



IPSOS VIEWS

SHORT-FORM SOCIAL MISFITS

The next creative shift that will drive advertising effects
in TikTok, Instagram Reels and YouTube Shorts

Adam Sheridan



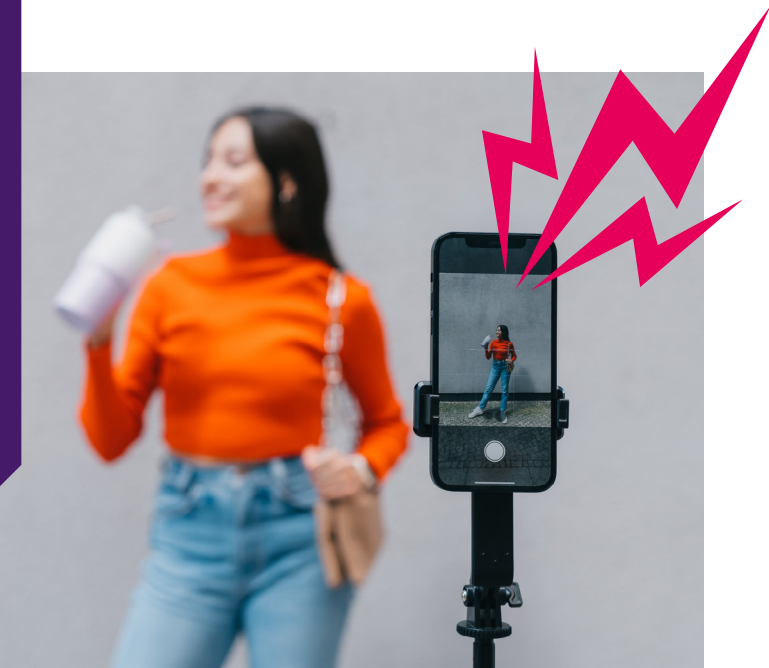
At Ipsos, we champion the unique blend of Human Intelligence (HI) and Artificial Intelligence (AI) to propel innovation and deliver impactful, human-centric insights for our clients.

Our Human Intelligence stems from our expertise in prompt engineering, data science, and our unique, high quality datasets – which embeds creativity, curiosity, ethics, and rigor into our AI solutions, powered by our Ipsos Facto Gen AI platform. Our clients benefit from insights that are safer, faster and grounded in the human context.

#IpsosHiAi



Powerful algorithms remove the burden of choice for users, filtering what it knows they want to see even before they know it.



How short got sweet for audiences, platforms and creators

TikTok is a social platform that needs little introduction. Yet in 2021, on announcing its first 1 billion users, the app and the internet came to an inflection point¹. One where audiences and content creators started choosing a new type of content, short-form video.

These videos can be anywhere from three seconds to up to 10 minutes long when recorded in the TikTok app, and their success in reaching an audience is underpinned by another inflection point in social media: the “For You” page. A landing screen in the TikTok app, algorithmically charged to optimize and adapt to user preferences by learning from the videos they view, like and interact with. Such is the power of these algorithms in optimizing and adapting to audience interests that it has been reported to remove the burden of choice for users, filtering what it knows they want to see even before they know it².

This combination of optimized recommendations and short-form content has not only led to TikTok becoming the social platform where users spend the most time per month³, but a place where creators can almost instantly find an audience, if their videos are what users want to watch and engage with. Take Shelby Renae, who went from receiving 20,000 views on a video of her playing Fortnite to waking up to 3 million views in the morning and now runs a full-time business making TikToks from her apartment.

With such life-changing outcomes for creators and growth in users and time spent, it's no wonder that YouTube and Instagram added their own short-form video experiences with Shorts and Reels. In doing so, they have brought forwards a new creative shift in the social content we all consume and interact with.

A creative shift is needed for brands

With this creative shift in the world of content, creators and platforms, global advertisers such as Unilever have reacted by adapting their media investments, targeting to increase their creator collaborations 20-fold, where short-form will likely be a core pillar of the content and ads they produce⁴. Yet even with more media dollars moving to social and creators, another shift needs to follow. One where marketers need to start prioritizing creativity in the ads they place in short-form videos to achieve effectiveness in increasing their sales and market share. And to embrace this creative shift, brands need to ask themselves:

- 1. Which experiences matter most to audiences in this short-form context?
- 2. How can we tactically maximize the chance that we deliver what audiences want from ads to increase end effectiveness?
- 3. With creators so central to the short-form content revolution, what effectiveness value can they bring to brands and how, tactically, can we best leverage their talents and connections with their followers to be effective?

How Ipsos leveraged HI and AI datasets to get the answers

Ipsos’ Creative Excellence team measured the effectiveness of ~500 short-form video ads in our ad evaluation solution, Creative|Spark. Ads were exposed to people in the context of viewing TikTok, YouTube Shorts or Instagram Reels, where they could swipe away from ads and get to video content they were interested in, representing the live viewing context of the platform. After this in-context exposure, we measured the effects of the ads using sales validated survey metrics: Memory Encoding, Brand Linkage and Behavior Change.

