

THE POWER OF YOU

Why distinctive brand assets are a driving force of creative effectiveness

By Adam Sheridan | February 2020



IPSOS VIEWS

GAME CHANGERS



A CALL TO ACTION: THE POWER OF YOU

The media landscape that creative needs to work in is undoubtedly changing, with more content volume, access and choice to skip or scroll away from uninteresting content. But the role of great creative has largely stayed the same, to capture attention and encode memories that can later influence brand choice.

Much has been written about the role brand assets can play, giving marketers a richer sensory palette to weave their brands into their creative and strike a balance between

engaging content and generating memories of brand value. However, less is known about the strength of their effects. Do they fuel effectiveness more than simply naming or showing the physical brand? And, if so, what types of assets and senses are the most effective to leverage?

This paper answers these questions via an Ipsos meta-analysis of over 2,000 pieces of video creative, examining the relationship between effectiveness and the presence or not of brand assets. The three key findings are:

- 1 The presence of brand assets is strongly linked to positive branded attention effects, more so than just directly showing or talking about the brand.**
- 2 Brand assets that leverage the power of you, such as characters and sonic brand cues, are more effective than assets that are leveraged from wider culture, such as celebrities and music.**
- 3 While less frequently used, audio assets are on average more effective than some visual assets, which suggests brands can take the opportunity of audio to improve the branded attention of their video creative over time.**

Based on these findings, we provide guidelines to inspire you and your creative agencies to infuse the best of you in your creative, to strike the balance of producing content people want to see, where your brand also benefits from being part of the memories.

This is a call to action to help your creative leverage the power of you.

