to tell a story in the first seconds, how to entertain and what people expect from the platform. They bring personality and a style the feed rewards.

Distinctiveness: brand-made vs. creator-made



But creator content struggles to cue the brand

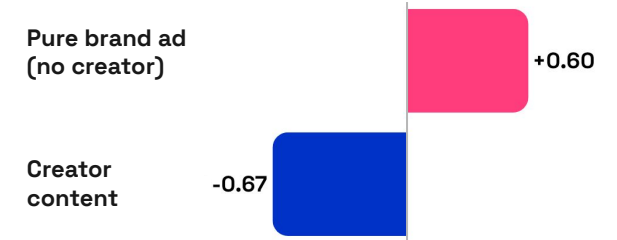
Yet on average, **creator content struggles to make sure the brand gets the credit.** Genuine creator content scores -0.67 on Brand Connection, compared to $+0.60$ for polished brand ads — and this impacts effectiveness as a whole because the brand can't benefit from the strengths of the content.

This isn't surprising. Every piece of creator content has to serve two brands: the creator and the company paying for the post. If the creator's brand dominates, the audience remembers the creator. If the paying brand dominates, the content turns back into an ad and loses the benefit the creator brings.

That should sound familiar to what we said earlier about celebrities! We have seen time and time again that **a famous face can make an ad stand out, but it can't do the branding or the selling for you.**

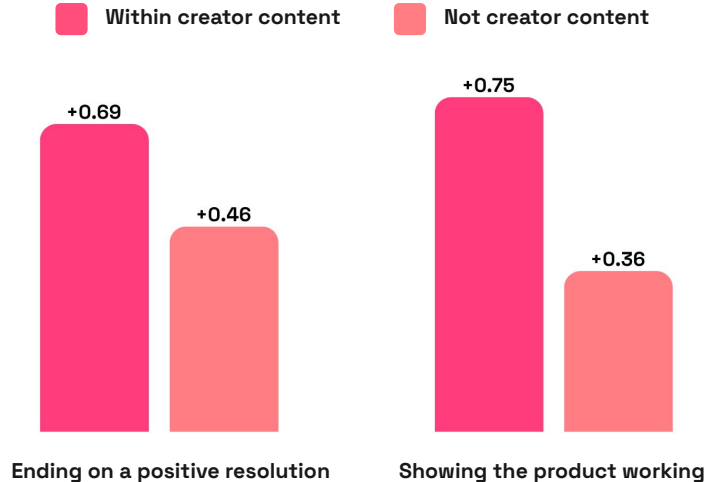
The creator economy makes the old problem bigger and more urgent, because creators now make a large and growing share of what brands put in the feed.

Brand connection: brand-made vs. creator-made



Creator content works best when it leverages good advertising fundamentals

Impact on creative power: Creator content vs. all social video ads



Keep in mind that the spread of results in creator content is wide. Creator content averages below other ad types in our data in some areas, but the variation within it is huge. As a result, the best examples stand out much more. So the goal is to be in the group that does it well.

You do that by remembering your advertising fundamentals — including all the characteristics we've covered in this report.

Advertising fundamentals pay off about twice as much for creator content compared to non-creator content. Within creator content, ending on a positive resolution is worth +0.69 on Creative Power and makes an ad 3.8 times more likely to reach the top 20%. Showing the product working is worth +0.75 on Creative Power and makes an ad 2.9 times more likely to reach the top 20%.

In other words, many of these characteristics we've looked at in this report have an even greater positive impact on creator content!

Let's look at some examples.

Creator-Made

NESCAFÉ Espresso Concentrate x Zach King

“Hack Your Iced Coffee”

ABOUT THE AD

NESCAFÉ launched its Espresso Concentrate globally with [Zach King](#) as its first-ever global influencer, built around the line: “pour it, mix it, hack it.” King’s typical approach is to create videos that look ordinary until an impossible edit reveals itself, and in [this video](#) he appears in a billboard and makes himself an iced coffee from other billboards around him. The video closes with him putting the finished glass down on the street, taking the drink out of the ad and bringing it into the real world.

WHAT WORKED

This creator content works so well because the **visual hook** is made specifically for the platform it runs on. This isn’t a TV idea adapted for TikTok, it’s made for the feed by someone who’s spent years mastering this kind of trick. The visual effect is also central to the product proposition, showing how quick and easy it is to make. This is what makes it so persuasive (6.8) as well as distinctive (6.9).

Brand connection is the only metric that falls slightly lower, because the attention goes to the trick and to the creator performing it. As we’ve seen, a well-matched creator won’t necessarily solve branding on its own.



Creative Power 6.8

Ad distinctiveness	6.9
Brand connection	4.0
Intensity	6.9
Resonance	6.8
Persuasion	6.8

Creator-Made

Chipotle x Ben Treat “Behind the Foil”

ABOUT THE AD

For the 2026 run of “Behind the Foil,” Chipotle let 100 creators into more than 50 restaurants across the US, UK and Canada and asked them to film their routine morning prep. One of them was the stop-motion animator, Ben Treat. He shot the backgrounds in a real restaurant, then went home and animated the rest. Frame by frame, he builds a burrito that looks like it’s making itself, in his signature style. The spot takes us through the restaurant, his home studio and the animation itself.

WHAT WORKED

Creator content often struggles to make sure the brand gets the credit, but **this ad lands brand connection at 6.7** — the strongest measure in the whole ad! What makes the difference is that the creator has complete freedom over the filming, but everything in front of the camera is Chipotle’s, including the restaurant and the food.

The stop-motion technique deserves credit too. It’s very distinctive (6.6), and it only works if you pay attention to every single step, which is what Chipotle wants us to notice about how its food is made. Ultimately this ad persuades (5.9) — a great outcome for creator content!



Creative Power

6.2

Ad distinctiveness

6.6

Brand connection

6.7

Intensity

4.6

Resonance

6.0

Persuasion

5.9

Creator-Made

Febreze x Til Science “Freshology”

ABOUT THE AD

Freshology is Febreze’s run of science lessons on TikTok made with creators. [In this one](#), science creator [TIL Science](#) opens Freshness 101 by challenging the assumption that an air freshener works by laying a nicer smell over a bad one. Febreze AIR contains ingredients that interact with odor molecules instead of covering them up, and as the explanation unfolds, animated molecules drift across the screen behind her showing what’s happening to them.

WHAT WORKED

This is another way to keep the brand attached. The **whole ad is built around Febreze’s distinctive benefit** — that it fights odors rather than masking them — and brand connection holds at 5.6.

To get that benefit across, Febreze partnered with someone who explains complex science for a living. And because the explanation is so specific to Febreze’s own chemistry, people connect it back to the brand, with one respondent saying: “[Febreze] doesn’t just cover odors but actually eliminates them.” It works because the explanation is simple and the person giving it is credible. As a result, persuasion lands at 6.8 and resonance at 6.6 — both areas creator content usually doesn’t do much for.



