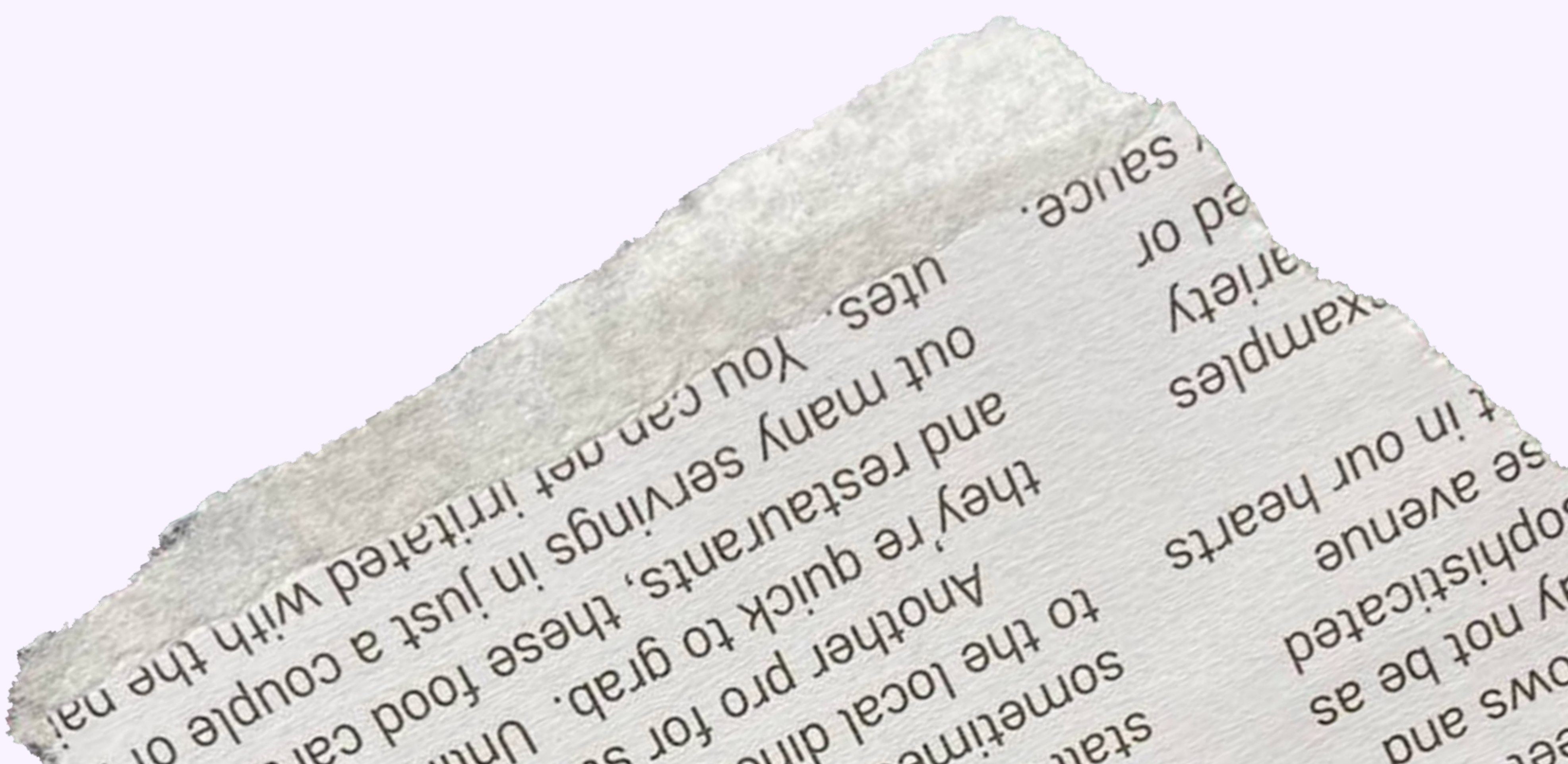
Tracksuit

The Emotion Effect

How to avoid the seven deadly sins of emotionless advertising to fuel brand growth.



The Emotion Effect 👋

For over a decade, marketers have grappled with the tension between short-term sales spikes and long-term brand building, as highlighted in the landmark study "The Long and Short of It." While most marketers understand the value of emotional advertising for sustained, profitable growth, the pressure to show quick returns often leads to an over-reliance on rational, product-focused campaigns.