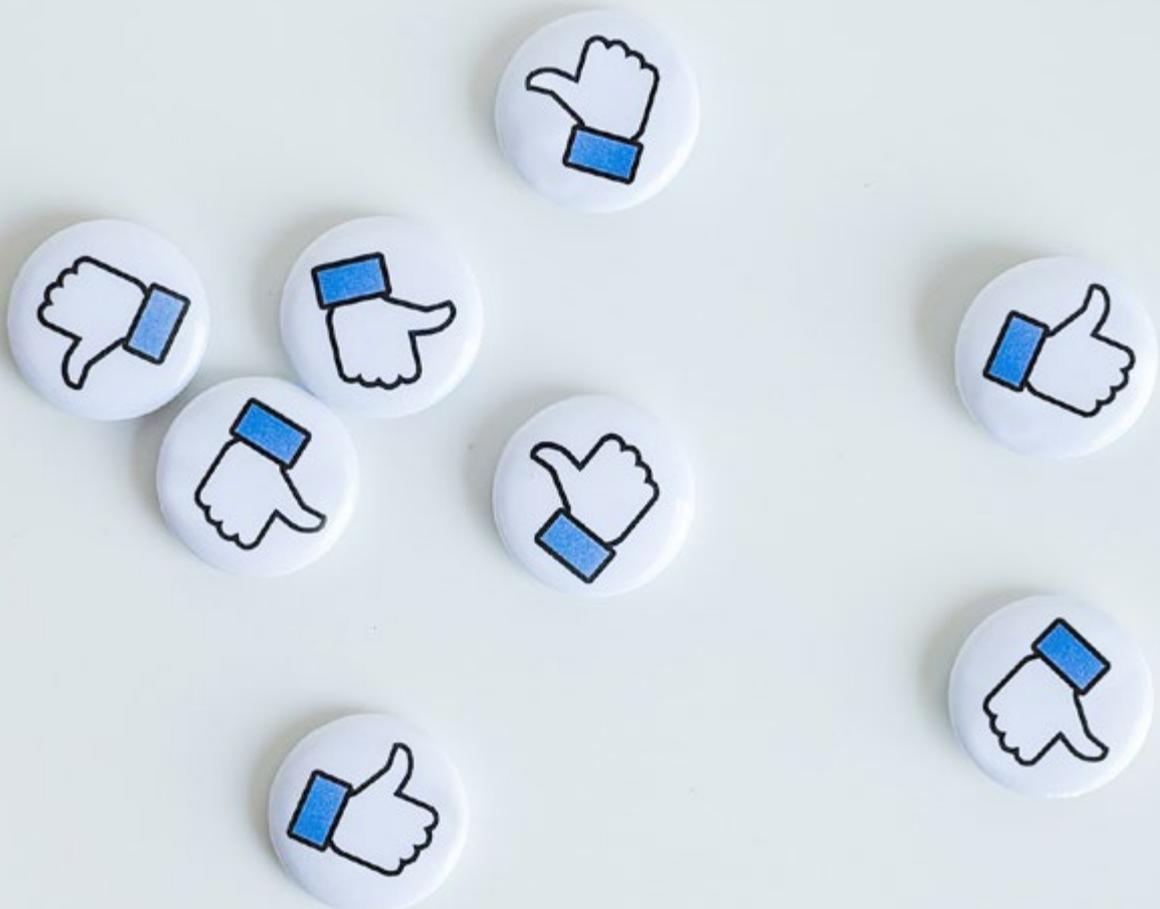
HOW BRANDS ARE CHOSEN AND THE VALUE OF GREAT CREATIVE

While at Ipsos we believe in the power of great creative to fuel brand growth, we first need to consider a sobering thought. In a majority of cases, people don't care about you and your brand. Your brand is in most cases a means to an end, a solution to a problem.

In fact, new research from Havas Media found, that people wouldn't care if 77% of brands disappeared¹.

This is the reality of what a brand is, *it exists in our minds*. A memory network of associations and experiences, of thoughts, feelings, images, and sounds. We encode and easily retrieve these memories to quickly solve problems or goals that we have in our lives, and it's the brands that come to mind first at the moment of choice or consumption that tend to have higher market share.

So where does creative come in? With often so many choices and ambivalence to many brands they could choose, creative remains one of the last "unfair advantages" to strengthen and refresh these networks of memories. Great creative moves people to trigger new behaviours or reinforce existing ones beneficial to the brand. It does this by capturing attention and encoding positive memories that easily come to mind at the right moment. This can be product benefits, though more often than not it's also a positive feeling associated to the brand that carries over to the moment of choice. This is the power of great creative, a story that captures the senses, that entertains, and leaves a positive branded memory.

