Measuring Emotional vs. Rational Advertising

Who among us cannot recall an advertisement or commercial that touched our heart in some special way, that caused feelings to suddenly well up within us? And which professional among us would not wish for that kind of powerful human reaction to advertising we care about?

When it happens to you, it's unexpected — almost random. One commercial ends, another begins . . . or you turn the page . . . and suddenly, within a few seconds, your right brain is working double time.

The next day you relate the experience to a colleague who asks, "Who was the advertiser?" and your mind goes blank. You can't remember.

If you are already concerned that measured recall may suffer when commercials or ads are particularly successful at engaging emotions, this kind of personal experience will almost certainly reinforce that concern. G&R investigated this issue — that is: compared to rational commercials, is recall of emotional commercials penalized by the very success of using an emotional appeal? The simple answer is no . . . strong emotional commercials are recalled fully as well as strong rational commercials.

The support for this conclusion was generated in a proprietary study of 2100 different commercials and has been confirmed time and time again by individual test results. For the analysis, we rated each commercial (for which we already had recall scores) on two criteria, using a 6-point scale.

1. The extent of content synchronization between the audio and video, and
2. The extent to which the commercial was either rational or emotional, or both.

Table 1
Commercial Recall

Synchronization	All Comm'ls	Highly Rational	Highly Emotional
Above Average	**12.3%**	**12.4%**	**15.8%**
Average	9.7	9.8	9.8
Below Average	8.4	8.4	8.2

The results shown in Table 1 demonstrate that:

- Talking about *what* is being shown *when* it is being shown is very important no matter what kind of commercial it is.
- Highly emotional commercials are recalled equally as well as highly rational ones, and perform even better when the sight/sound synch is above average.

Note in Table 2 below, however, that only one-third as many highly emotional commercials as highly rational ads are above average in synchronization. The payoff is better, but it occurs much less often:

Table 2
Commercials

	All Comm'ls		Highly Rational		Highly Emotional	
Synchronization	#	%	#	%	#	%
Above Average	**893**	**27.9%**	**319**	**44.1%**	**117**	**13.5%**
Average	1,365	42.6	306	42.3	322	37.1
Below Average	944	29.5	99	13.7	428	49.4
	*3,202	100.0%	724	100.1%	867	100.0%

** 3,202 total observations, 2,100 different executions*

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Commercial: COCA-COLA, "Mean Joe Greene"

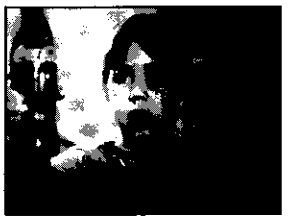
Length: 30 seconds
Date: 8/2/79



1. (Sound of Crowd Cheering in Background)
BOY: Mr. Greene?
JOE GREENE: Yeah?



2. BOY: Do you need any help?
JOE GREENE: Um um.



3. BOY: Want my Coke?
JOE GREENE: No, no.



4. BOY: Really, you can have it.



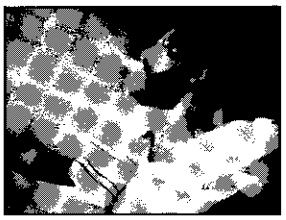
5. F/SINGER: A Coke and a smile. . .
JOE GREENE: Okay.



6. F/SINGER: makes me feel good.
JOE GREENE: Thanks.



7. CHORUS: That's the way it should be. . .



8. and I'd like to see. . .
BOY: See you around.



9. CHORUS: the whole world smiling with me.



10. Coca-Cola adds life.
JOE GREENE:
Hey, kid, catch.



11. CHORUS: Have a Coke and a. . .
BOY: Wow!
CHORUS: smile.



12. BOY: Thanks, Mean Joe.

The problem seems to be balancing the desire to show emotion with the need to talk product. Very simply stated, communication is improved when both sight and sound work together on one task, and not on two separate ones simultaneously.

Two famous examples of highly successful emotional commercials are Coca Cola's "Mean Joe Greene" (53% above norm) and AT&T's "Joey Called" (70% above norm). Both of them represent advertising at its best, judged not only by creative pro's but by audiences as well. ■

"Mean Joe Greene", a Coca-Cola Classic. Contrary to rumor, this superb example of emotional advertising performed well above norm in both recall and persuasion.