With these effects metrics in hand, we compared high and low performing ads

with the creative tactics brands used in the ads and the strength of experiences people had. For experiences, we measured MISFITS Mindset experiences with human survey responses in Creative|Spark. This represented our human intelligence or “HI” dataset.

These experiences have been shown to represent an audience-first definition of what creativity means in advertising, where a combination of creative and empathetic experiences is related to more effective potential short-term sales lift outcomes⁵.



Creative Experiences
Does the ad entertain in a unique and surprising way?



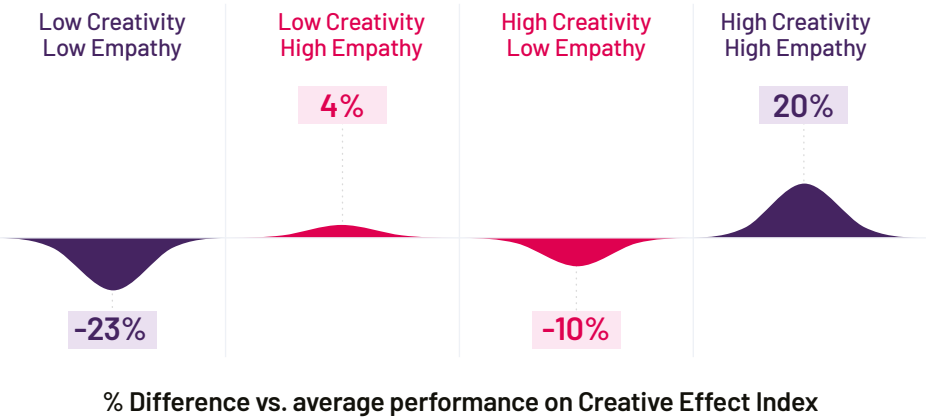
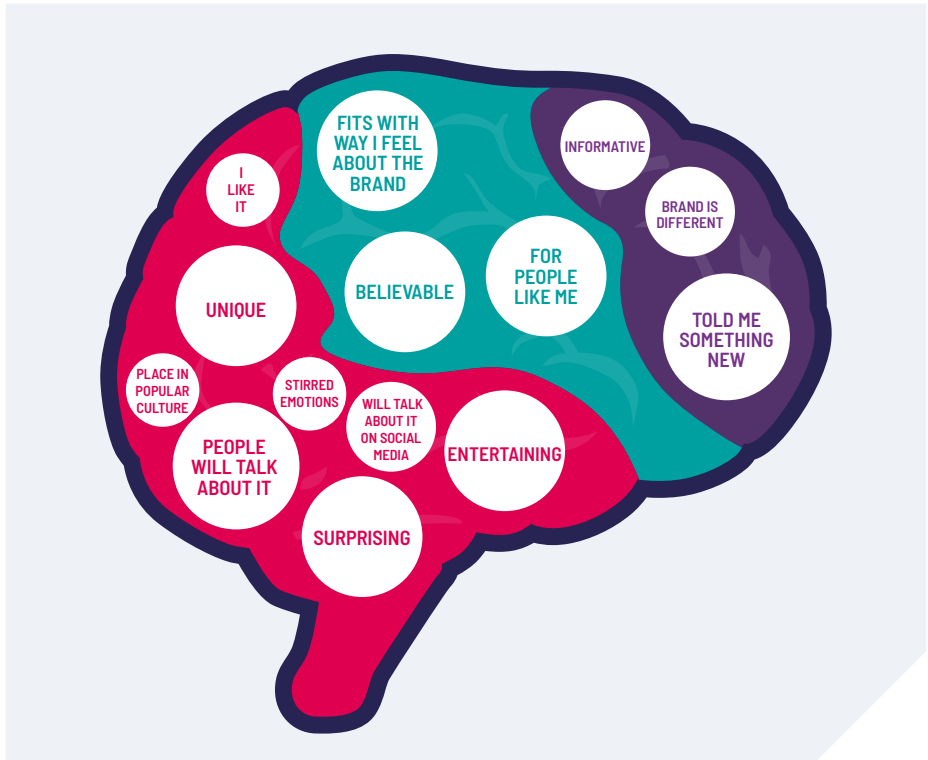
Empathy & Fitting In
Does your creative address the audience context? Is your brand acting with empathy?



Creative Ideas
Does it have the power to shape people’s expectations?

