
Last impressions also count

How to evoke an emotional
response to leave strong
branded memories

Ornella Godard | Adam Sheridan



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First impressions count

We often hear that first impressions count. In a first interaction, studies in social psychology suggest, on average, we judge people in as little as seven seconds¹. Seven short seconds in which we choose if we want to continue a relationship with another person.



We judge people in as little as seven seconds.¹

If that seems a short amount of time, spare a thought for marketers and creative agencies producing video campaigns to promote their brands and products. With US consumers now spending half their media day consuming digital content² and platforms giving them the power to skip or scroll past their advertising, they have as little as three seconds³ to make a good first impression and earn the opportunity for their content to be viewed to completion and deliver the intended message.

With such a short time to earn the opportunity for a video ad to tell its intended brand story, it's understandable that marketers are using tactics to grab initial attention, such as the use of striking visual images and including brand images and assets early. While there is value in this practice, is this focus on the first few seconds alone enough for a video ad to achieve easily retrievable branded memories to have the end opportunity to influence people at the moment of brand choice?

What about last impressions?

Emerging evidence in cognitive psychology in fact suggests that our memories can often be more governed by how an experience ends than how it begins. In a series of experiments, Fredrickson and Kahneman observed differences in perceptions of an experience based on how it was manipulated at the end⁴. Two groups were asked to submerge a hand in 14 °C water for 60 seconds, with the second group asked to keep their hand in the water for a further 30 seconds, during which the temperature was raised to 15 °C. When asked how likely they would be to repeat the trial, despite having a longer unpleasant experience, the second group were more likely to agree.

These types of experiments led Fredrickson and Kahneman to define the 'peak-end rule', where snap shot memories, the peak of response and the end, govern the memory of the whole experience perhaps intuitively this makes sense. As early as the 17th century, one of the most celebrated playwrights in history, Shakespeare, observed that 'All's Well That Ends Well' and the modern day poetic giant Jerry Seinfeld lives by the rule that you should 'Always leave em wanting more'.



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With the experiments of Fredrickson, Kahneman and the words of Shakespeare and Seinfeld suggesting endings matter, as advertising researchers we asked ourselves a question:

Do last impressions matter for advertising to be easily retrievable in memory and influence brand choice?

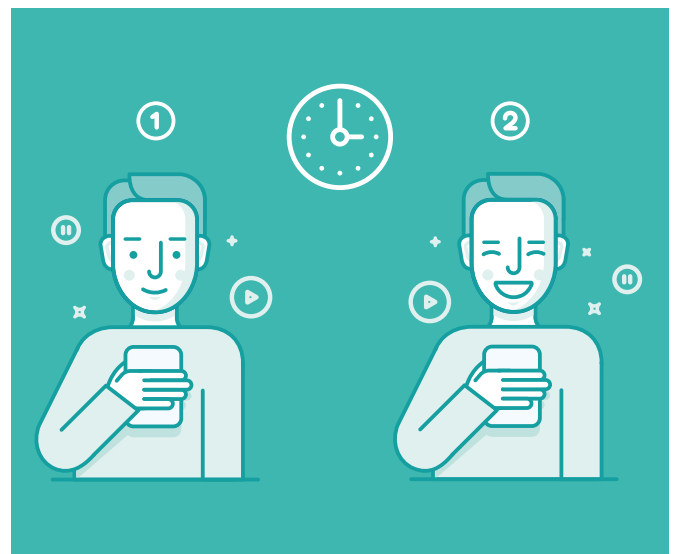
What We Did

In our creative development testing solution, ASI:Connect, we measure the effectiveness of video ads to be encoded and retrieved from memory by exposing test ads to consumers in a distracted media environment, where the ads can be viewed as part of a wider content experience. We then prompt people with de-branded visual images of the ad and ask which brand they think was advertised.

We call this Retained Branded Recognition (RBR), the Ipsos metric of Branded Attention and use it as a component of our sales validated Copy Effect Index (CEI). In doing this, we measure if the creative was encoded and retrievable from memory, to have the opportunity to influence behaviour at the moment of brand choice.