Creative Power 6.5

Ad distinctiveness	6.0
Brand connection	5.6
Intensity	6.8
Resonance	6.6
Persuasion	6.8

Our recommendations for thinking about creator content

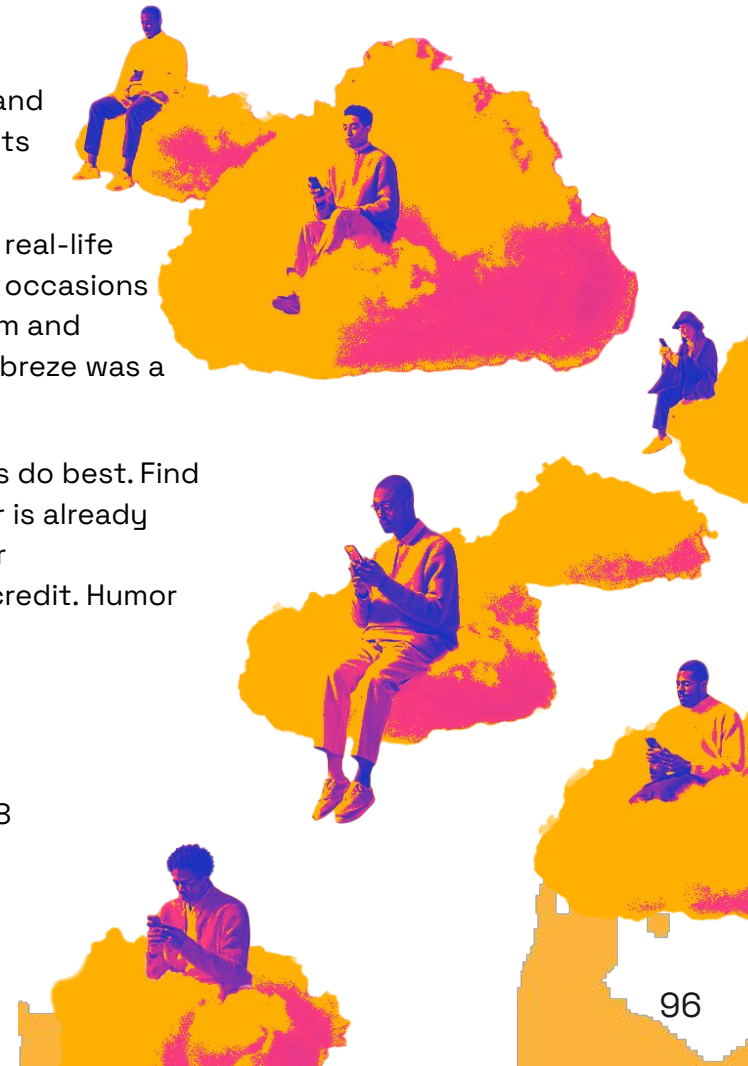
Show and tell. Build a story around the product and the part it plays in the creator's life: how they use it, where, and why they enjoy it. It can be functional or fun. In the best creator content, audiences talk about the product and its benefits, not about the creator. But it's still authentic to what it means for the creator.

Be useful. People love how much they learn from creator content. This isn't the old-fashioned product demo. It is real-life problem solving that opens up something new. Creators can often show a product's value against real needs and occasions better than most brand ads do. And in a much more engaging way. We see that creator content showing a problem and resolution on average is +0.49 higher on creative power and twice as likely to be in the top 20% of creator ads. Febreze was a great example of this. The benefit is specific to the brand, so the brand came through.

Make it entertaining, in the creator's own way. Entertainment is why people are in the feed, and it's what creators do best. Find funny, surprising or clever ways to use or engage with the product, built on the humor, format or trick the creator is already known for. The product should be the reason the moment is funny or surprising, not a prop beside it. If the joke or entertainment would work without the brand, people remember the joke and the creator, and the brand gets no credit. Humor also needs to feel natural rather than scripted.

Put it in everyday, relatable life. Show the product in its natural place, in scenarios the audience knows are real. Testimonials and reviews appeared in 16% of consistent brand builders, against 4% of the rest.

End on a high. A positive resolution is worth +0.69 on Creative Power within creator content, and those ads are 3.8 times as likely to reach the top 20%. Close on the payoff the product delivered and leave people feeling good.



And what about making the connection to the brand?

There are two questions to ask when branding creator content:

Would viewers remember whose ad it was?

Would the creator's followers still recognize it as the creator's content?



Branding creator content

without breaking it

- **Say it, don't stamp it.** Creators often talk to their audience, so the brand can show up the same way — named in passing, explained, recommended or even joked about. A spoken brand name feels like part of the conversation, but a logo on screen can feel like an interruption. It also reaches people who are half-watching or scrolling with the sound on. Have the creator say the brand name early and naturally, in their own words.
- **Put the product in their hands, not on an end card.** Branding within the scene works, but branding pasted on top doesn't. The product being used, opened, poured or talked about is branding the audience accepts.
- **Brand early, but through the creator.** The brand needs to register before viewers move on. Pushing a pack shot or logo to the front, though, drives people to scroll past. The way through is for the creator to carry the early branding: naming the brand as they start talking, or with the product already in shot as part of what they're doing.
- **Make the product and its benefits the story.** In the best creator ads, people talk afterwards about the product and what it does for them (meaningful or fun), not about the creator. When the product does the work in the story, the brand gets the credit.
- **Weave the brand's assets into the narrative.** The pack, a jingle, a tagline, a mascot or a signature ritual can all work. They just need to appear the way they would in the creator's world — on the pack in their hand, sung, said in passing or playing a part in the story. Used like that, the assets tell people whose ad it is without making it feel like an ad.



And don't forget about brand-made native content

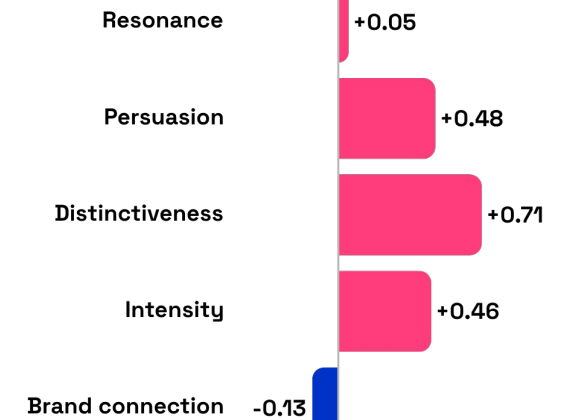
And before we conclude our section on native content, there is another approach you can leverage: your own brand-made content in the native style. These are videos that fit in with the platform they're on, but produced by your own team and without a creator attached.

Brand-made content in the native look **lifts Creative Power by +0.31** and is **1.4 times more likely to reach the top 20%**.

Just like creator content, this type of content primarily impacts distinctiveness (+0.71), but it also positively impacts persuasion (+0.48) and intensity (+0.46).