Figure 1: Effective creatives need Empathy x Creative Ideas x Entertaining Experiences

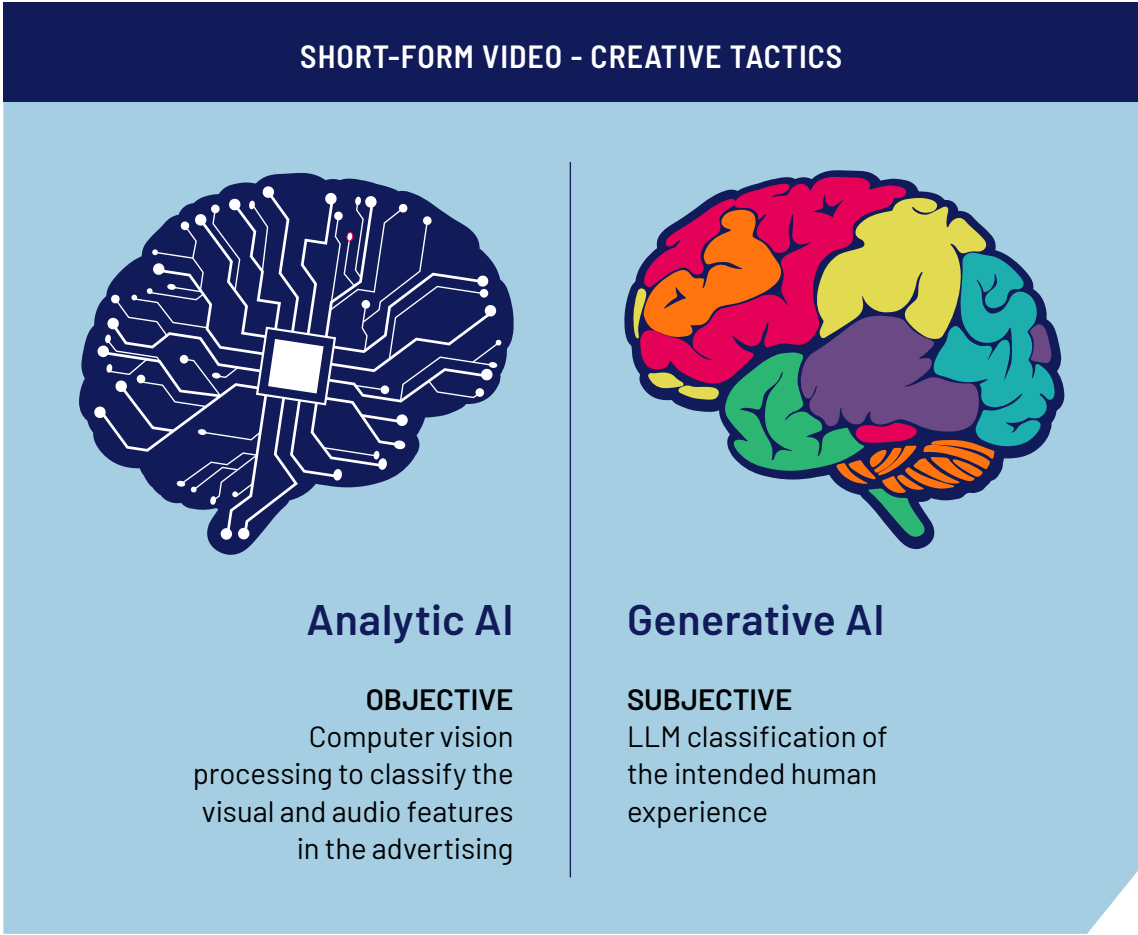
■ Creative Experiences ■ Empathy & Fitting In ■ Creative Ideas



Source:
Ipsos Global Ad
Testing Meta-Analysis
(n=1,734 cases)

For creative tactics, we looked to the power of AI to classify specific objective and subjective tactics, at scale. Objective features such as colors, use of people, brands on screen and narration were classified using analytic vision software. This software enabled us to deconstruct the ads frame by frame and extract visual and audio features. Alongside this, we used Ipsos’ generative AI platform, Ipsos Facto. In the Ipsos Facto interface, we uploaded the video ads and prompted different generative models to classify 40 subjective tactics specific to TikTok video ads, such as if the production quality was lo-fi or high production, or if the ad was led by a creator or not.

With this triangulation of effects metrics and experiences from the HI dataset, and objective and subjective features from the AI dataset, we set out to understand what creatively separates high vs. low effectiveness ads in short-form video formats.



Short-form: a new era of creativity in social ads

A new user context to adapt ads to

When considering how to be effective in short-form video ads, we first need to appreciate the context in which audiences experience them. As well as being short in length, short-form video ads appear in a

faster-paced user experience, where the videos are flicked through and shown full screen, whereas for in-feed video ads the action of scrolling is slower, and the video is within the feed.

SLOWER SCROLLING VS FASTER PACED FLICKING

In-feed scrolling



Scrolling at a **slower pace** and the video ad appears in feed

Short-form video



Flicking up at a **faster pace** and the video ad is full screen

A balance of creative experiences and empathy is key to short-form video effectiveness

In the [Social MISFITS paper](#) we published in 2024, we identified that video in-feed ads in Facebook or Instagram were more effective if they delivered an empathetic audience experience⁶, such as representing familiar environments and issues in their lives that the brand played a role in supporting or resolving. Meanwhile, Creative Experiences that entertain in a unique and surprising way made less of a contribution to increased effects.