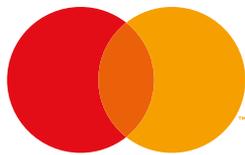


WHERE DO BRAND ASSETS FIT IN?

Brand assets were originally defined by Byron Sharp and Jenni Romaniuk of the Ehrenberg-Bass Institute as ‘the non-brand name elements that trigger the brand into the memory of category buyers’². In effect, they are the cues and signals of a brand that leverage non-verbal based stimuli, such as visual colours, logos, characters, celebrities, audio devices and music, scents/tastes when using the brand or product.

Examples of visual assets for market leading brands are as numerous as they are recognisable and these are just some examples you may well be familiar with.

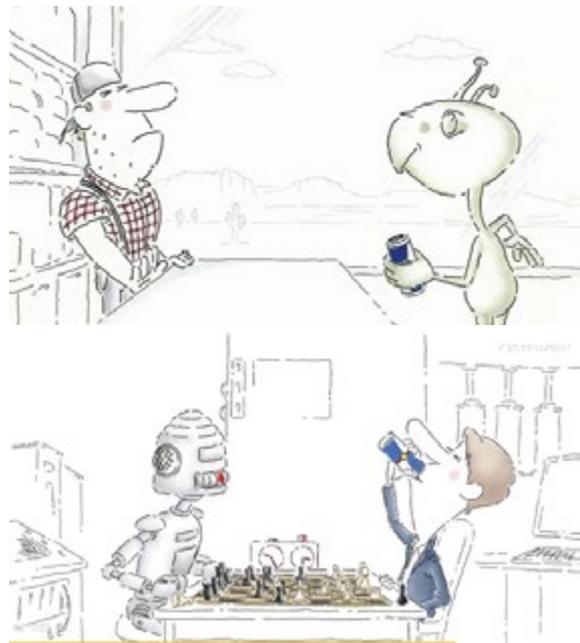
Figure 1 Brand assets for Starbucks, Mastercard, and Amazon



In the case of video creative, it is of course often visual and audio assets that feature, and if combinations of such assets are used consistently enough, they can form instantly recognisable creative styles that can cue the brand within a story with very little mentioning or display of the brand, or any at all. A great example of this is the Red Bull ‘Gives you Wings’ creative, which has built over time a distinct style that often does not require the brand to be shown or mentioned heavily.