But also just like creator content, it has a **negative impact on brand connection** (-0.13). Even when the brand is solely responsible for the creation of the content, the native style can distract from the branding.

Brand-made, native look



Brand-Made

McDonald's "The Grinch Meal"

ABOUT THE AD

McDonald's holiday Grinch meal included a Big Mac or McNuggets, McShaker Fries with a sachet of dill pickle seasoning called "Grinch Salt" and a pair of collectible Grinch socks. This [social cut](#) produced by the brand is a creator-style unboxing, narrated by the Grinch himself. Each part of the meal is revealed in turn: the Grinch-themed packaging, a Big Mac, a sachet of dill pickle "Grinch Salt" shaken over the fries and finally the socks, ending with a thumbs-up and a "You're welcome."

WHAT WORKED

Brand-made content in a native style can be a very effective type of social creative because it has the standout of creator content but more control of the brand. But even when the brand has control, **the native look** usually detracts a little from the branding.

This ad side steps that by putting nothing on screen but the product, with no creator to pull attention away from the brand. Every single thing that comes out of the box is a branded McDonald's product with a Grinch twist on it. And the unboxing style feels right at home on Instagram. As a result, distinctiveness and brand connection both land at 6.6!

**Creative Power 6.3**

Ad distinctiveness 6.6

Brand connection 6.6

Intensity 5.5

Resonance 5.9

Persuasion 6.4

Brand-Made

Hellmann's "A Little Sparkle"

ABOUT THE AD

Hellmann's made [a native social video](#) about bedazzling a jar of mayonnaise posted to the brand's Instagram account. In it, a person covers a jar of Hellmann's Real with gems, hearts and stars, piece by piece until the entire container is covered, while music plays in the background. The finished jar is held up in the sunlight, bedazzled top to bottom, with the line: "she deserved a little sparkle."

WHAT WORKED

Bedazzling common items has taken off with Gen Z on social media as part of the **whimsymaxxing** trend — the practice of injecting playfulness or nostalgia into everyday routines to combat minimalism. It makes it a perfect trend for a common household staple like Hellmann's mayonnaise to take part in!

The video shows the entire craft project from start to finish, so the product with its recognizable branding is on the screen the whole time. As a result, brand connection holds strong here at 6.4. And the video really stands out as distinctive (6.9).

People said that it held their attention and the idea was creative, while others thought the approach was soothing. Overall, it's a video that feels right at home on Instagram, while fitting with the playful and funny tone of the Hellmann's feed.

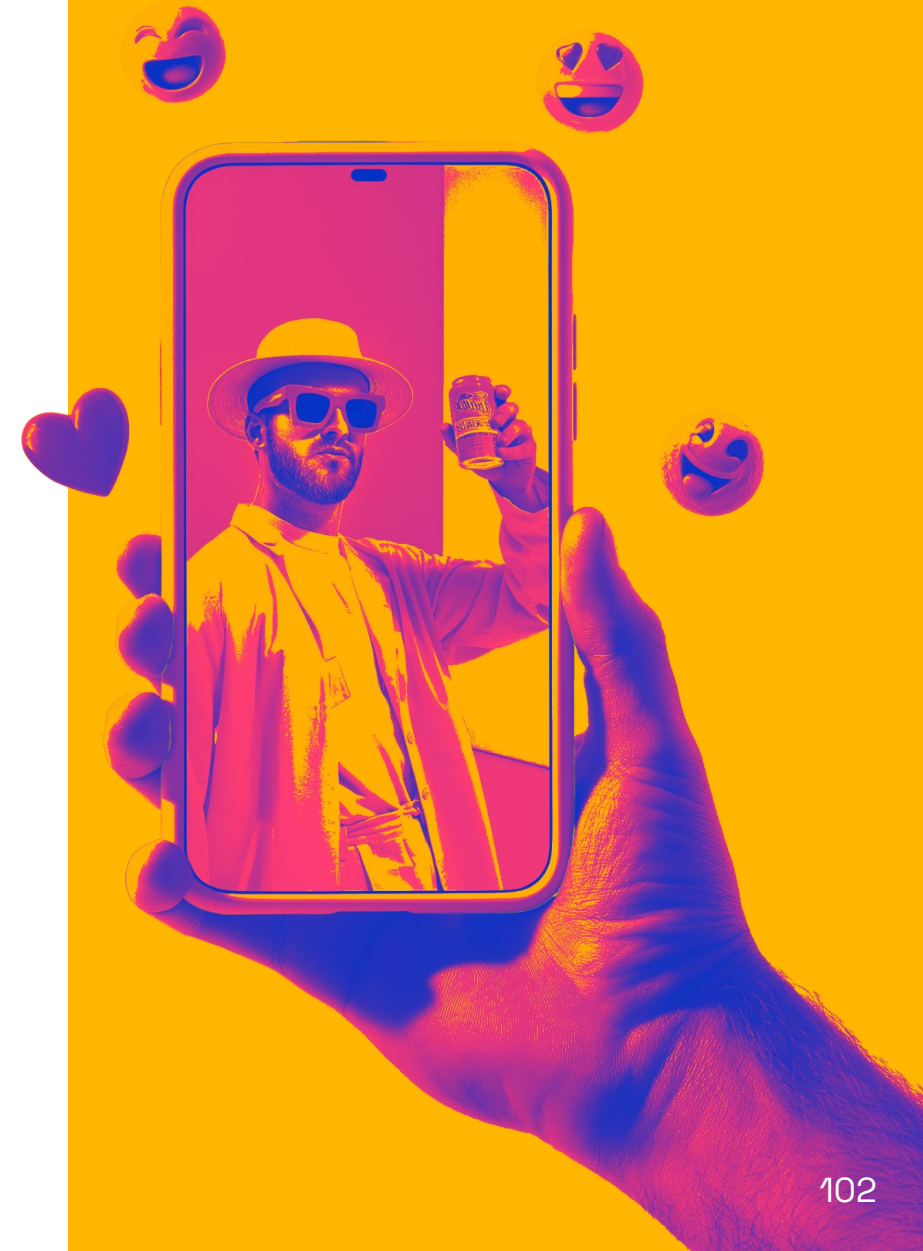


Creative Power 5.2

Ad distinctiveness	6.9
Brand connection	6.4
Intensity	4.6
Resonance	3.4
Persuasion	4.1

Our recommendations for thinking about brand-made native content

1. **Lose the polish:** Native social content shouldn't look like advertising. Give content the looseness and spontaneity of the platform while retaining a distinctive brand voice.
2. **Be native, not anonymous:** The best brand-made social content looks and feels at home in the feed. But fitting in shouldn't mean fading into the background. Use distinctive brand assets, cues and behaviors to make native content recognizably yours.
3. **Hook them, then brand them:** A great opening earns attention, but as we've seen, it doesn't build brand connection. Make sure the brand has a meaningful role in the content (beyond just a logo at the end) so people remember the brand in the content they enjoyed.
4. **Join the conversation:** Jumping on a trend can make a brand feel culturally relevant. But take it a step further by asking what your brand can uniquely contribute to the conversation, rather than simply putting your spin on what everyone else is doing.
5. **Think beyond the individual post:** Not every piece of content needs to do the same job. Some posts can prioritize attention and participation while others can work harder on persuasion. The goal is a portfolio of content that adds up to a recognizable brand.