Social video in-feed ads being more reliant on empathetic experiences makes sense when we consider a key reason users scroll their feeds, which is to connect with people they know or people whose interests and work have meaning in their lives. And ads that lean into representing the world and challenges of their audience are likely more effective because they fit with the user goal in scrolling a feed.

Figure 2: Short-form video effects are more balanced between Creative Experiences and Empathy



Source:
Ipsos CreativeSpark
Social Video analysis
cases (n=191 cases) and
Short-Form Video cases
(n=489)

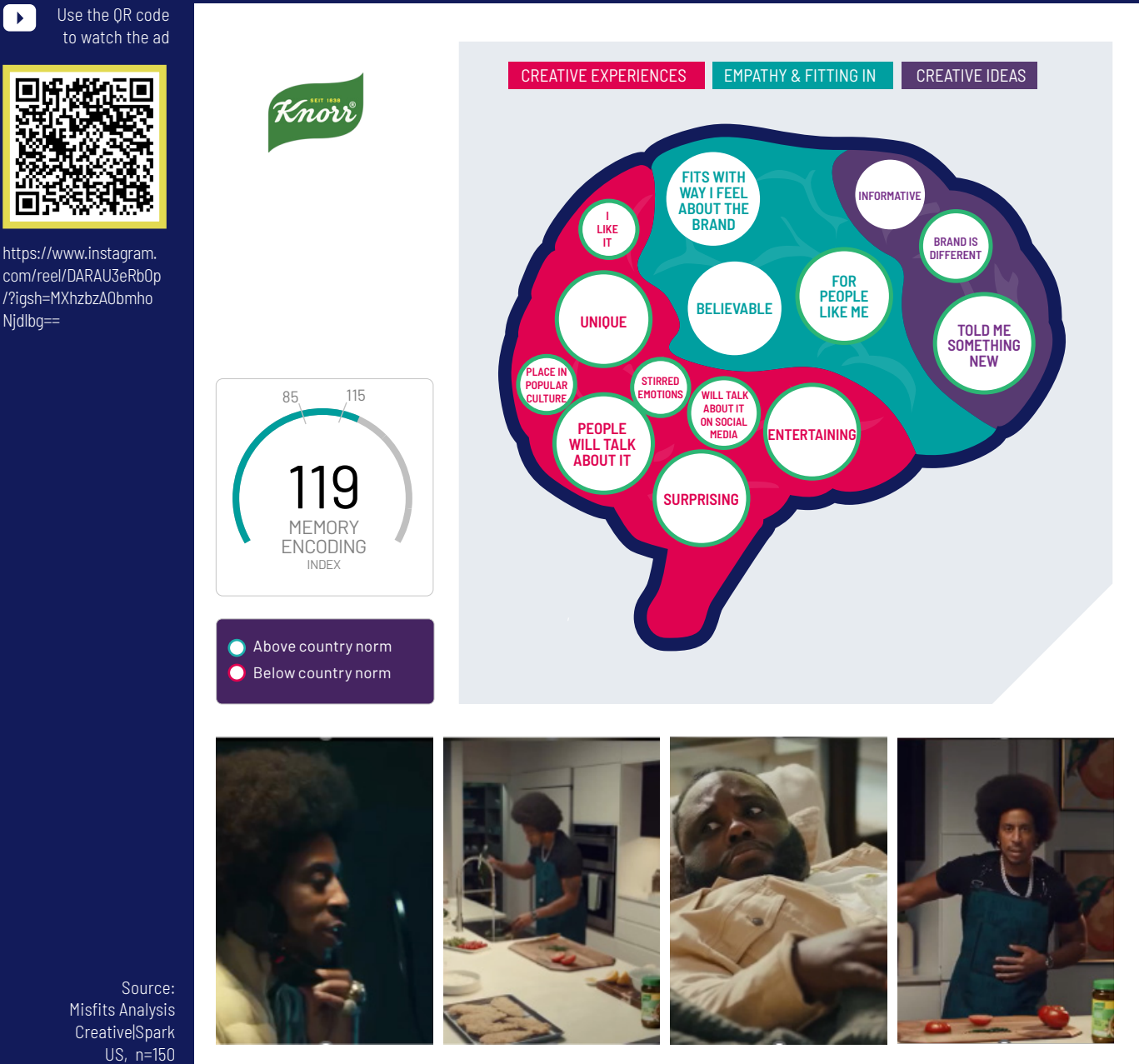
Yet with short-form we see a different profile of MISFIT experiences contributing to higher effectiveness. One that has more balance between empathetic and unique, entertaining experiences.

By comparison, the flicking experience in short-form, whether that is in TikTok, YouTube Shorts or Instagram Reels, has a broader set of user goals, to seek out entertainment and connect with creators. With the content recommendation algorithms, specific user interest based on what they have viewed and interacted with before is all that matters. And it's this alchemy of entertainment and empathetic connection that ladders into audience-first MISFITS creativity, where ads that deliver on this user need are most likely to deliver increased effectiveness.

