

BREAKING THE MOULD: BURGER KING CONTINUE TO BREAK THE RULES WITH RISKY CREATIVE, BUT HOW EFFECTIVE IS THEIR LATEST EFFORT?

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SCREENSHOT: BURGER KING/YOUTUBE

Burger King's marketing has attracted applause and acclaim for their work and collaboration with some of the best creative agencies on the planet. A Grand Prix, two Gold Lions and being named as the first ever Cannes Lions Creative Brand of the Year tells this story.

What led to this recognition and creatively awarded work is their divergent thinking and ideas bordering on being certifiably crazy. In what world would a brand actively drive their customers to a competitors' outlets to redeem a reward as they did in Whopper Detour, or call for a collaboration with their biggest competitor to create a new product for the benefit of all people like with McWhopper?

At Ipsos Creative Excellence, we know that the more distinct, risky creative that breaks category conventions is more likely to capture Attention, while those that follow established 'rules' are likely to suffer from cognitive immunity, with people non-consciously screening it from their mental spotlight of Attention. In other words, to quote Leo Burnett, the greatest danger of advertising is of boring people to death. Certainly, Burger King doesn't want to take that risk:

CREATIVE THAT CONFORMS TO CATEGORY CONVENTIONS IS **35% MORE LIKELY** TO BE LOW PERFORMING ON BRANDED ATTENTION.

SOURCE: IPSOS CREATIVE EXCELLENCE META-ANALYSIS (2,015 CASES)

In seeing this type of work coming from the risky decisions and strong agency collaborations Burger King create, we constantly salute them. First and foremost, because this type of marketing works to trigger action favourable to the brand, influencing people to visit more outlets and buy more products, though also it serves as an example to advertisers we work with to embrace risk and being uncomfortable, which is a reliable path to capturing and retaining Brand Attention.

But when their latest creative landed, we watched, and we paused for thought. Was showing the deterioration of their hero product, The Whopper, into a mouldy, fuzzy, green shell of its former self a step too far in breaking category convention? While campaigns like McWhopper and Whopper Detour were playful campaigns that generated immediate positive action and behaviour towards the brand, Mouldy tries to do something different, by using the degradation of their hero product as a vehicle for a bigger message about the importance of removing artificial preservatives. But in taking this approach had they broken the mould without a positive effect for the brand?

The key jobs that great creative needs to do is to attract and retain Attention to later influence brand choice in the short term and build a feeling it is a good consistent choice in the long term. The mechanisms of this can vary depending on the brand market share and campaign objective, though evoking positive emotions,

ensuring the brand is the hero and providing reasons to believe it is a good choice that can help benefit people in the short and long term are often effective paths to success.

If we take this lens of desired effects, as humble creative research practitioners we thought it would be helpful to measure the creative effects of Mouldy in our evaluation solution, CreativeSpark. We evaluated the creative in the USA a few days after the campaign launch to understand its potential to capture and retain Attention and influence short and long-term choices.