Bringing it all together

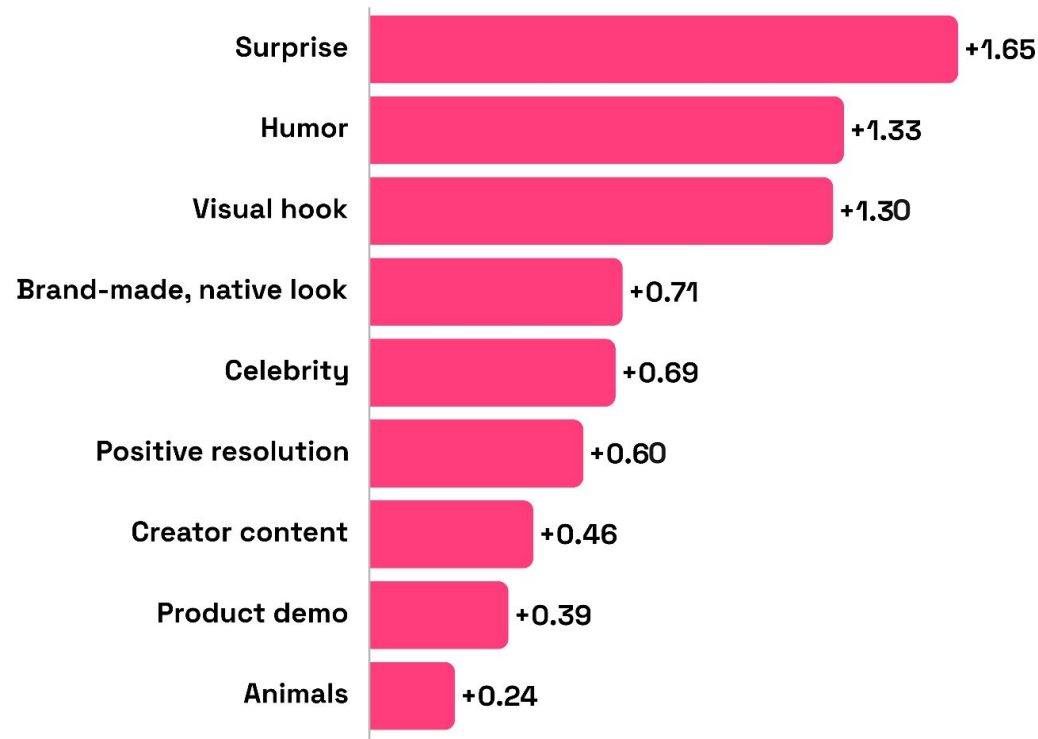
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Making decisions about what to include in your social video ads is a balancing act, and it's certainly more art than science.

This section is a useful summary of what we've shared to help you understand the tradeoffs associated with using some characteristics over others.



What drives the most **distinctiveness**?



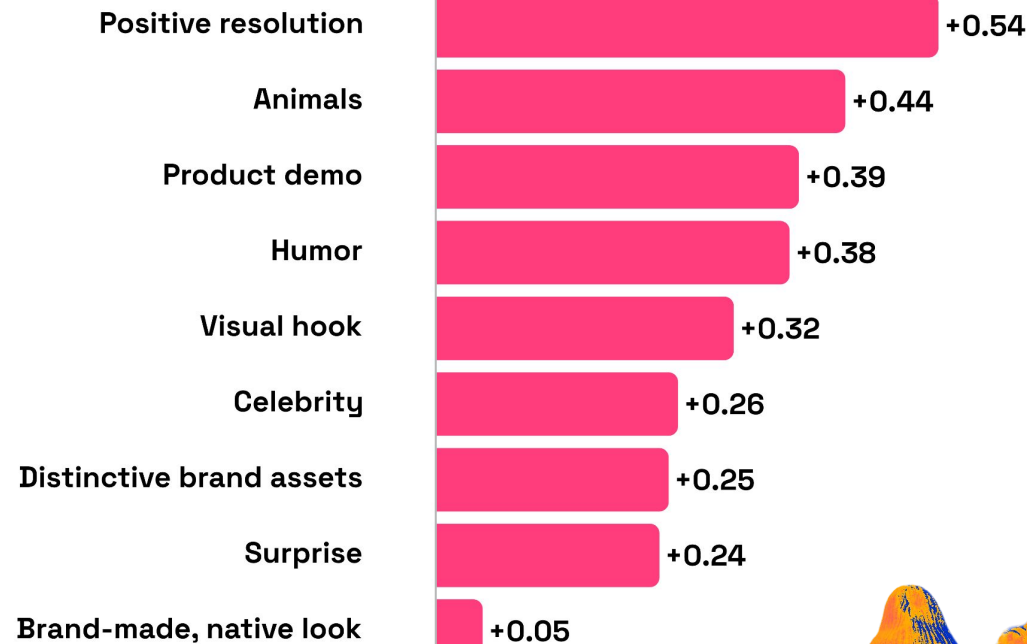
Surprise leads at +1.65, humor follows at +1.33 and a visual hook at +1.30.

Nothing else gets close: celebrities and a full narrative arc sit at +0.69, less than half as much.

As we saw earlier, more than half of funny ads are also surprising, and both lean heavily on a strong visual image. So in practice, this is one approach showing up three ways.



What drives the most emotional resonance?