An example of a TikTok video ad that creates this alchemy is for Knorr stock cubes. In the ad, the characters sing a popular song and act out the process of using the product in a kitchen to create

great tasting food. And in doing so, they create a mash up of unique, surprising entertainment that audiences think represents their world and needs.

Figure 3: TikTok video ad for Knorr stock cubes



Unique experiences are more effective than brand time on screen

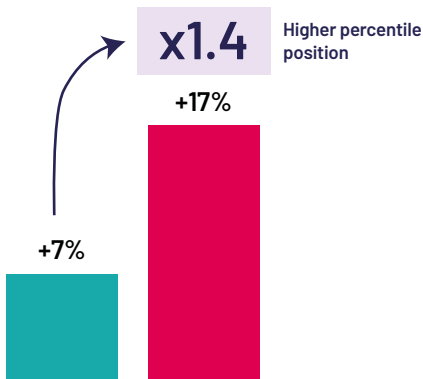
With limited time to engage with users and communicate clarity about the advertised brand, social ads typically will target branding early and often to support effectiveness. While this is generally accepted as good practice, it is by nature a “brand-first” rather than “audience-first” tactic. Having observed in our MISFITS datasets that audience-first creativity supports higher effectiveness, we looked to understand how specific branding tactics compared to other audience-first tactics, such as unique visual styles.

To explore these relative effects, we used Vision AI software to deconstruct frames and visual objects in the ads. Firstly, we measured Brand % Time on Screen and identified that high performers in the dataset on Memory Encoding showed their brand on screen for more time in their ads. While this is increased effectiveness we should welcome, visual elements linked to a good quality audience experience support even higher effectiveness gains.

One example is visual Category Uniqueness. This is a feature we engineered in our AI prediction model, CreativeSpark AI. Using Vision AI software, we create a visual profile of one ad vs. the average profile of the total

Figure 4: Brand Attention Index

Brand Screen % Time Category Uniqueness



Source: CreativeSpark Digital Short-Form Video TikTok

category. And in the case of short-form videos, we observed that high performers on Memory Encoding were 1.4 times more likely to have a unique visual profile and experience than those that showed their brand on screen for longer time periods. This suggests that while branding often and early is important, giving audiences a unique visual experience, representing a key element of a Creative Experience, is even more effective and should be considered in the development process.



An example of a visually unique and effective ad for TikTok is for Jameson whisky. In just 10 seconds, the brand tells a story of secrets in their recipe in

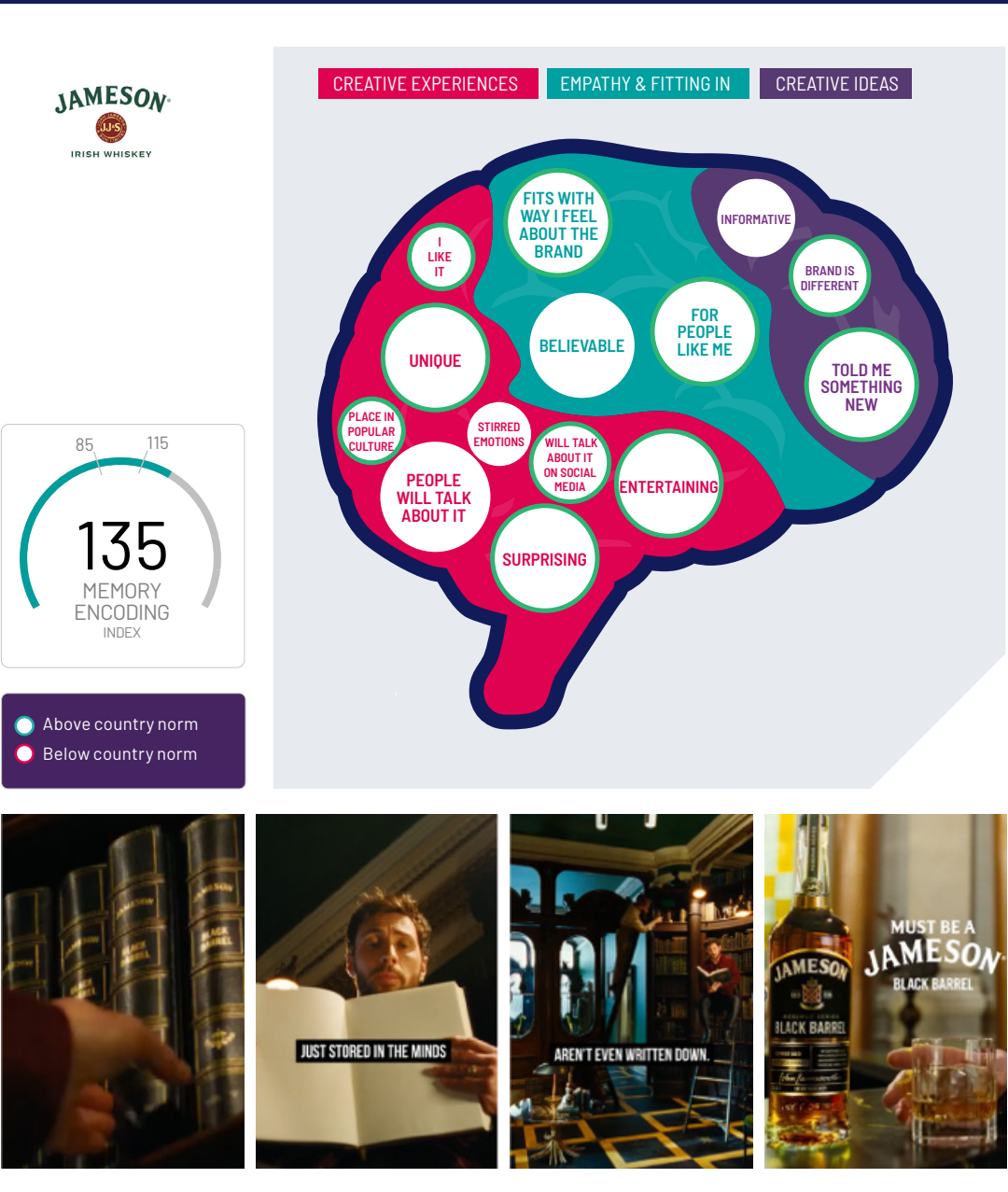
a unique, playful way, without relying on showing the brand often.