This paper explores the "Seven Deadly Sins" of emotionless advertising and presents compelling evidence that emotional storytelling outperforms rational approaches across all platforms - from traditional media to digital channels like YouTube. By understanding these principles, marketers can strike a better balance between short-term gains and long-term brand health, ultimately driving greater business value.

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Contributors

Here at Tracksuit, we've conducted an in-depth analysis examining the relationship between emotional advertising and long-term brand growth. Drawing on a diverse range of data sources, including insights from Google, Ipsos, and the work of Les Binet and Peter Field, we've identified what we've termed the 'seven deadly sins' of emotionless advertising. Our research suggests that marketers should steer clear of these pitfalls to effectively drive their brand's growth over time.

James Hurman
Co-Founder of Tracksuit

James is a globally recognised advertising effectiveness expert who's spent over 20 years researching, publishing, practicing and teaching advertising effectiveness. He's the author of two books on effectiveness, has won more than 50 advertising effectiveness awards, and was named the world's number one strategic planning director.

With thanks to:

Ariane Pol
Global Head of
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IPA Institute of Practitioners In Advertising

The Institute of
Practitioners in Advertising

Tracksuit

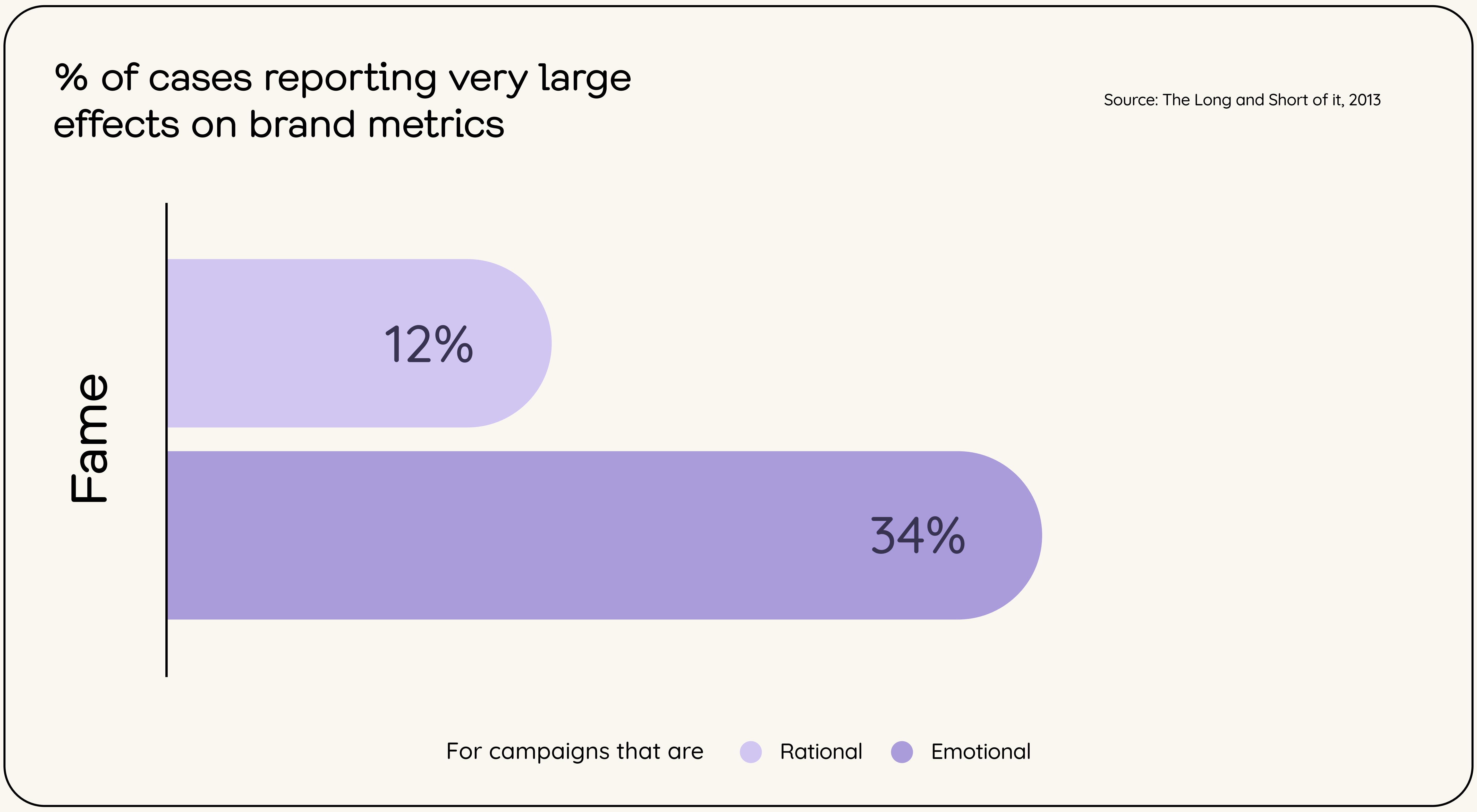
Global Brand Tracking
for B2C Marketers

GrEeD

Let's start with greed.

Greed is an insatiable desire for more. Greed manifests itself when marketers use their resources to buy their target – in this case, brand awareness. Yes, it's possible to buy awareness through a huge media spend, but our research shows that unless the message is right, that type of spending is not effective. Spend a packet on a rational campaign and people will become aware of you. But let's look at a more telling metric: fame.