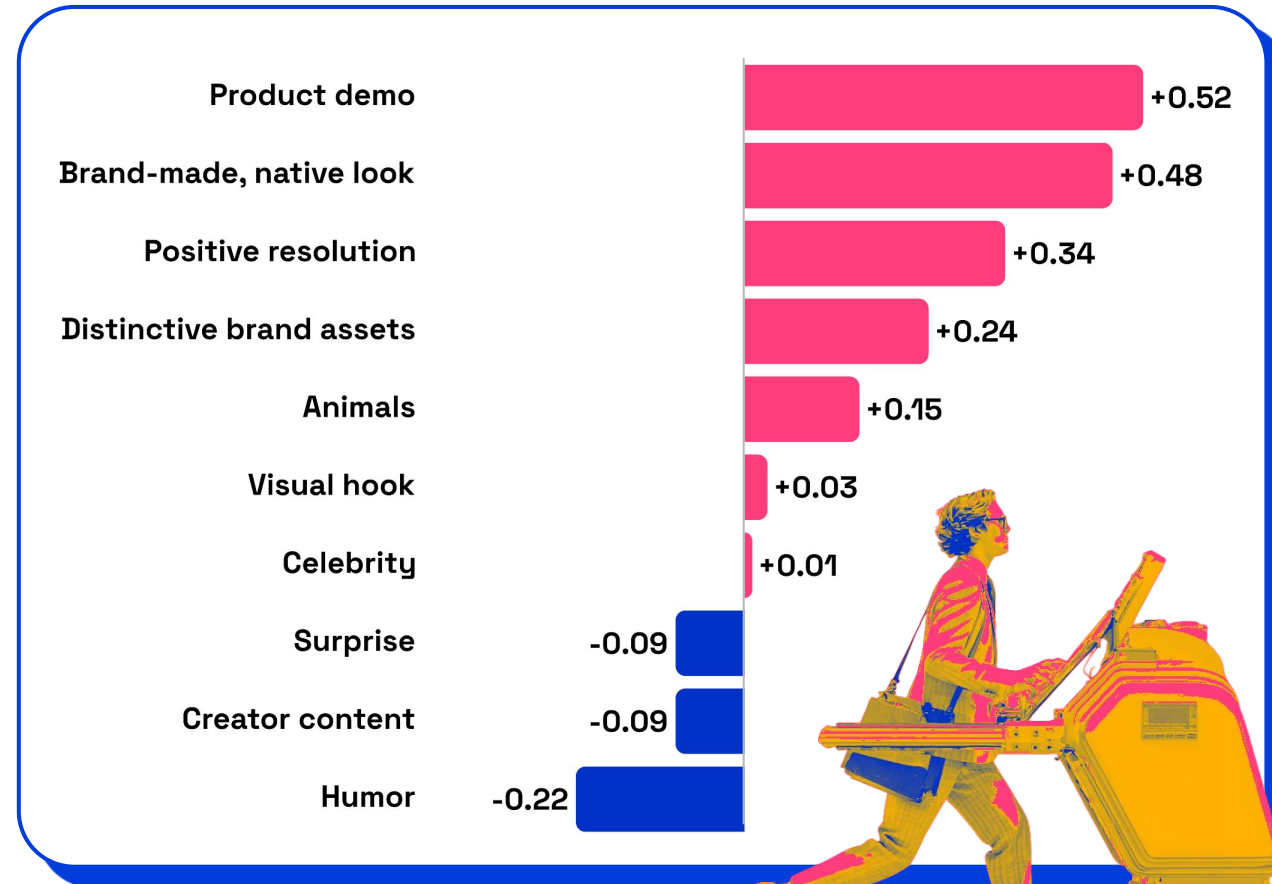
Ending on a high is the most effective way to make people feel something with your ads. Animals are also useful because people love animals!

But overall, emotional resonance is hard to earn in social video. Nothing gets past +0.54, and seven of the ten characteristics land between +0.24 and +0.44. By comparison, surprise lifts distinctiveness by +1.65.

That's what makes the ending worth the effort. It isn't dramatically better than everything else, but it's the most reliable to lift emotional resonance in your ad.



What drives the most persuasion?

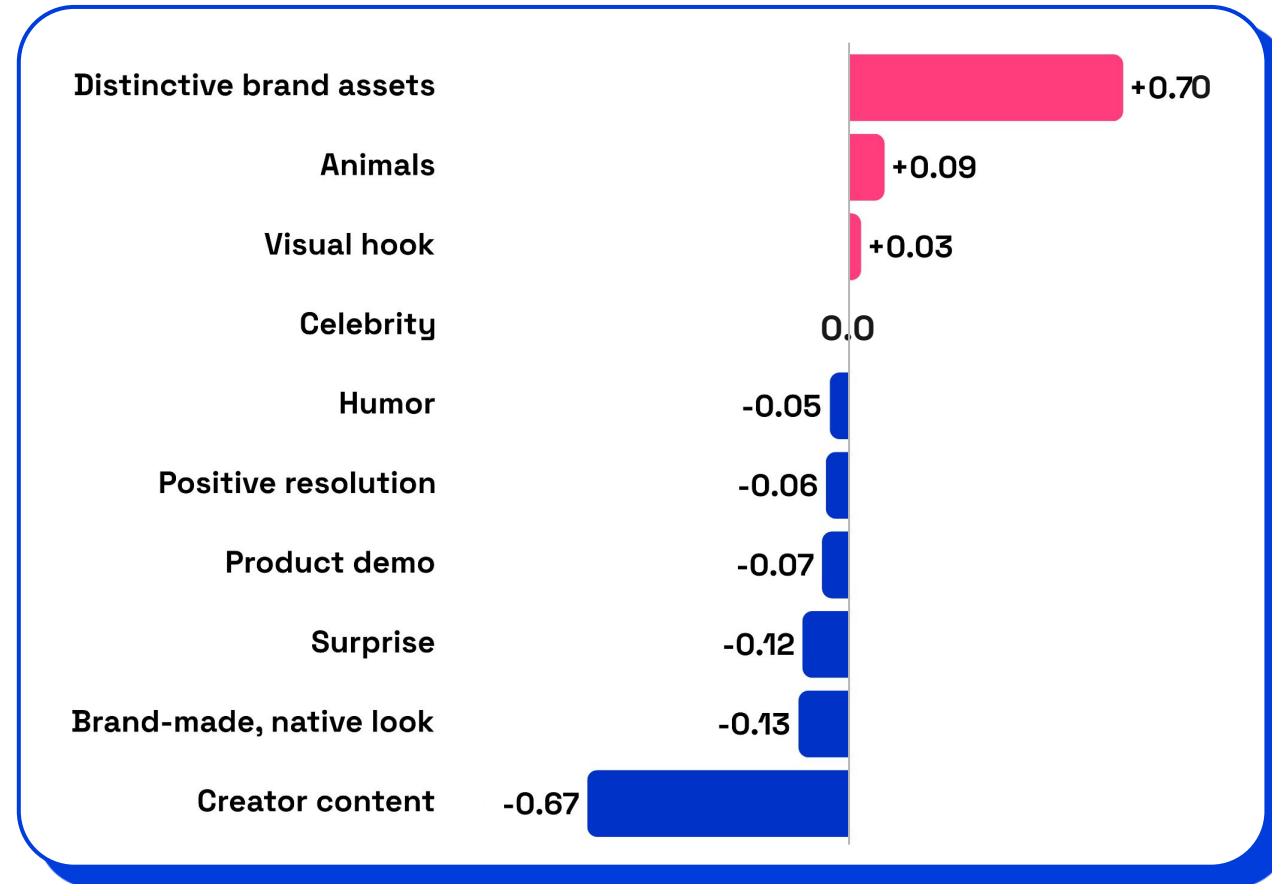


Product demos lead at +0.52, followed by brand-made, native look ads at +0.48 and a strong ending at +0.34.

Surprise, humor and visual hooks — the three characteristics that own standout — sit at the bottom here. Humor is the weakest of the lot at -0.22, and surprise is negative too.

Getting noticed and giving someone a reason to buy are different problems and the characteristics that positively impact one tend to negatively impact the other.