When people are exposed to the test ads, we also measure moment by moment non-conscious and emotional responses using facial coding, where facial expressions are measured via web cams. The system is provided by our partner Realeyes and measures the physiological changes in facial muscles while viewing the ad, related to classifiers of emotional responses based on extensive work in cognitive psychology⁵. People are asked to opt in to activate their web cam and are unaware our primary interest in their responses is related to the test video ad.

Using this method, we ran a meta-analysis of 734 video ads of between 30-32 seconds and 15-16 seconds long, segmenting the cases in the data set into quintiles based on their effectiveness in being encoded and retrieved in memory. We then analysed the average second-by-second emotional responses observed in each quintile to understand if, on average, video ads that perform strongly in being encoded and retrieved in memory differ in the pattern of emotional responses they evoke vs. weaker performing ads. The cases in the data set represent tests in 23 countries and more than 50 brands.



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What we learnt

A strong second act is the fuel of memory encoding and retrieval.

When reviewing second-by-second patterns of positive emotional response, represented by Happiness, we observed video ads between 30-32 seconds in length attracted a similar response in the first 15 seconds whether they had high or low performance in being encoded and easily retrievable from memory.

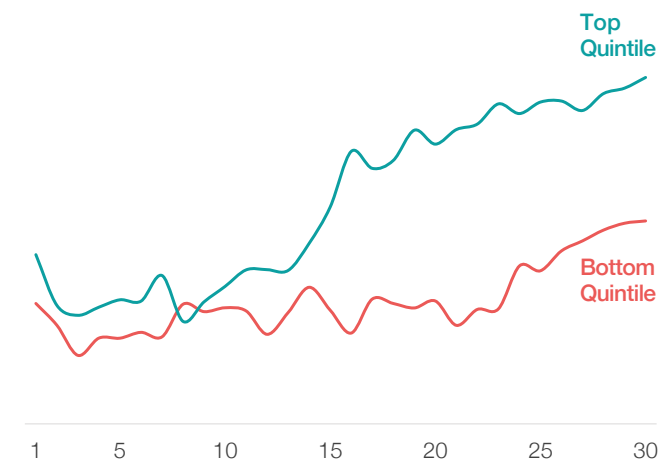


However, after 15 seconds, high performing ads display a different pattern of positive emotional response, with a steeper increase over time until the end (see Figure one).

Figure one

Average Happy Emotional Response by Retained Branded Recognition Performance

N=102, per quintile



This different pattern of response suggests that the emotions evoked in the latter stages of longer video ad lengths appear to play a role in ad effectiveness in memory encoding and retrieval.

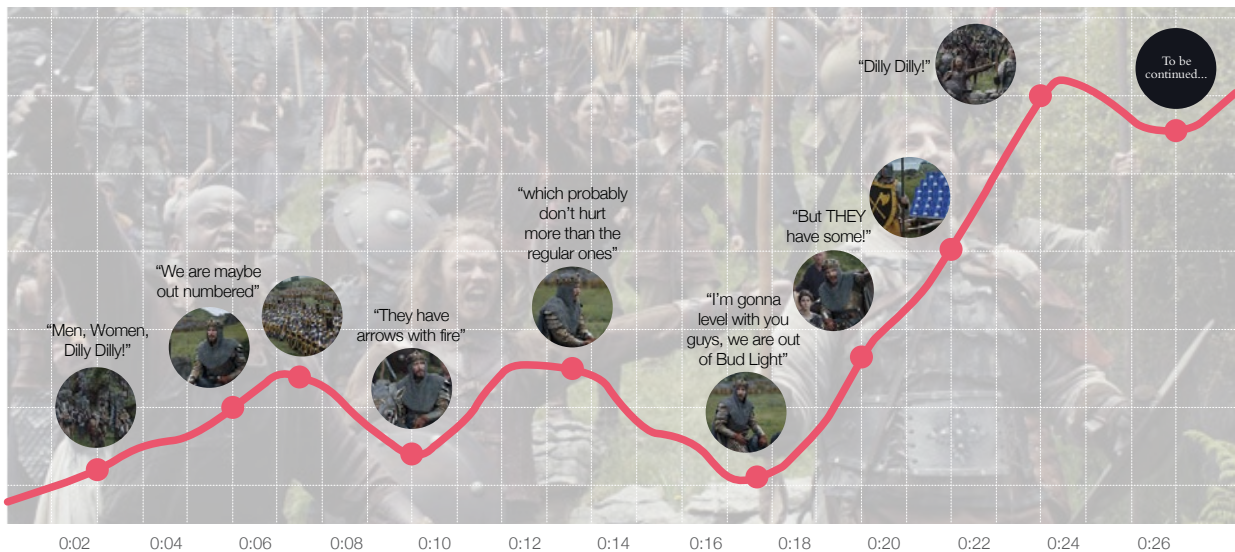
When considering specific ads that represents this trend of a strong 'second act', the recent Bud Light Pep Talk ad aired in the 2018 SuperBowl is a great example⁶.