Campaigns with 'fame' effects are those that drive lots of earned impressions and earned media, because consumers share those campaigns and the media write about them. Those earned impressions come for free — and they make our media dollars go much further. Which makes the advertising more efficient. Which makes it more likely to drive a high ROI and be profitable. On this measure, emotional campaigns are nearly three times as effective:



According to a pre/post survey of Long Term Brand Build Ads on YouTube led by Ipsos, ads that made "respondents feel highly pleasant emotions" led to a +27% increase in their saying they are likely "to share this ad."[1]

What this means is that if we want to drive maximum awareness bang-for-buck, we're much better off running emotional campaigns than rational ones. They're much more likely to be shared and publicized in the media, making our advertising dollars go a great deal further.

+27%

of ads are more likely to go viral and generate word of mouth.*

*Source: Can YouTube help drive long-term brand building? Ipsos and Google Global Creative Works, 2023

Airbnb, founded in 2007, has used emotional advertising to achieve like-for-like brand awareness in the United States with Hilton hotels. This is impressive progress, considering Hilton is a 105-year-old brand that was founded in 1919. Other brand metrics such as consideration and preference are nearly on par between the two brands, too.

> “ We also know, from our own partnerships with major social and retail media platforms, that brands with higher awareness see better conversion rates from their performance marketing, and better ‘growth efficiency’ — a metric we coined to describe brands that can increase their performance or retail media spend without seeing their acquisition costs increase and conversion rates decline.
>
> James Hurman, Co-Founder of Tracksuit

WRatH

Following closely on greed's heels, is another deadly sin — wrath.

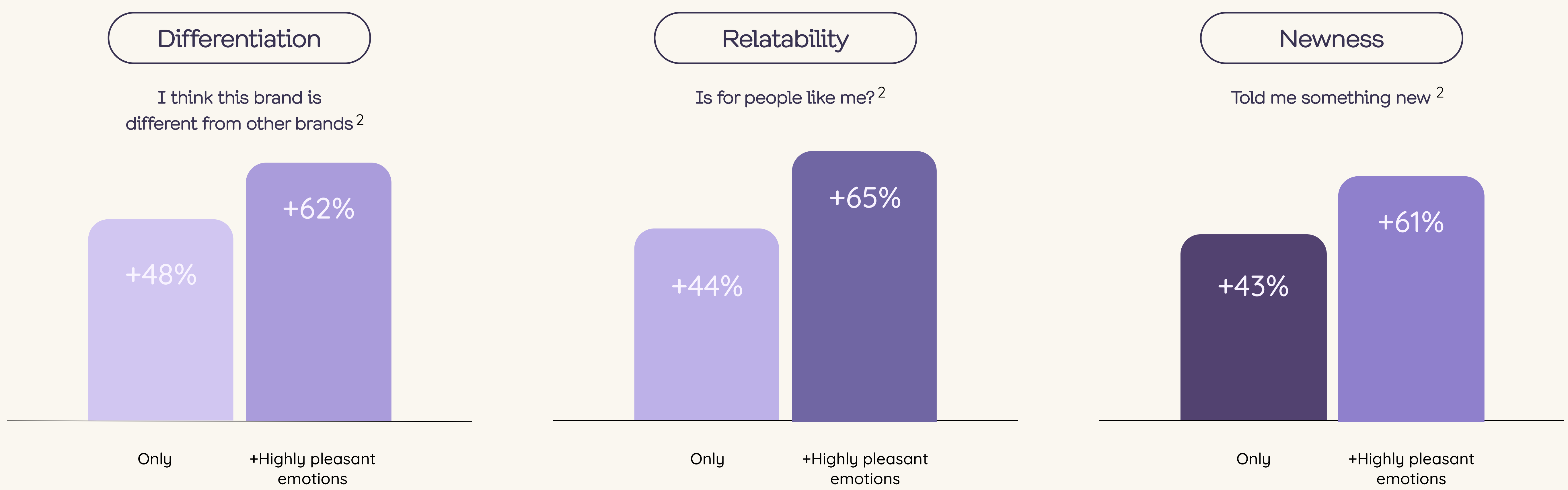
Wrath's impulsive nature is characterized by forcefulness, and can be seen when marketers use aggressive, promotional techniques and rational messaging to shout to their audience without first building positive feelings towards the brand. There's clear research that shows this is the wrong thing to do.