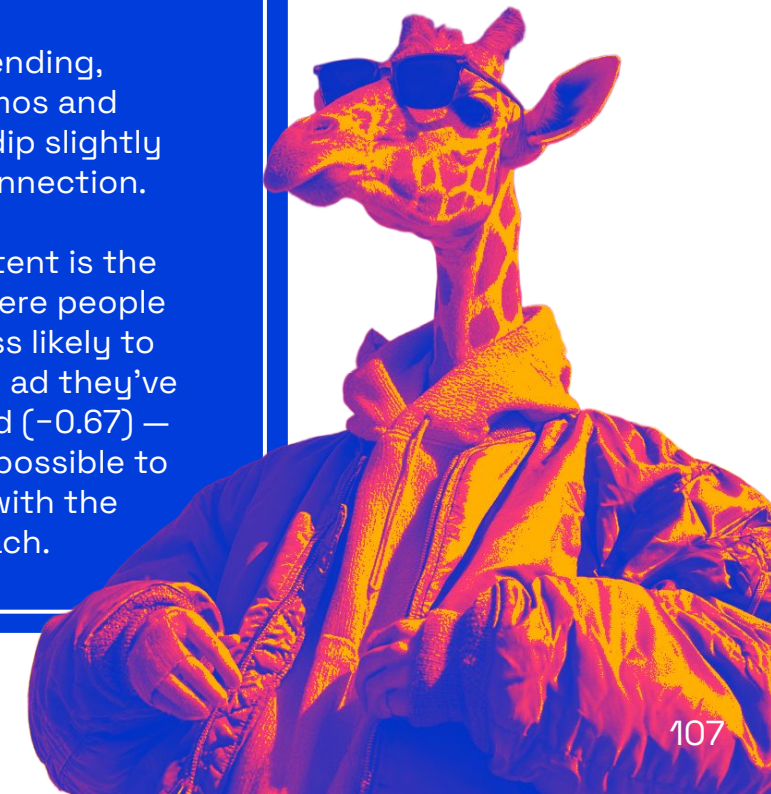
What drives the most brand connection?



Distinctive brand assets lift brand connection by +0.70. The next best is animals at +0.09.

Humor, the ending, product demos and surprise all dip slightly on brand connection.

Creator content is the only one where people are much less likely to know whose ad they've just watched (-0.67) — but it's still possible to get it right with the right approach.



Takeaways & recommendations



So what should you remember from this report?
Here are our biggest takeaways.



1. Attention gets you in, but the work doesn't stop there

Visual hooks, surprise and humor are powerful ways to make an ad stand out — which is absolutely critical to do on social platforms.

But getting noticed as social content isn't the same as being effective as an ad.

Remember that the characteristics that drive a standout can have little impact or a negative impact on brand connection and persuasion.

A scroll-stopping idea is very important, but it is just the start. Once you have it, there's still more work to do to nail the execution and ensure the brand has a role.



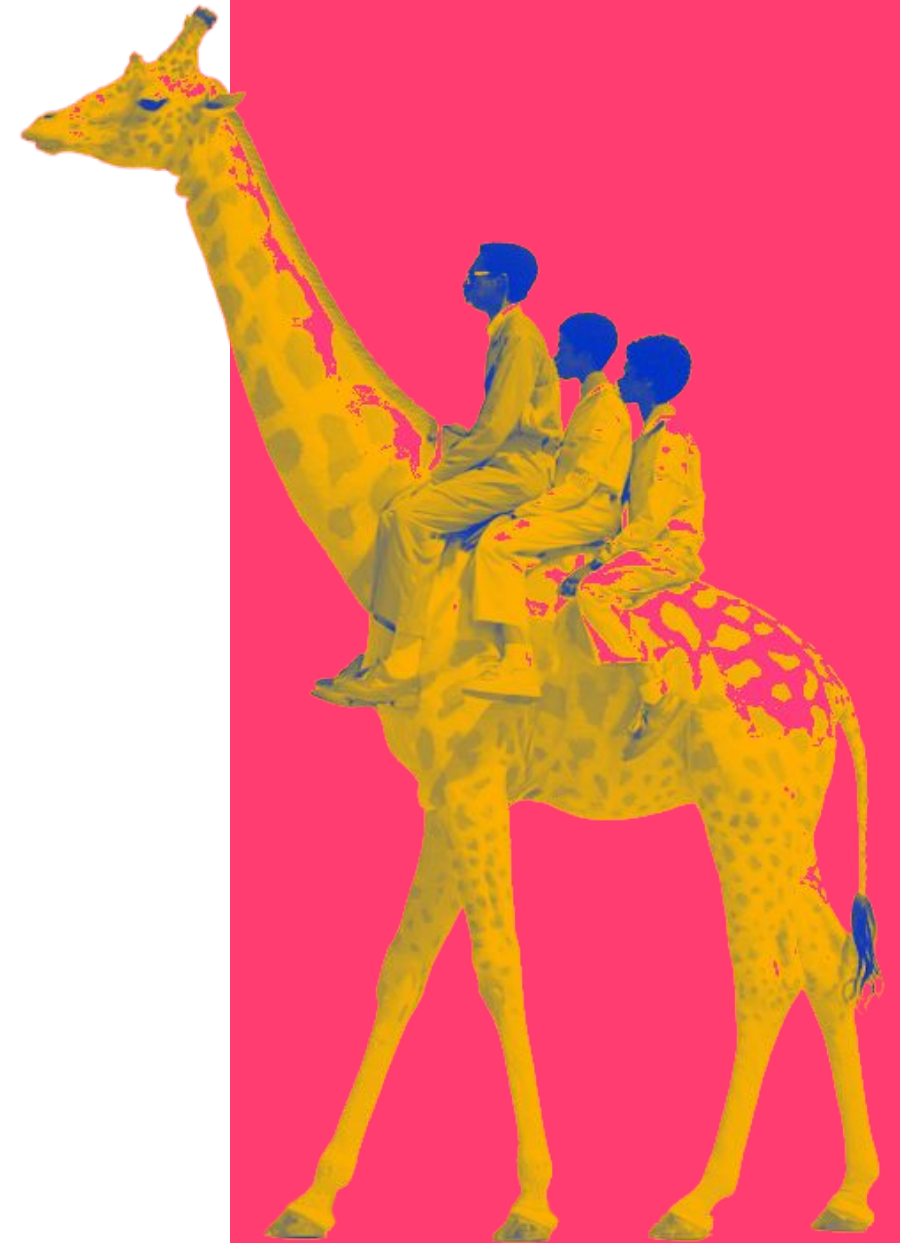
2. The fundamentals still matter, perhaps more than ever

Traditional advertising principles are alive and well on social platforms. Your DBAs and how you show off your product and its role in consumers' lives still matter!

And the strongest characteristic we measured overall is even simpler:
end the ad well.