Whatever sense they engage, the intended role of these assets is to act as brand cues without mentioning the brand, to weave the brand into an engaging story that leaves a positive branded memory. In effect, acting as fuel of branded memories, instinctively attached to encoded creative memories and as they are non-brand name stimulus, less effortful and more easily retrievable to trigger the brand at the right moments, such as on the store shelf or when scanning product images in eCommerce platforms.

Figure 2 Red Bull “Gives You Wings”

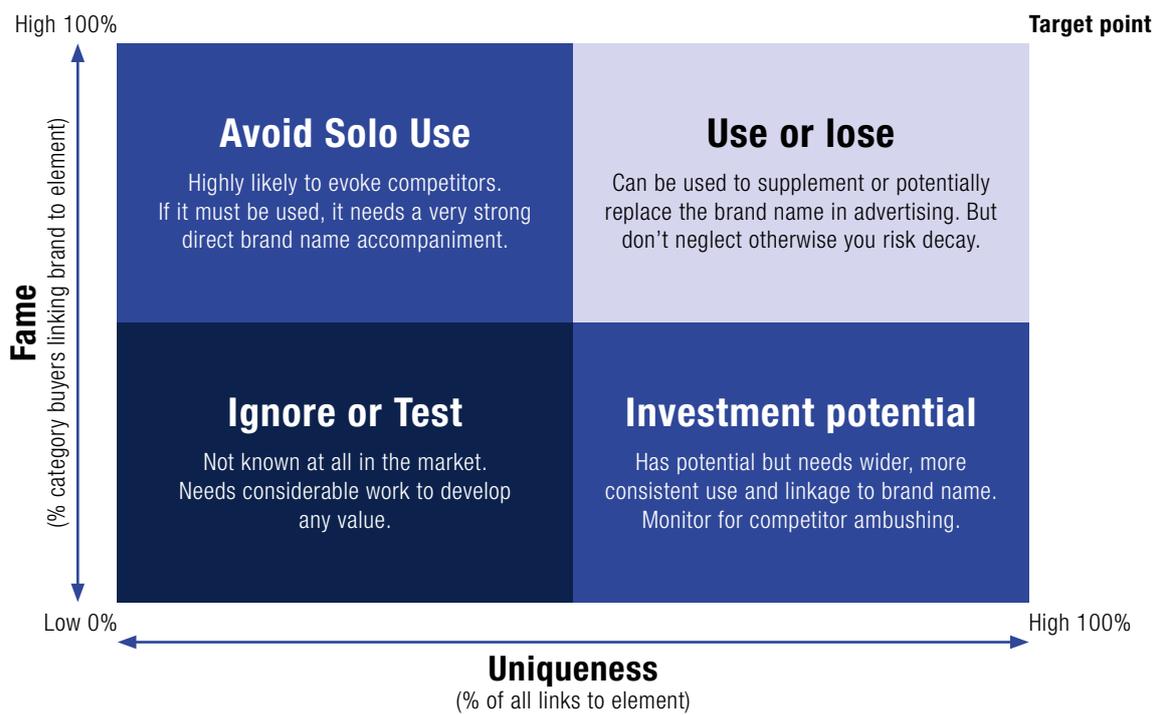


Outside the practice of marketing, experiments in cognitive psychology have observed such phenomena of multi-sensory stimulus activating memories. An example is Brunel et al (2009)³, where people exposed to multiple types of sensory stimulus, such as visuals and sounds, subsequently had their memories of the visuals triggered by further exposure to the sounds, and vice versa.