Global research company, Ipsos, has proven that there are five key positive emotions that are statistically significant predictors of ad effectiveness over the long term: surprise, empathy, excitement, happiness and curiosity. When we trigger those feelings, we make people much more likely to consider our brand.

Rational product or promotion information is generally poor at eliciting those emotions. Emotional storytelling is much more likely to do so.

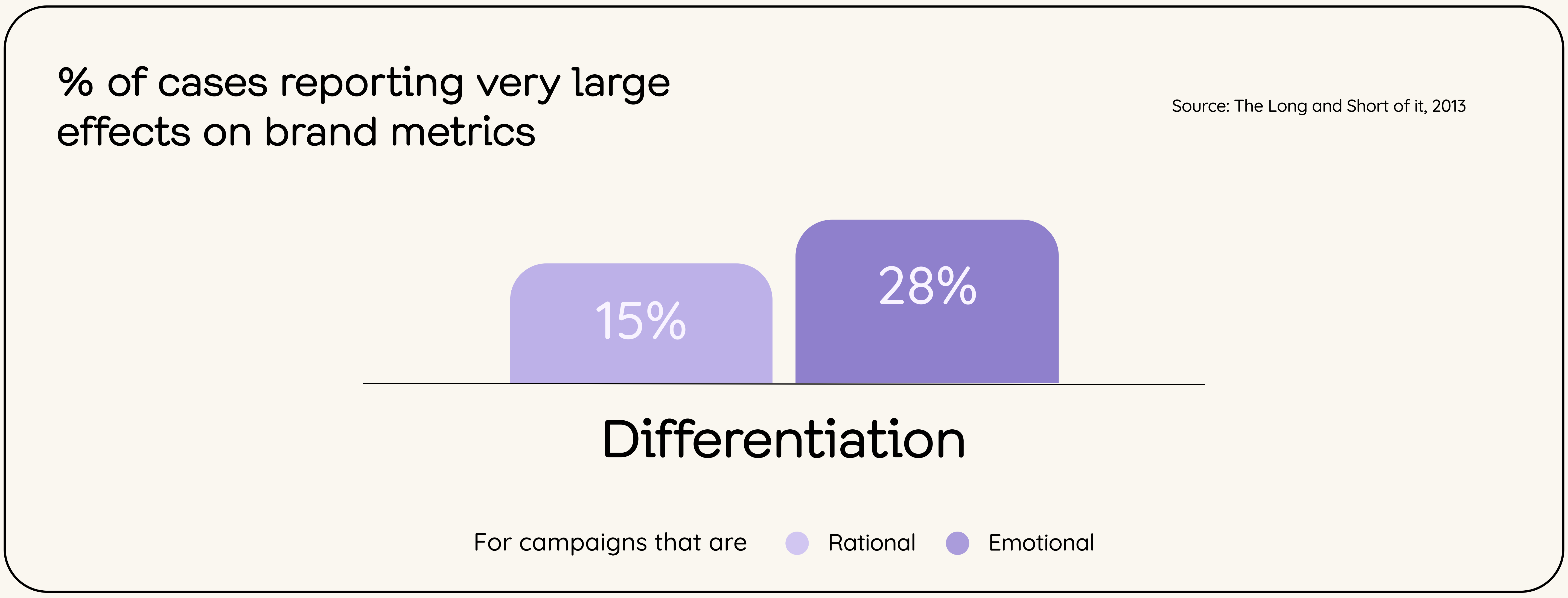
Research by Google and Ipsos also found that people are more likely to value brands and consider them when they're differentiated, they're relatable, and they provide a new perspective.