Figure 5: TikTok video ad for Jameson whisky

Use the QR code to watch the ad



<https://www.tiktok.com/@jameson.irish.whiskey>



Source: Misfits Analysis CreativeSpark US, n=150

Creators help you get more creative and effective

With the rise in short-form content came another rise, the rise of creator-led ads. In just several years, global marketing spend on creator and influencer partnerships has grown by +135% to \$32.8B⁷.

And this growth in spend with creators may turn out to be a wise investment in both short-term conversions and longer-term brand impact. In research published by TikTok, they observe a +69% conversion rate for creator ad formats vs. standard in-feed ads⁸ and in our Ipsos dataset we also see higher effects for creator vs. agency produced ads. When we used generative AI models to classify TikTok ads led by creators vs. those not, we observe that creator-led ads are +13% more effective on Memory Encoding, and +19% more effective on Behavior Change.

Figure 6: Creator-produced ads



Use the QR code to watch the ad



<https://www.instagram.com/reel/DCXPninyEUr/?hl=en>

Source:
Sample of TikTok
Video ads evaluated in
CreativeSpark Digital
(n=289 cases)

Figure 7: Difference in average effect

Memory Encoding



Choice Effect



Source:
Sample of TikTok
Video ads evaluated in
CreativeSpark Digital
(n=289 cases)



The growth in spend with creators may turn out to be a wise investment in both short-term conversions and longer-term brand impact.

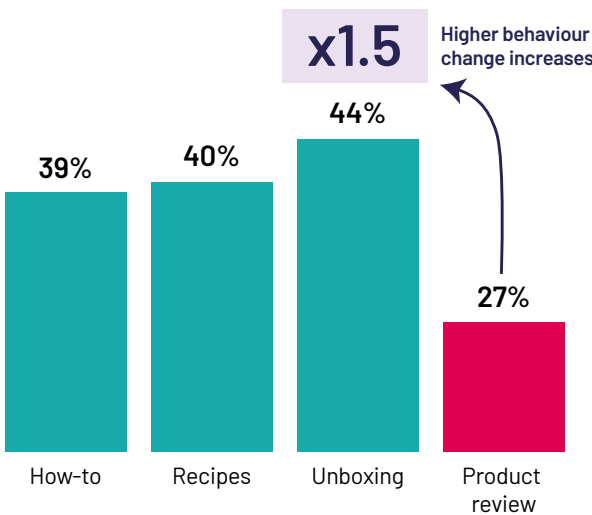


With often modest production resources available to them, we need to ask why do creator-led ads deliver higher levels of effectiveness in TikTok? It could be they have a more authentic connection with their followers than a brand advertising to an audience they paid to get in front of, but other creative tactics classified by generative AI point to a more fundamental reason: simple audience-focused value.

When we look at increased effectiveness in Behavior Change across TikTok ads that use different types of creative tactics, we observe that ads focusing on audience value by providing "how-to" explanations to achieve an outcome, provide recipes or unbox a product deliver 1.5 times more effectiveness than more straightforward product reviews.

Figure 8: Difference in average behaviour change

Brand Screen % Time Category Uniqueness



Source:
Sample of TikTok
Video ads evaluated in
CreativeSpark Digital
(n=289 cases)



With creators being so key to short-form video content, it's clear they will play a role in the ads that drive sales, increase market share and boost brand awareness.

Whether it's how-to videos, recipes or unboxing, we see evidence that when a creator is bringing content to their audience that delivers value, and the featured brand facilitates that value, it converts to higher effectiveness for the brand than when it's the focal point in more typical product review ads.