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Figure two



In this example, we see that the ad starts with a relatively flat 'Happy' response, where we set the scene of the smaller army readying itself for battle and the Knight greeting them with the mnemonic, 'Dilly Dilly'. When the Knight reveals that they are 'Out of Bud Light' and the opposing army have some, the positive emotional response picks up and reaches a strong finish as the Knight screams 'Dilly Dilly!' and the army attacks (see *Figure two*).

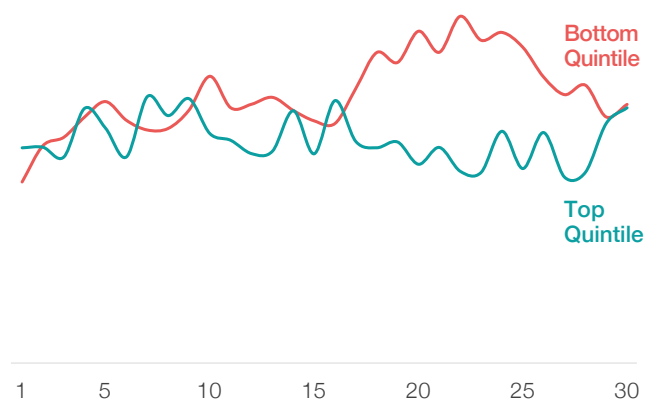
In this ad, setting a scene and using devices such as mnemonics and humour attracts a positive emotional response, which we see on average is linked to stronger memory encoding and retrieval.

When looking at the same quintile we also reviewed second-by-second responses to less positive reactions, such as Confusion. Conversely, we found that 30-32 second video ads that perform weakly in being encoded and retrieved in memory attract slightly higher levels of confusion in the second half of the ad (see *Figure three*).

Figure three

Average Confused Emotional Response by Retained Branded Recognition Performance

N=102, per quintile



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What about shorter ads?

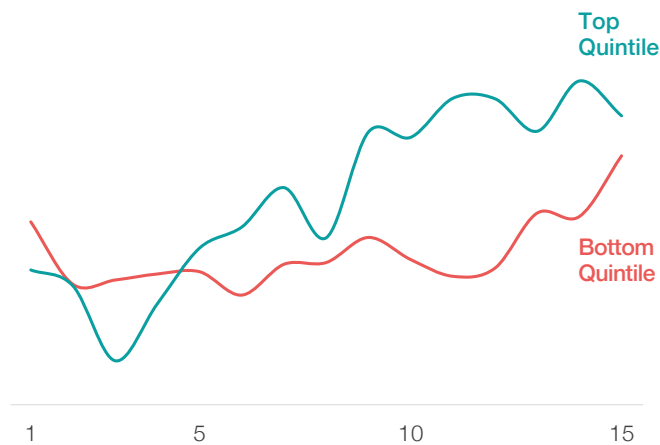
When looking at the same quintile of branded memory performance amongst 15-16 second ads, we saw a similar, though less distinct pattern of emotional response in the second half of the content (see *Figure four*).