Three quarters of social video ads finish on a positive resolution, and those that do score +0.46 higher on Creative Power and are 1.5 times more likely to be top ads. A strong ending lifts resonance, distinctiveness, intensity and persuasion.

Social video may be fast, fragmented and native to the feed. But **that doesn't mean viewers have stopped responding to good stories**, satisfying payoffs or products that actually demonstrate their value.



3. Native doesn't mean unbranded

Native content is distinctive, but harder to brand. It's worth investing in because stopping the scroll by standing out is the first goal of any social video — it has to get attention before it can work for the brand.

But the brand connection has to be there so the content can build or refresh a brand so that it comes to mind more powerfully in the future and in more use cases.

There's an art involved in allowing the creator to do what they're good at in creating content that performs in the feed, but still leveraging advertising fundamentals. It has to be **branding that the creator can deliver in their own voice, as part of the story.**

And don't make the mistake of thinking that brand-made native content is exempt from this. Brand-made native content still needs to leverage strong advertising fundamentals, as the brand can get lost in the native style even when it's produced by the brand itself.

Stopping the scroll with something people want to watch is the first step. Don't forget about tying it back to the brand in a way that still feels authentic to the creator as the second step!



4. The hardest job is still getting credit

Across the report, we see a recurring tension between making an ad noticeable and making it attributable.

Standing out (distinctiveness) has three characteristics at or above +1.30.

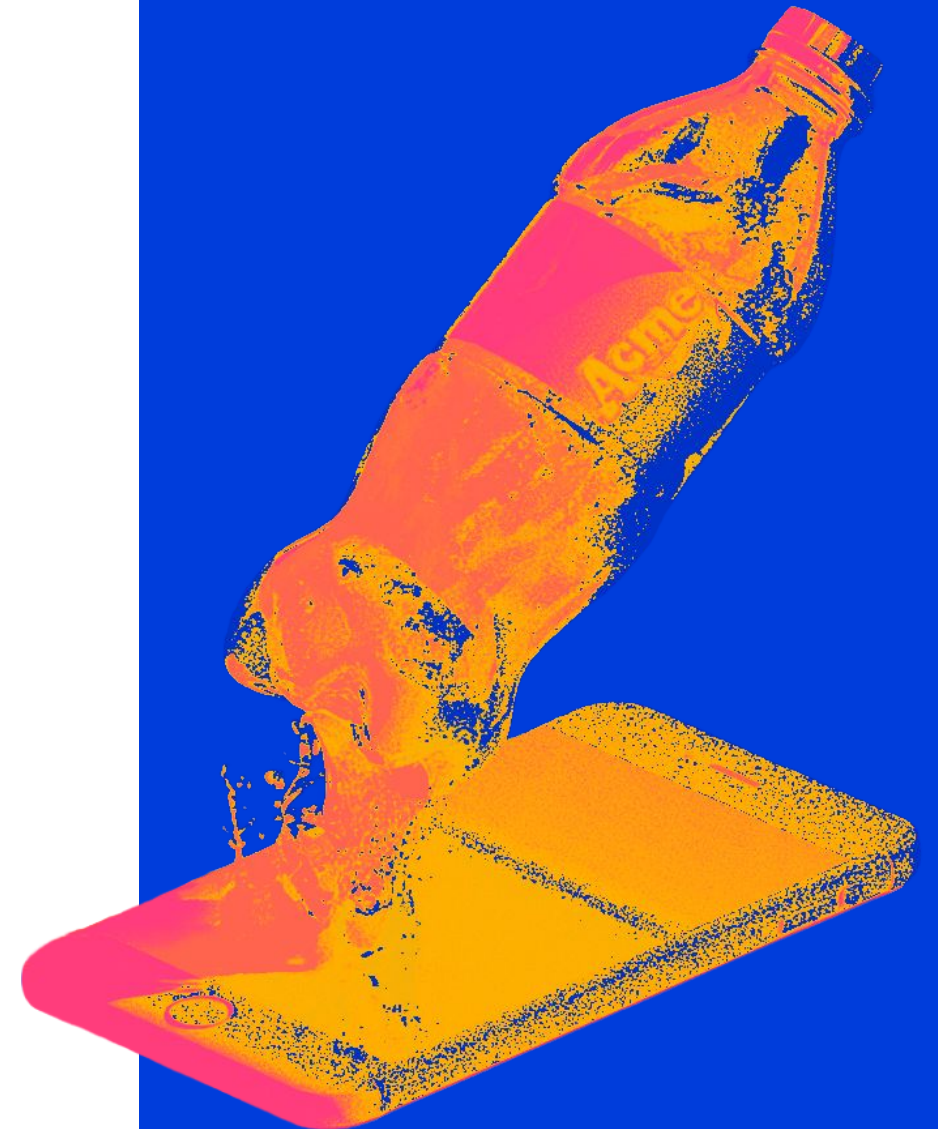
Persuasion has four above +0.24.

Brand connection has only one characteristic that really drives it.

So while you're in search of funny, surprising moments with strong visual hooks that will grab attention on social, remember that these hooks don't exist in isolation — they must relate in some way to the brand, the product and its role in people's lives.

Your brand link has to be built in deliberately and can't ever be an afterthought.

Because we've seen plenty of examples in this report of brands that were able to do it all! **It just takes creativity to strike the right balance.**



Our recommendations

- 1 Win attention, then make it count.** Use creators, strong visual hooks, surprise and humor to stop the scroll — but make sure that attention leads back to the brand and product.
- 2 Bring advertising fundamentals to social.** Even in a native-looking format, give people a clear reason to care, show the product with a positive outcome and give your brand a role.
- 3 Make every creative choice work harder.** Treat every decision (the opening frame, the use of a creator, a product demonstration, the ending) as an opportunity to improve effectiveness.
- 4 Test more of the creative ecosystem.** Test more of your decisions — not just the hero ad — to optimize investment across the strongest assets and learn how to win in social.

Bringing advertising research to social video

How can you make sure your social video ads work?
Understand consumer response.

