

# TV Briefs



## TV On The Mind – TV ads that tell a story trigger deep emotional associations with brands

Source: David Brennan- Thinkbox; Admap | July-August 2011

In a study that measured TV viewing's stimuli on the brain two measurement techniques were used: functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) and steady state topography (SST). This was to better understand how the brain was processing TV commercials on a second-by-second basis, in a natural setting, while also understanding which specific parts of the brain were active across the whole commercial. The SST part of the study allowed us to look at how TV commercials affect five main parts of the brain associated with emotional intensity, emotional direction, attention, engagement, and long-term memory encoding. The study demonstrated quite conclusively that it is not attention that creates long-term memory encoding, but engagement. Across all of the measured advertisements, the correlation between levels of engagement and long-term memory encoding was well over 70%.

The brain “chunks” information into manageable pieces, and when it feels a “chunk” of the storyline has been told, it will go into shutdown for a second or so while it processes the information it has received. This is known as “conceptual closure” and often occurs at the point in the advertisement when the brand or package shot comes into view, just after the resolution or punch line. This is often the point in the ad when the brain is least receptive to new information. There are some clear examples of what makes a TV commercial work creatively. Things like the power of music to drive emotions, engagement and attention was seen a number of times, and those ads that contained music performed significantly better on those parts of the brain than those that didn't. The study also used the fMRI analyses to see the importance of TV ads in creatively engaging the parts of the brain responsible for purchase decision making or empathy, both of which have a huge influence on how our brains respond to a piece of advertising.

All of this work demonstrated the importance of creativity in TV advertising. The central idea, and the way it is structured to tell a story, can have a huge impact on how well an ad works. The study analysed the IPA Databank of entries to the annual Advertising Effectiveness Awards across the past eight years and compared the performance of those who won major awards and those who didn't. Awarded campaigns outperformed the non-awarded campaigns on virtually every measure. They drove market share 11 times more efficiently than non-awarded campaigns.

Across all of the commercials and online ad formats that were tested, TV viewing generated much higher levels of emotional intensity, engagement, detailed long-term memory (almost 30% higher), and global long-term memory (almost 50% higher). Online activity tends to be more task led, requires active decision making, which in turn requires attention. This means the higher engagement and memory encoding of TV, mixed with the higher attention levels online, produce all the elements needed for brand building and responsive generation. The level of engagement for online ads was much greater if respondents had seen the TV commercials for the featured brand first. This effect was not successful if respondents saw the ads online before seeing them on TV. The research also confirmed that ads perform better in programs that are more engaging and ads that appear in the early part of the break tended to perform much better than those that appeared later.

TV advertising works often at a very deep level. It is not just about messages and awareness, but about creating emotional associations, telling stories and influencing the way we feel about brands. That's why TV consistently comes out top in major effectiveness studies; it's all in the mind.