To add value and justify their inclusion in creative, Romaniuk said, brand assets need to fulfil two key criteria. They need to have strong brand linkage, defined as at least 50% of people linking it to your brand, and they need brand uniqueness, at least 50% only linking it to your brand⁴ (see Figure 3).

While we have a logical theoretical framework and prevalent practice in leveraging brand assets in creative, the key question is, how much value do brand assets bring to creative effectiveness and what types and combinations are most effective?

Figure 3 What is a brand asset?



Source: 'Building Distinctive Brand Assets', Jenni Romaniuk, 2018

WHAT WE DID

Ipsos selected 2,015 pieces of video creative in the USA from our global database of over 200,000 creative evaluations and cross-referenced creative effectiveness measured in pre-launch evaluation service with the presence or not of brand assets. The creative had a fairly even split of 15" and 30" lengths and represented a broad range of ten categories, including: healthcare; pet food; durables, such as consumer electronics; financial services; digital services; beauty; beverages and food.

We coded the creative based on presence, frequency, and time of brand assets. A brand asset was defined by an Ipsos practitioner working closely on the brand, having either directly measured the brand linkage and brand uniqueness of the asset or, with their experience, made a judgement if the asset was strongly enough associated with the brand only to qualify.

Each video creative was evaluated pre-campaign launch and exposed to target category buyers in a distracted environment amongst competing content with sound on to represent the

type of 'in the wild' conditions creative needs to perform in. People, given this distracted exposure, were later asked via de-branded images to confirm if they recognise the ad and, if so, what the brand was via an unprompted open ended question without visual aid.

The strength of response for recognition and correct brand attribution was then combined to give a metric of branded attention, which is a key metric in our sales validated pre-launch creative evaluation service. In our analysis, we segmented the dataset by low and high terciles of branded attention performance and compared the presence of brand assets between these two groups, only reporting differences with a minimum confidence level of 95% that would be generalisable to a wider population of creative cases.

The following sections outline the key insights we identified about brand assets' use in creative and what this means for marketers and creative agencies.