And when they studied 100 YouTube ads with a panel of 15,000 respondents, they found the ads that elicited a positive emotional reaction were significantly more effective at driving those value levers of **differentiation, relatability and newness:**



Source: Can YouTube help drive long-term brand building? Ipsos and Google Global Creative Works, 2023

Google and Ipsos study findings mirror the findings of the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising (IPA). Although the IPA didn't measure relatability or newness in quite the same way, they certainly measured differentiation, and found that emotional campaigns were almost twice as likely to cause large shifts in people believing the brand was different:



So if we want to become part of that elusive consideration set of 2 or 3 brands, making our brand relatable, new and different, emotional campaigning is the far superior path.

Heineken 0.0 is a brilliant example of a brand fueling growth by prioritizing emotional advertising over product-led, rational messaging. The campaign is underpinned by the Now You Can idea, which showcases how people can participate in various everyday activities like driving, work lunches and water skiing whilst also enjoying a beer.

This commitment to emotional advertising is reaping rewards for the brand. From September 2023 to July 2024, Heineken 0.0's consideration among the overall population in the U.S. Alcohol-Free Beer category increased from 42% to 48%, maintaining its leading position in the competitive landscape.

Source: Tracksuit global brand tracking data 2023-2024

SLOTH

After greed and wrath, sloth rears its bed-haired head.

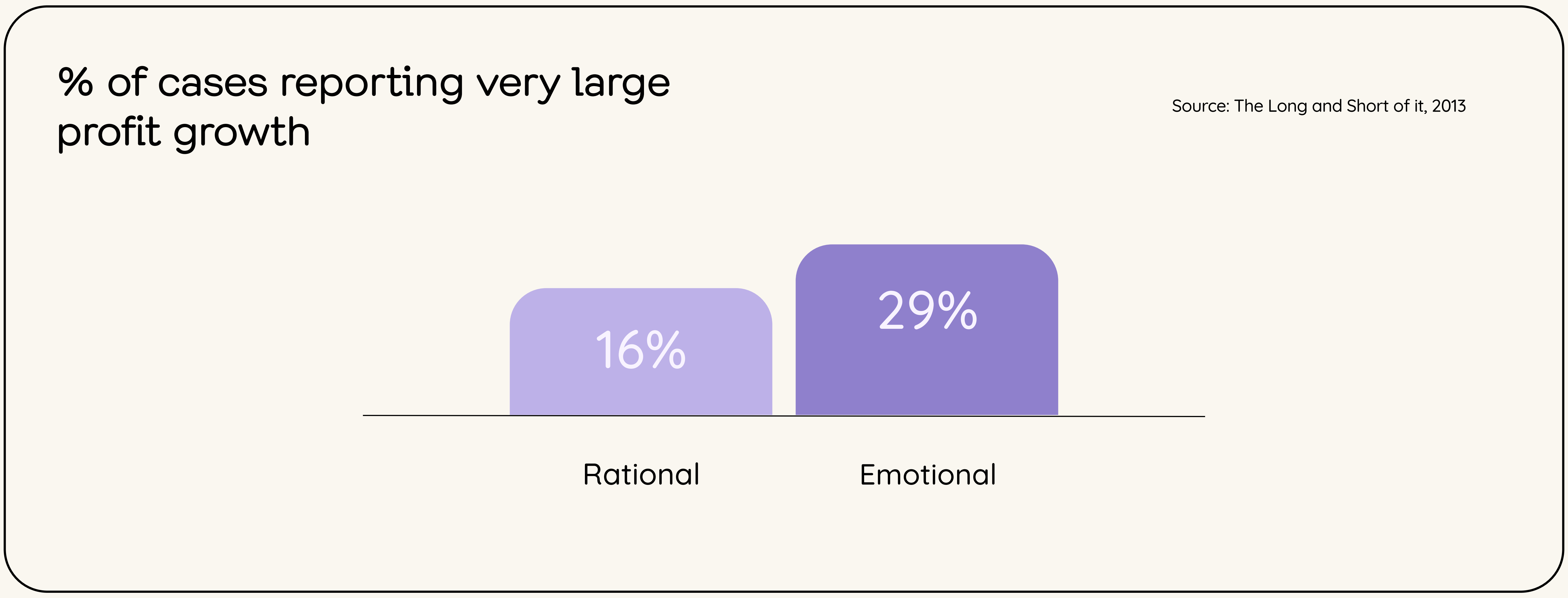
Most people associate this deadly sin with laziness, and for marketers it's no different. Focusing on rational messaging to achieve short-term sales targets, prioritizing volume over profitability, and neglecting to foster the brand's pricing power, is the lazy and easy path to take.