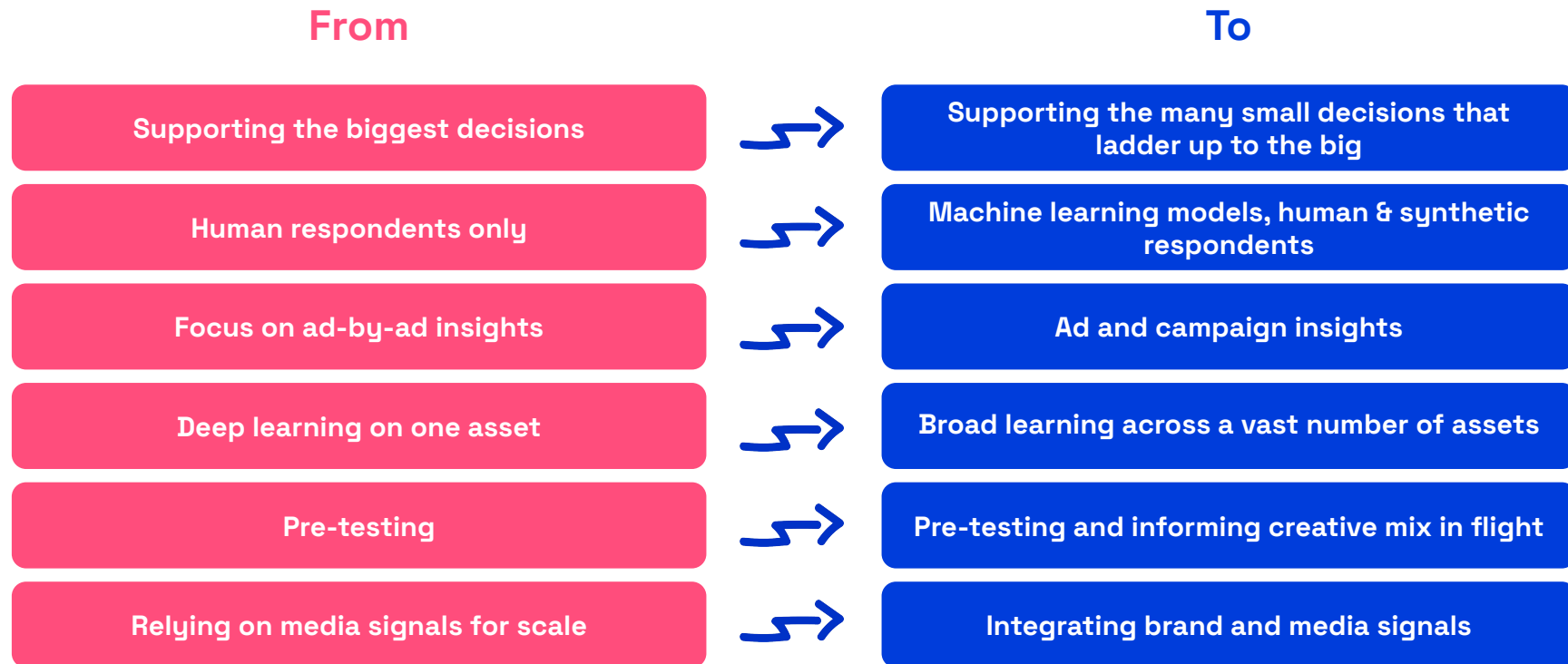


Today brands have more creative & media decisions than can be supported with traditional research methods

Each decision may seem small, but together they impact campaign performance, brand consistency, media efficiency and future creative learning.



Your research must evolve



Integrating synthetic & human research methods

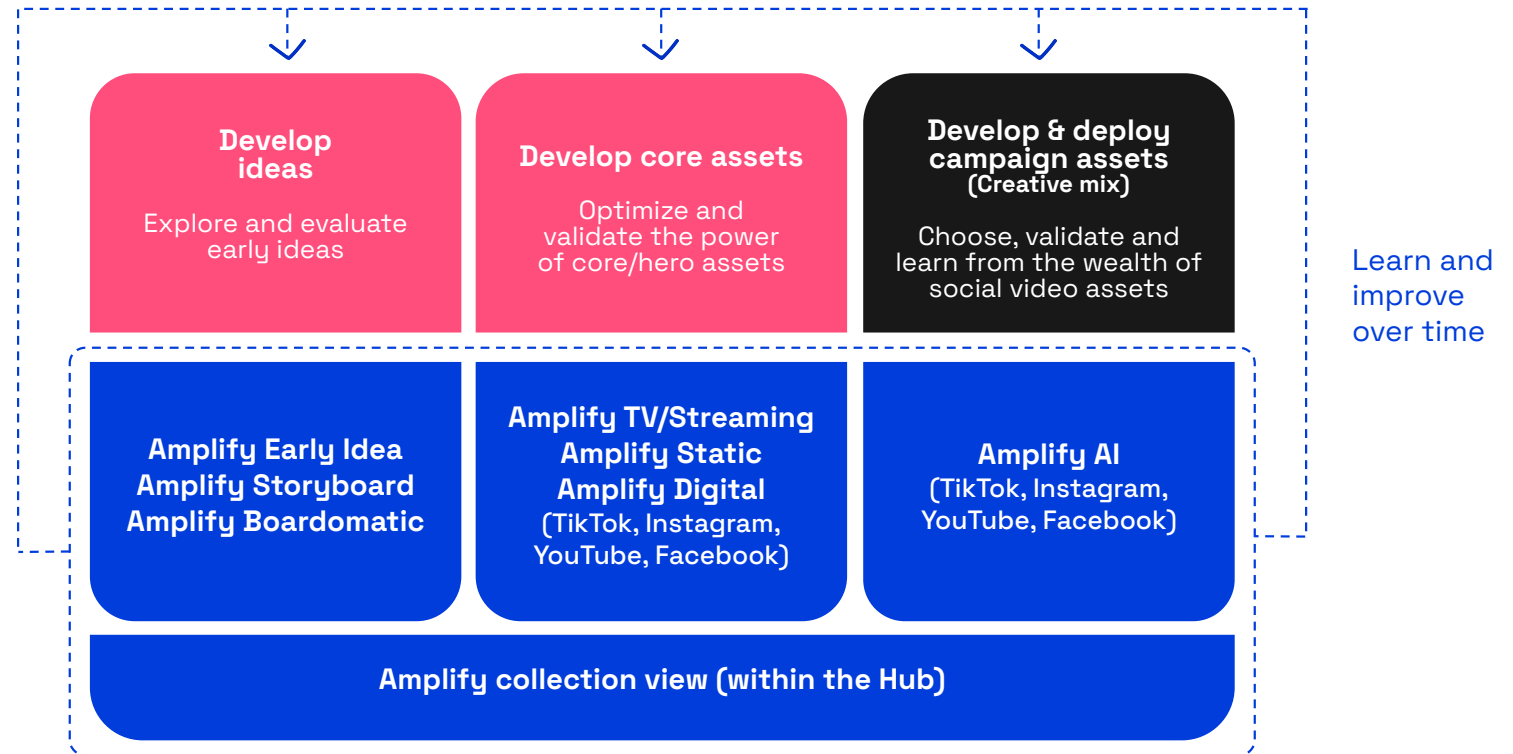
With such a high volume, it isn't practical to run every social video asset by real audiences. That's where synthetic research comes in.



Zappi offers a system of solutions for all types of advertising research

Zappi's Amplify suite offers the right solution for all advertising research needs — across platforms (TV & digital) and stages of development (early idea, storyboard, finished film).

All of this lives in a single platform to house all your projects and build a bank of smart learnings so you can create more effective ads over time.



Connected insights for faster, better decisions

Zappi connects innovation testing, advertising testing and brand tracking in a single platform — giving organizations the speed and signal clarity they need to compete and win with consumers.



Working with top brands



See how Zappi can help you
create social video advertising
that wins with consumers