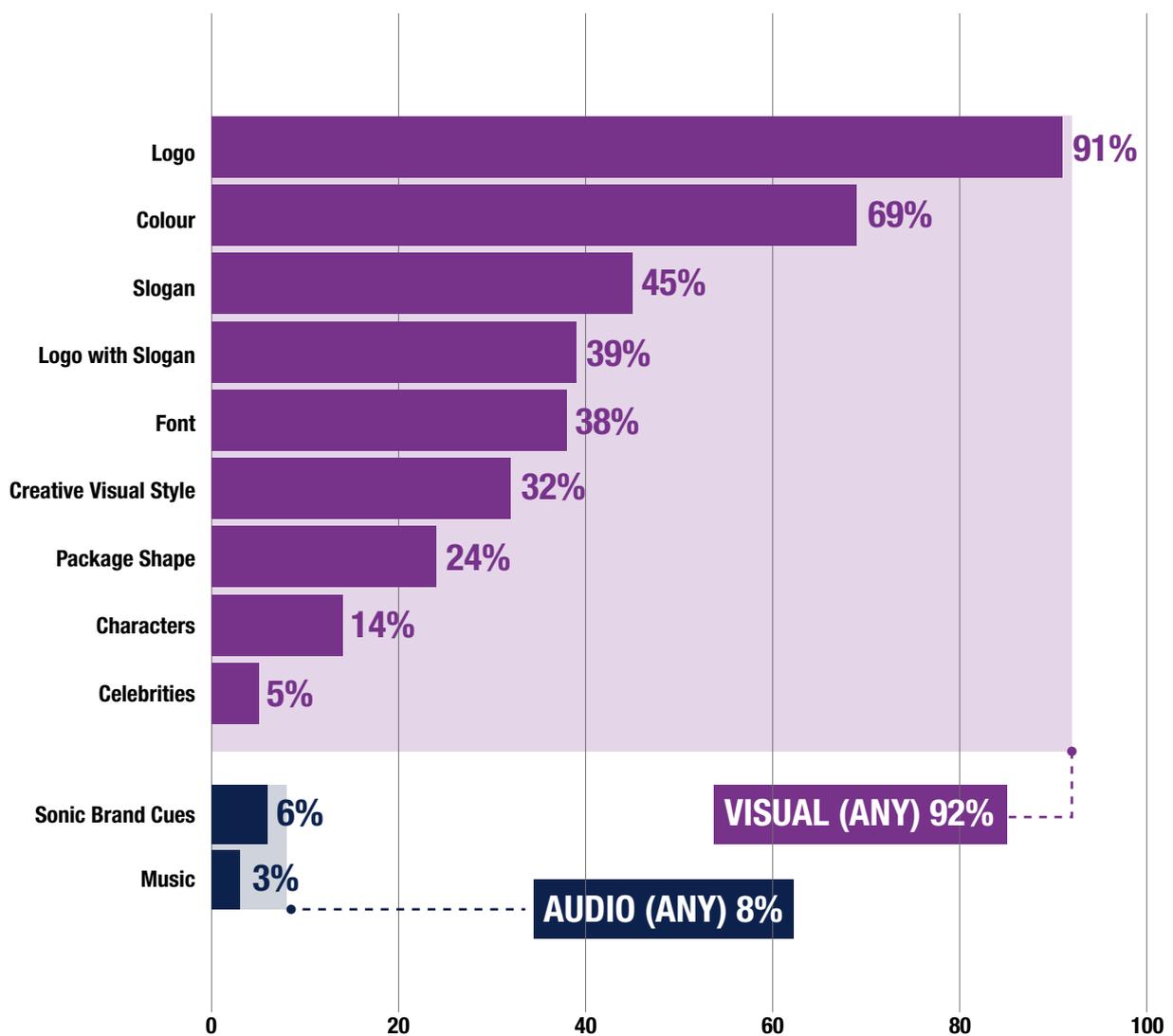


USING DISTINCTIVE BRAND ASSETS IS NOT A DISTINCT PRACTICE

Among this broad cross-section of ads in the data set, it appears, marketers widely use brand assets. However, visual assets, such as colours and logos, seem to dominate while

audio assets are less frequently used as can be seen in Figure 4.

Figure 4 Percentage of ads that used distinctive brand assets



Source: Ipsos Creative Excellence Video Ad Meta-Analysis, 2,015 USA cases

BRAND ASSETS FUEL BRANDED ATTENTION

While the use of brand assets is a fairly common practice, we see clear evidence of a relationship with effective branded attention, with these cases 1.15 times more likely to be high performing ads (in the top third of the dataset) than low performing (in the bottom third).

BRAND ASSETS ARE MORE EFFECTIVE THAN SHOWING OR TALKING ABOUT THE BRAND

We also looked at the average frequency of use of brand assets and compared this to the frequency of talking about the brand or physically showing it with the brand name visible. When we compare high vs. low performing creative we see little difference in the frequency of brand mentions or display, but with brand assets, high performing creative showed them on average +34% more often (see Figure 5).

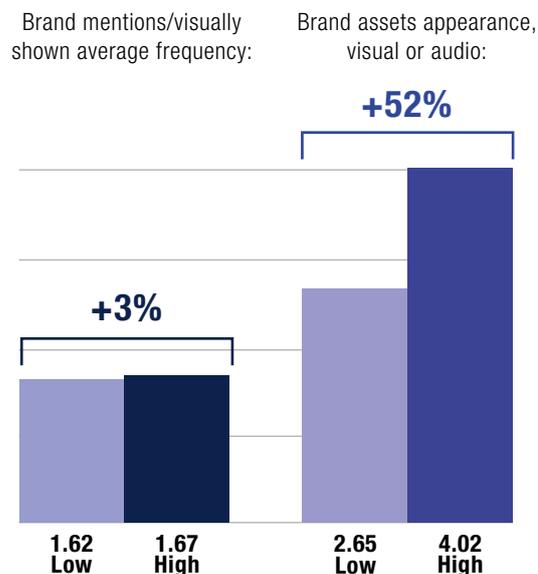
Here we see clear evidence of the power of brand assets being linked to stronger branded attention and we can consider it provides some supporting evidence that the assets used do indeed enable more sensory mechanisms for the brand to be weaved into the story and be part of the creative memories encoded. Conversely, while showing or talking about the brand in a direct way doesn't have a negative relationship with branded memories, it does not appear to be an advantage over brand assets.