However, when looking at confusion we see no evident difference by either the first or final moments of the content (see *Figure five*).

Figure four

Average Happy Emotional Response by Retained Branded Recognition Performance

N=45, per quintile

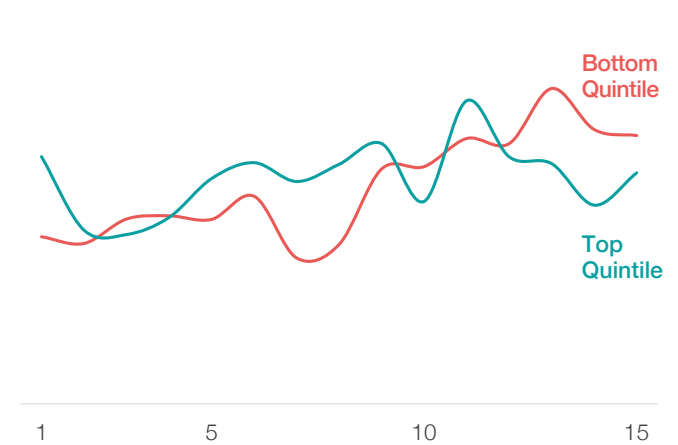


While it should be noted that the overall levels of confusion are low, it suggests that while for longer form video, advertisers need to consider clarity of messaging, as well as building a positive emotional response, this is less of a priority for shorter form where ads are often cut downs that retain core ideas from longer form creative.

Figure five

Average Confused Emotional Response by Retained Branded Recognition Performance

N=45, per quintile



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What does this mean?

The average trends of emotional response we observe across the high and low performing cases in our database suggest getting the 'second act' of a video ad right should be considered when trying to maximise the opportunity to be encoded and easily retrievable in memory. Delivering a positive emotional response towards the end, such as the peak or conclusion of an impactful story or resolution, seems to be especially beneficial, likely fuelling memory encoding.

Avoiding ambiguity in the clarity of the message and story also appear to be levers to leaving strong branded memories for longer form ads of 30-35 seconds, though we believe further exploration is needed by category and creative objective to enable more specific guidelines to support creative agencies.

This doesn't mean that first impressions don't matter. It's clear that in skippable and scroll away content viewing that video ads need to intrigue and engage in the first few seconds to capture initial attention. It does though appear that the 'second act' should not be ignored and once initial attention is captured, it plays an important role in impacting memory encoding and retrieval.

Based on these observations, marketers and creative agencies need to consider early in their early storyboarding and script development how they can leave a final impression that 'Leaves 'em wanting more' when they come to make a decision about which brand they want to choose.



References:

¹Harvard Business School Communications Research, November 2012: <https://www.wired.com/2012/11/amy-cuddy-first-impressions/>

²eMarketer, US Time Spent with Media, October 2017: <https://www.emarketer.com/Article/eMarketer-Updates-US-Time-Spent-with-Media-Figures/1016587>

³Facebook IQ, Stop thumbs in their tracks: <https://www.facebook.com/business/news/mobile-moves-people-stop-thumbs-in-their-tracks>

⁴Kahneman, Daniel; Fredrickson, Barbara L.; Schreiber, Charles A.; Redelmeier, Donald A. (1993). "When More Pain Is Preferred to Less: Adding a Better End". *Psychological Science*. 4 (6): 401-405. doi:10.1111/j.1467-9280.1993.tb00589.x.

⁵Ekman, P., & Rosenberg, E. L. (Eds.). (1997). *What the face reveals: Basic and applied studies of spontaneous expression using the Facial Action Coding System (FACS)*. Oxford University Press, USA

⁶Realeyes 2018 SuperBowl Rankings: <https://blog.realeyesit.com/super-bowl-2018-rankings>

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