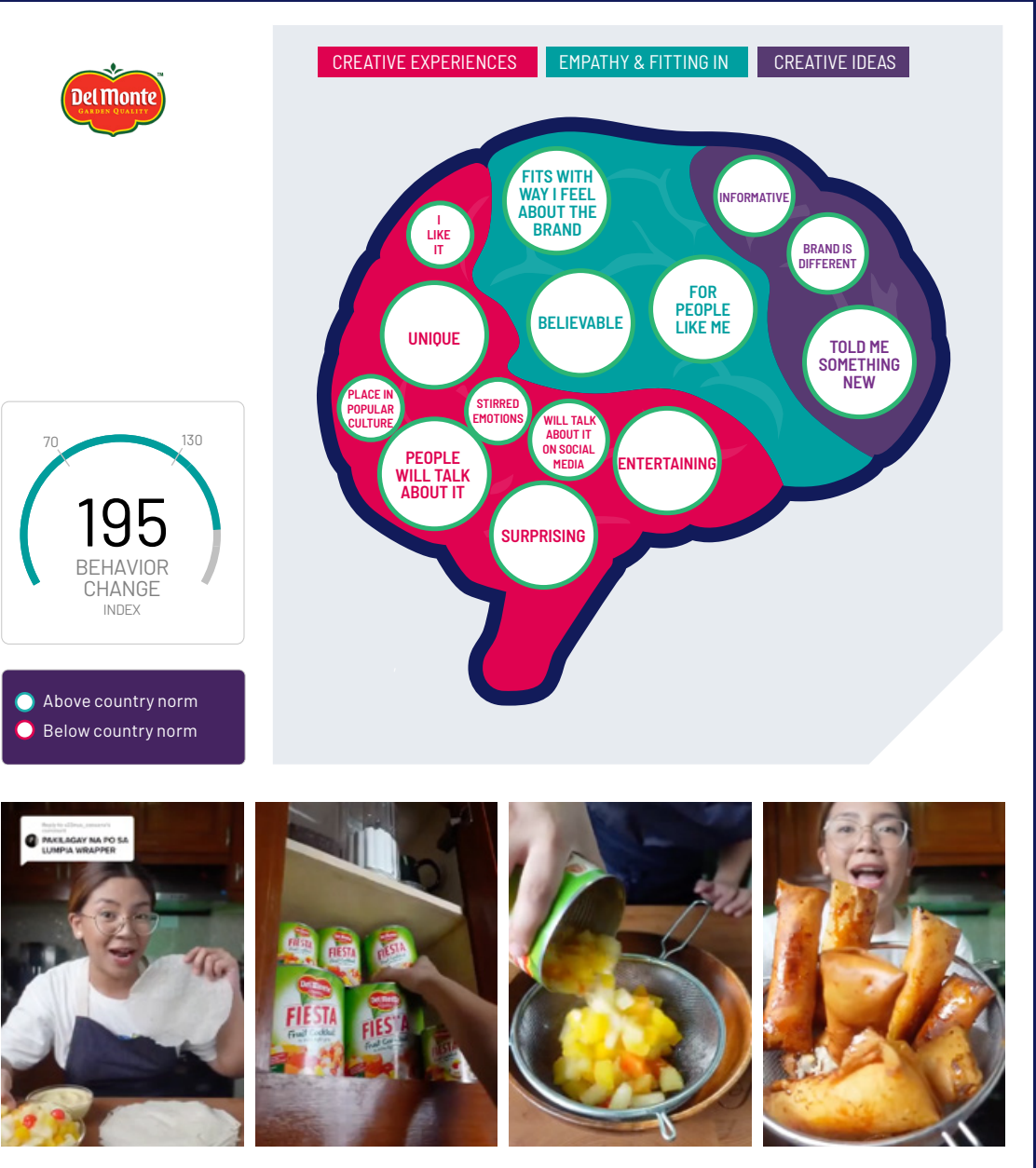
An example of audience-first value delivered in action is this ad for Del Monte Fiesta, where the creator is showing how to make a fruit tortilla, and Del Monte Fiesta happens to be an ingredient for the filling. Here we see an example of audience-first value with a sweet twist on a savoury dish that the brand enables, rather than it being a brand-first demonstration or review.

Figure 9: TikTok video ad for Del Monte Fiesta

Use the QR code to watch the ad



https://www.tiktok.com/@abigailmarquez/video/7218544766957538566?_r=1&_t=8ruxLjvUoZT



Source:
Misfits Analysis
CreativeSpark
US, n=150

Effectiveness through audience-first creativity

The effectiveness evidence in these HI and AI datasets point to a bright future for brands as they invest more in short-form video and creator-led marketing. But it's a future they can only realize if they obsessively focus on one thing: audience-first creativity and value.

By creating short-form video ads that harness MISFITS creativity with unique, entertaining and empathetic experiences that respect the fast-paced flicking context of short-form, we see brands can gain increased Memory Encoding and Behavior Change effects. And with creators being so key to short-form video content, it's clear they will play a role in the ads that drive sales, increase market share and boost brand awareness. But brands will need to outline a vision in their briefs for creators to focus their energy to develop audience-first experiences, while accepting less control over the production process.