VISUAL ASSETS ARE EFFECTIVE, WHILE AUDIO IS A MISSED OPPORTUNITY

When comparing the presence of visual assets between low and high performing creative, we see they are 1.15 times more likely to be high. Although used in less than 10% of cases in the dataset, creative that used audio was a significantly higher 3.44 times more likely to appear in the high tercile, driven by a notable 8.53 times for sonic brand cues (see Figures 6 and 7).

This perhaps represents the missed opportunity of audio. On the surface, this can be considered as understandable for video creative. As a marketer, your first concern is to visually

Figure 5 Average number of Distinctive Brand Assets used for Low and High performing ads on Brand Attention



Source: Ipsos Creative Excellence Video Ad Meta-Analysis, 2,015 USA cases

engage in 'sound off' and thumb-stopping media placements. However, this is perhaps not thinking about the wider value such assets can deliver, especially sonic cues such as the McDonald's and Intel 'stings', enabling sensory cues that follow in store and other physical, retail experiences, and even financial services companies such as Mastercard developing their own 'sonic logo' to carry through from the campaign to their online or in-store point of sale sounds⁵.

VISUAL ASSETS ADD MOST VALUE IF THEY LEVERAGE THE POWER OF YOU

Although audio appears to be a missed opportunity, some specific types of visual assets are also strongly linked to effective branded attention, and they all have one thing in common: **you** and **your brand**.

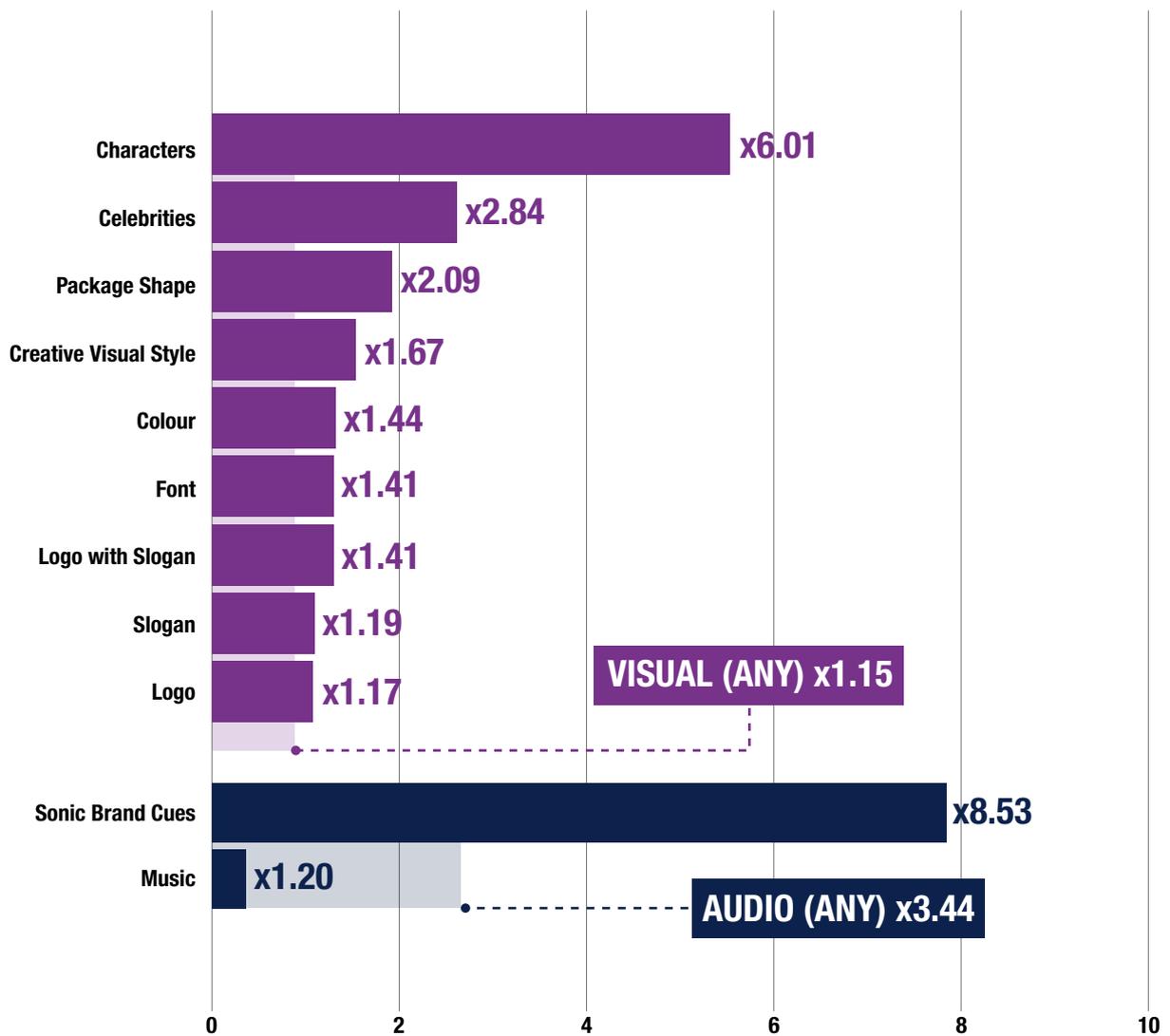
If people often don't care if a majority of brands would cease to exist, then the role of great creative is to keep the brand in mind, by creating and refreshing mental networks. It's in the use of visual brand assets that we see this in action, with the presence of assets most likely to be owned by the brand most strongly linked to effective branded attention.