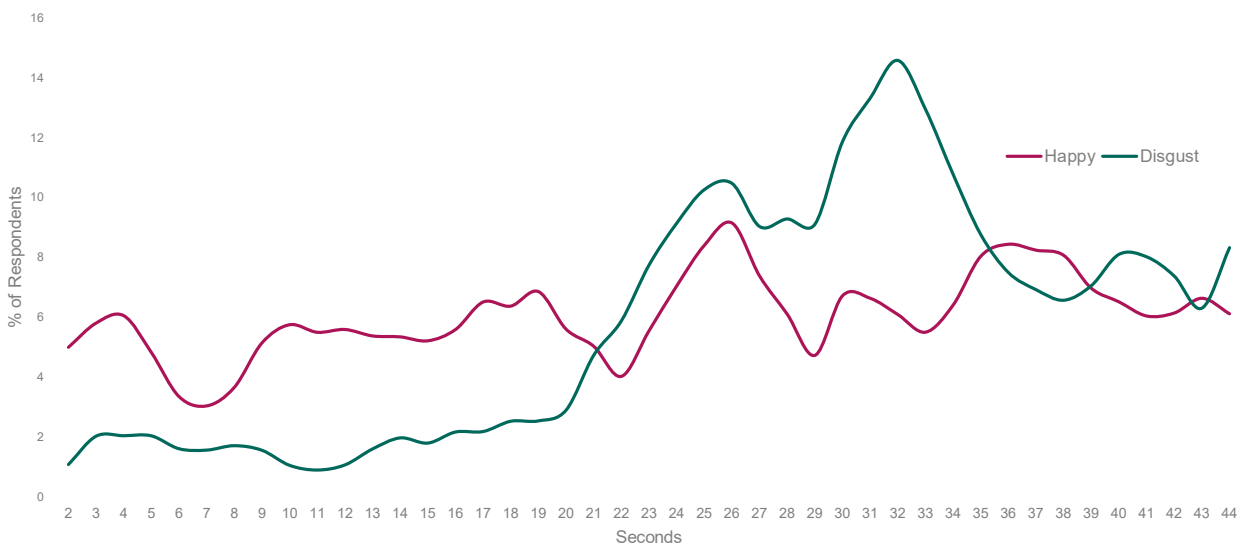
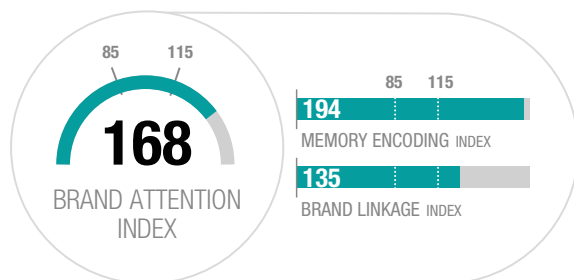
Looking first at Brand Attention, the creative breaks every rule of food advertising, where the convention is to show the product in as positive an image as possible, the perfect lighting, the perfect image of the end customer experience it can deliver. Instead, the hero product deteriorates before our eyes and this unusual and bold approach leads to very strong Branded Attention, with the creative clearly encoded in memory and linked to the brand:



SCREENSHOT: BURGER KING/YOUTUBE

This strong performance is even more impressive as the creative only mentions the Burger King brand at the end frame. This speaks to the power of The Whopper as a visual distinctive brand asset, re-igniting past memories and refreshing mental networks and is an effect we often see with creative that achieves strong Branded Attention. For more on this you can view our paper, [The Power of You](#)¹.

When we look at the data for the immediate emotional response to the creative, we can start to understand why the Brand Attention is so strong. We measure immediate emotional affect using web cams (AKA “facial coding”) to pinpoint the arc of emotional responses and how they relate to the likely encoded memories. Often we see [that building positive emotional affect over time is the fuel of memory encoding](#)², though in the case of Mouldy we see a rise in negative ‘Disgust’, surpassing the positive affect from the point when the close up of the fur on the burger starts to grow:



1 <https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/publication/documents/2020-02/power-of-you-ipsos.pdf>

2 https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/ct/publication/documents/2018-09/the_impressions_also_count.pdf

We also measure residual feelings left by the creative, which can be helpful to understand if the immediate

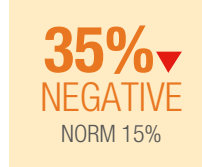
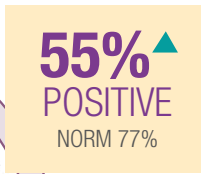
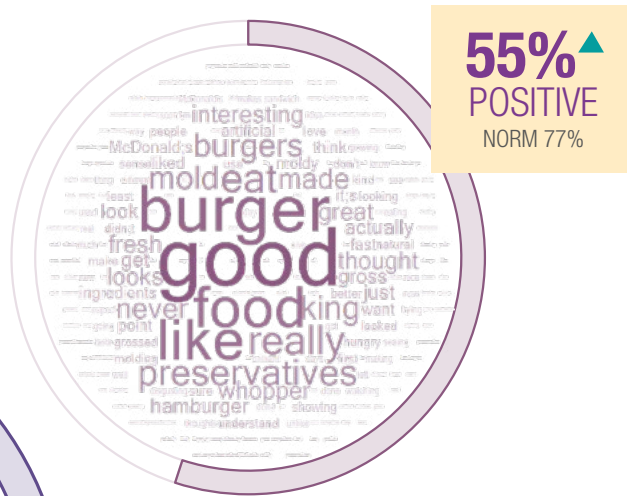


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emotional experience carries over into encoded memories and associations with the brand. We do this by applying self-learning algorithms to open text responses to derive the tone of the response as positive or negative and combine the frequency of these words into an Intensity score. Reflecting the strong Brand Attention we see further evidence of encoded memories and reactions, with strong Intensity, though this is driven more by an above norm negative classification, alongside just over half conveying positive feelings:

SPONTANEOUS REACTION TO:

“What thoughts, ideas and reactions went through your mind while you were watching the ad?”