Building on these foundational insights to short-form video from our human response HI effectiveness data, we also

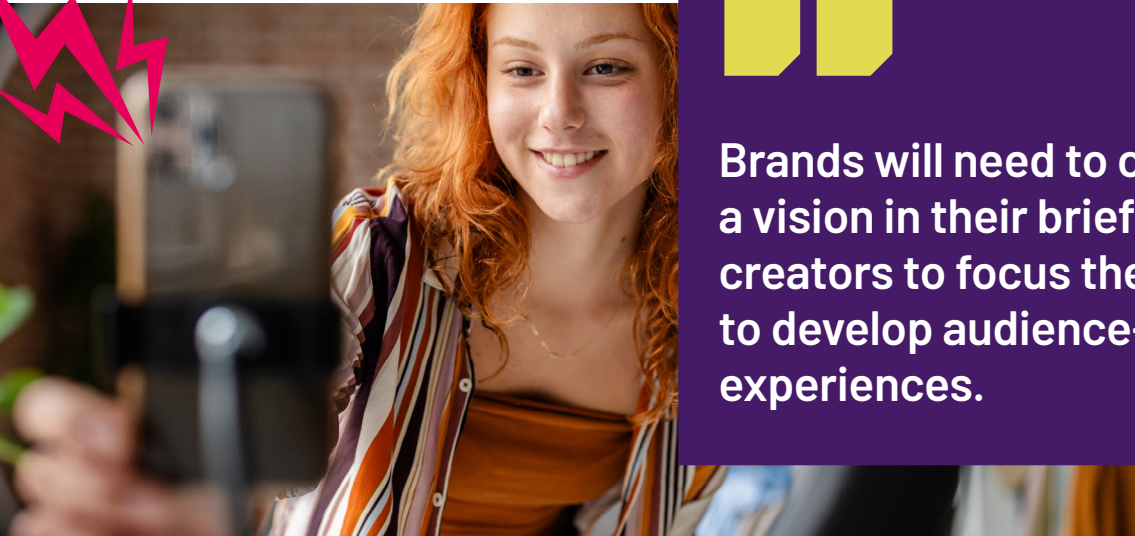
see a future where AI data can support brands to adapt their creative strategies. One where AI prediction models, such as those available in CreativeSpark AI, measure short-form video effectiveness at scale, alongside AI models to classify features and tactics to set frameworks for what can work best for different categories and brands. And once we have creative ads that can drive effectiveness, such AI creative prediction models could also have the power to converge with media performance metrics to inform creative decisions in media planning and more generally drive a scalable effectiveness agenda.

The effectiveness gains are there for us to achieve. But only if we take an audience-first focus in our creativity, to offer content that adds value to their lives.

Let's then embrace audience-first creativity to get effective in short-form.



Brands will need to outline a vision in their briefs for creators to focus their energy to develop audience-first experiences.



Key takeaways

01

Embrace audience-first creativity.
Effective short-form video ads require a balance of creative and empathetic experiences. Successful short-form ads blend unique entertainment with content that represents the audience's world and needs.

02

Creators as catalysts for effectiveness.
Collaborating with creators can significantly boost the impact of short-form video in both Memory Encoding and Behavior Change. Creators excel at delivering simple, focused audience value through tactics like how-to videos, recipes, and unboxing content, where the brand facilitates value rather than being the focal point.

03

Dial up unique visual experiences.
Visually unique ads are 1.5 times more effective than ads that simply focus on showcasing the brand. Prioritize creating unique visual experiences to capture attention in the short-form context.

04

Adapt to platform context.
Platforms like TikTok leverage powerful recommendation algorithms that deliver content tailored to user preferences. Advertisers should be aware of this context, ensuring that their creative strategies align with the content that audiences are most likely to engage with and enjoy.

05

Leverage AI for creative optimization.
Embrace AI advertising research services, like Ipsos' CreativeSpark AI, to classify creative features and tactics and predict ad effectiveness at scale.

Endnotes

1. <https://newsroom.tiktok.com/en-us/1-billion-people-on-tiktok>

2. https://academic.oup.com/jcmc/article/27/5/zmac014/6670985?utm_source=chatgpt.com&login=false

3. <https://www.warc.com/content/feed/tiktok-users-now-average-35-hours-per-month/en-GB/10376>

4. <https://www.campaignlive.co.uk/article/new-unilever-ceo-hire-20-times-influencers-major-marketing-boost/1909494#:~:text=‘Our%20spend%20on%20social%20will,see%20as%20a%20competitive%20level>

5. <https://www.ipsos.com/en/misfits>

6. <https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/lpsos-Views-Social-Misfits.pdf>

7. <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1092819/global-influencer-market-size/>

8. <https://ads.tiktok.com/business/en-US/blog/spark-ads-101-make-tiktoks-into-ads?redirected=1>

Further reading



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