Figure 6 Average likelihood of an ad featuring different brand asset types being high vs. low performing on branded attention



Source: Ipsos Creative Excellence Video Ad Meta-Analysis, 2,015 USA cases

Figure 7 Average likelihood of an ad featuring different brand asset types being high vs. low performing on branded attention



Source: Ipsos Creative Excellence Video Ad Meta-Analysis, 2,015 USA cases

“Branded characters represent an interesting opportunity. They do not represent multiple brands, unless you want them to, and they offer the potential to evolve with your creative style and story you want to foil around your brand.”



VISUAL CHARACTERS VS. CELEBRITIES

The use of celebrities to promote a product is a well-trodden path, with the marketer investing in the link between the celebrity and the brand to gain positive endorsement and possibility that their brand will benefit from the halo effect of their personality.

The data suggests that it is linked to stronger branded attention. Brands that use celebrities consistently across multiple campaigns are 2.84 times more likely to be in the high tercile, a higher effect ratio than the general use of celebrities which include one-off campaigns (1.43 times).

However, while consistent celebrity use is effective, this is significantly overshadowed by characters, with creative in the high tercile 6.01 times more likely to use them.

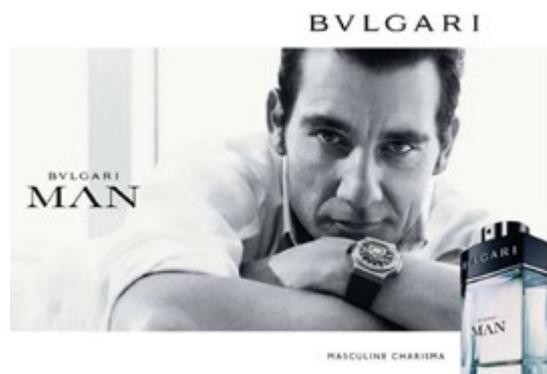
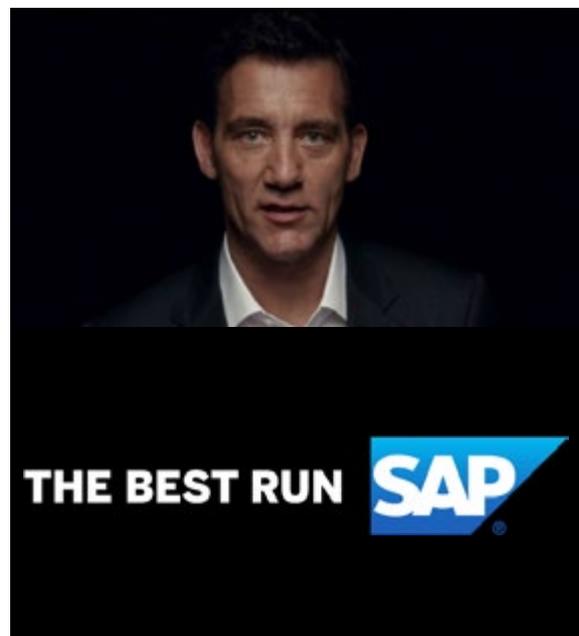
Figure 8 Cardi B for Reebok (top) and Pepsi (bottom)



This difference perhaps represents a potential drawback of celebrity use, that they are not controlled as such by the brand, but used for benefit of association. This can carry a risk of attention in the creative being more on the celebrity than the brand.

While there is no evidence to suggest using celebrities generally has a negative impact, they are not a ticket to success and there are numerous examples of celebrities appearing in creative for multiple brands where there could be risk of dilution of association.

Figure 9 Clive Owen for SAP (top) and Bulgari (bottom)



Conversely, branded characters represent an interesting opportunity. They do not represent multiple brands, unless of course you want them to, and they offer the potential to evolve with your creative style and the story you want to foist around your brand. There is perhaps no better example in recent times of this opportunity in action than KFC's use of Colonel Sanders. An icon since the national expansion of the brand in the 1950s, KFC has since evolved and appropriated the character in a range of ways to reach new audiences and tell new stories. Recent examples include the Rudy Super Bowl commercial and in China an app which offers the chance to date a 'hot colonel' (see Figures 10 and 11).

Figure 10 Rudy II: He's Colonel Sanders now



Figure 11 I Love You, Colonel Sanders! A Finger Lickin' Good Dating Simulator



CONSISTENT CREATIVE STYLES WORK HARDER THAN COLOURS AND FONTS

Another way you can achieve creative impact simply by being you is to invest in a consistent creative style, that is used and adapted over time, such as the Red Bull 'Gives you Wings' example or Apple's iconic visual silhouettes and music.

Figure 12 Apple iPod advertising 2003–2011



This is in itself a brand asset and the data confirms this has a stronger relationship with branded attention than an attempt to use other visual assets such as colours and fonts (1.67 times vs. 1.41-1.44 times).

So at the next strategic creative review, when there is a push to move in a 'completely new' or 'disruptive' creative direction, do give careful consideration to this, as you may be leaving a key brand asset on the table.

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LEVERAGE THE POWER OF YOU

In this dataset we've frequently observed that brand assets are strongly linked to creative that performs highly on branded attention. We can in turn consider that this is the result of the creative having a broader sensory palette from which to weave the brand into stories and create or refresh mental networks to later influence choice.

We've seen that some types of brand assets are more effective than others and while we wouldn't attempt to preach a set of 'rules' to marketers and creative agencies, there are trends in the data that we think can inspire you to infuse your brands in creative and effective ways.

One example is the missed opportunity with audio, especially sonic brand cues, which while less frequently used in our corpus of cases, show strong relationships with branded attention, enabling another sensory cue to leverage the power of you.

We've also been inspired by observing that visual brand assets that most closely represent the brand and its values are most closely linked to effective branded attention. Whether it's a character, or your particular creative style, it demonstrates the power of you over the effects you can gain from appropriating other things such as colours and celebrities.

You and **your brand** are the key brand assets for your creative to deliver positive effects for your business and we hope this gives inspiration at your next creative planning session.

Never forget or underestimate the power of you.

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