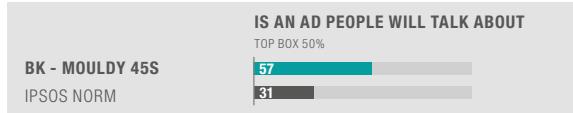
▲ ▼ : higher/lower than benchmark (index thresholds or sig. testing to norm/PAR @ 90% CL)

Across the immediate emotional responses and residual feeling we see a strong “Love/Hate” response to the creative, which is reflected in its risky rule breaking and strong Brand Attention performance.

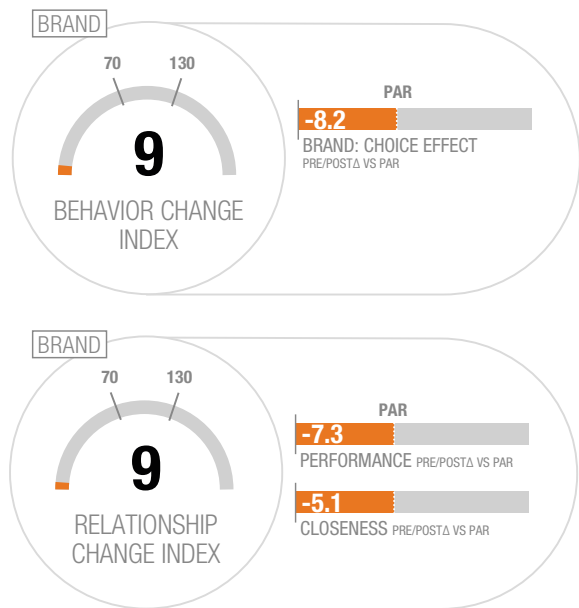
“HAVING EVOKED THESE EMOTIONAL RESPONSES AND FUELLED ENCODED MEMORIES, THE QUESTION IS IF THIS IS OF POSITIVE BENEFIT TO THE BRAND?”

Attracting Attention linked to the brand is an increasingly difficult challenge with more content volume competing for finite cognitive resources, though it's only half the battle. All advertising needs to capitalise on any Attention it achieves to enable positive behaviour change for the brand.

If the main objective was to get people talking about the campaign and brand, Burger King can consider Mouldy to be a great success, with 73% agreeing they are more likely to consider Burger King 'a brand people will talk about' and 57% expecting people to talk about the campaign, significantly above the norm:



When considering end behaviour change, the response was however not as positive, with short term choice (Behaviour Change) and association with longer term choices (Relationship Change) both displaying low potential effects for the brand:



With validations for the Behaviour Change metric to in market short term sales effects and Relationship Change to market share effects, we can consider this is a helpful signal of potential and start to hypothesise why the strong Branded Attention does not carry over into positive behaviour change for the brand.

While the mental spotlight of Attention clearly carries over into encoded memories that link to the brand, the “Love/Hate” immediate emotional response and residual feelings suggest the lack of artificial preservatives message and visuals of the mouldy Whopper are not effective cues to choose Burger King in the short or long term and may not lead to favourable mental networks for the brand at the later moment of choice.

“WHEN LOOKING AT MOULDY THROUGH THE LENS OF CREATIVE EFFECTS, THE PICTURE BECOMES CLEARER.”

The creative is clearly another example of a divergent and risky idea and execution from the team and Burger King and the types of open collaborations they nurture with their agency partners.

If the brand objective was to attract Attention linked to the brand and generate talkability, this is another blockbuster effort from Burger King and indeed an evolution from their previous work. The creative effects measured do suggest this to be a polarised response and encoded memories of the mouldy food do not have strong potential to influence positive behaviour. However, follow-up communication and creative to build on this Attention-grabbing message may potentially help build on the “no artificial preservatives message”.

What we can and will say at Ipsos is that Mouldy is another great example of divergent thinking and risky behaviour and we thank Burger King for giving humble creative researchers fresh work without the rules of idea preservatives to think and write about.

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