If you can avoid the slothful path, the potential is huge – and the real kicker for marketers is the power of emotional campaigns to contribute to profit. While this is, disappointingly, an uncommon objective for marketing (we're unhealthily biased toward volume growth at all costs), it's become vastly more important as financial markets have turned against growth companies who are unprofitable or barely so.

Google and Ipsos found that emotional YouTube ads were much more likely to reduce a Brand's price sensitivity. According to a pre/post survey of Long Term Brand Build Ads on YouTube led by Ipsos, ads that made "respondents feel highly pleasant emotions" led to a +40% increase in their saying "(brand)...is worth paying more for.

> 'Pricing power' means the ability to (a) charge a slightly higher price than competitors with similar products, (b) put prices up slightly without losing customers and (c) maintain sales without being on discount so often.

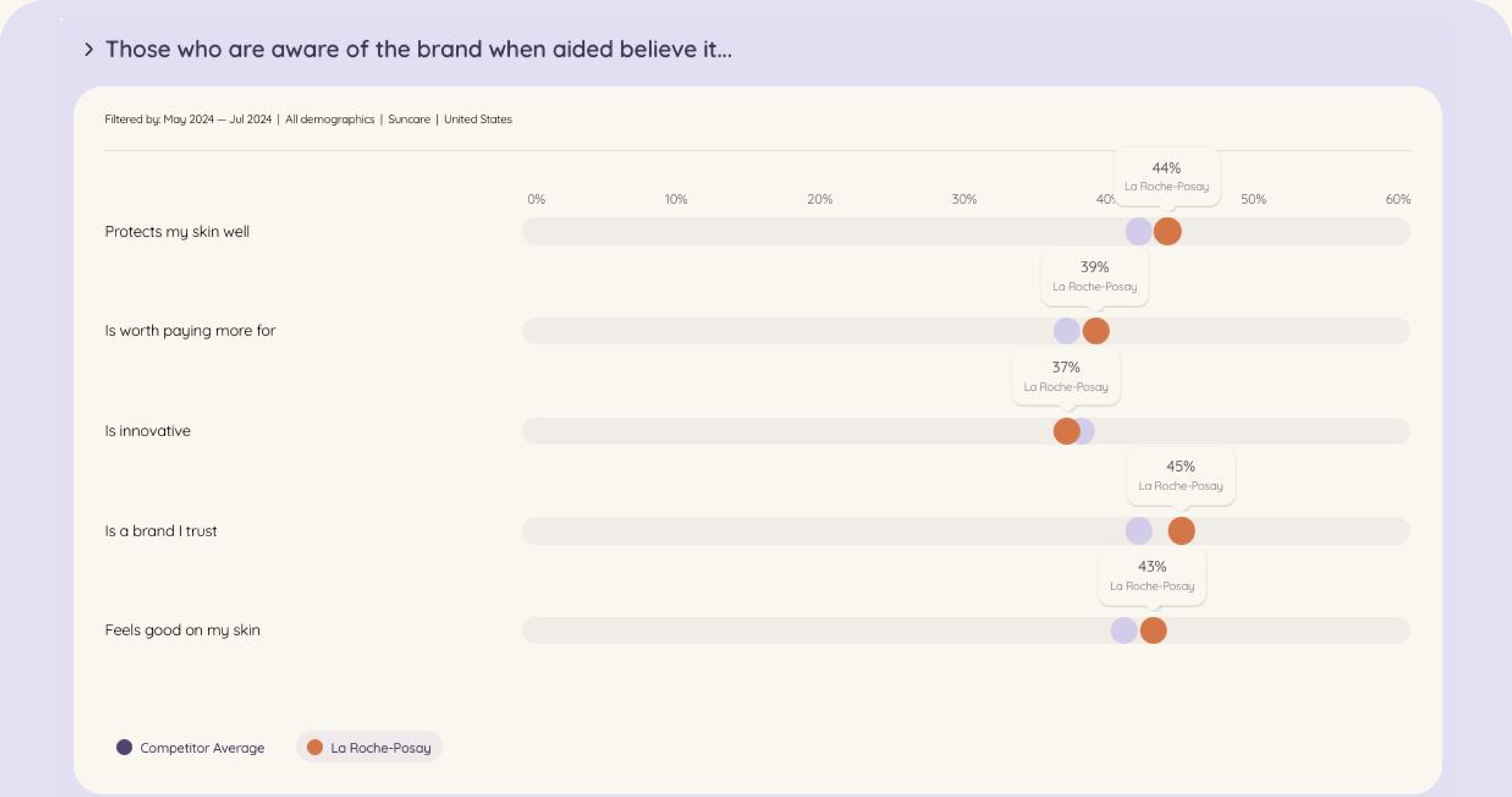
This correlates tightly with the findings of the IPA, who found that emotional campaigns were much more likely to drive increases in pricing power. If we have greater pricing power (or, put another way, have lower price elasticity), we're much more likely to be profitable. Which is why emotional campaigns are nearly twice as likely to drive profit growth:



What this means is that if we want to grow our brand's awareness and consideration, at the same time as growing its profitability, we're much more likely to do that with campaigns that tell emotional stories, rather than throwing rational information at people.

If we're happy trying to drive those same results with rational campaigns, that's our prerogative — but we should do so knowing that it will likely cost us twice as much, and yield half the return on investment.

> “It's about striking a connection with the audience and providing more than just the functional benefits. And when you do that, people are more keen to buy in at a premium, they're more keen to buy into your brand values and choose you as a superior product.
>
> Ariane Pol, Global Head of Research at Google



Source: Tracksuit

Tracksuit's data shows 39% of American consumers who are aware of premium skincare La Roche-Posay believe the brand is worth paying more for. This means regardless of the economic conditions or sales events, La Roche-Posay maintains its pricing power.

Lust

The fourth deadly sin for marketers is lust.

It's a sin many trip and fall into. Lust speaks to a lack of self-control and an urge for instant gratification where the marketer focuses on capturing existing demand and ignores future demand.

The truth is that in any market, there are two types of demand. There's existing demand – the group of people who are ready to buy from our category right now, and there's future demand – the group of people who aren't ready to buy, but who'll definitely purchase in the category at some point in the future.

EXISTING DEMAND

The 5-15% of category buyers who are currently in the market.

Our job is to convert as many of them as possible, as efficiently as possible.

FUTURE DEMAND

The 85-95% who will come into the category at some point in future.

Our job is to make them familiar with us, so that when they come into the market, they gravitate toward us.

Rational ads can be great at connecting to the tiny group of category buyers who are ready to purchase when the ads run. These buyers are easy to target because we know the purchase process and can address the barriers, but Ehrenberg-Bass estimate this group to only be about 5% of the total group of category buyers. The other 95%, who aren't in the market (but will come later), need a different style of communication. They need ads that stand out, grab their attention, and are remembered – even though the product being advertised is irrelevant to them right now.
As marketers, half of our job is to convert the existing demand in the market now. The other half of our job is to plant positive memories in the minds of the people who will come into the market later. People don't remember facts for very long at all. Maybe a day. Maybe two. But people remember feelings for a very long time.

Emotional advertising is very good at creating feelings for a brand. Feelings such as likeability, affinity and empathy. Whether it's on TV, on a social media site, on a billboard, or on YouTube, emotional advertising creates future demand. It plants positive feelings in the hearts and minds of the people you want to choose you as they come into the market in the next week, month, year or decade.

> " Marketers need to drive both short and long-term effects, continually feeding the funnel with new prospects who may not buy for some time, as well as stimulating purchase amongst... existing customers. This requires two different kinds of marketing activity.
>
> The Long and The Short of it, 2013

Mattel understood that as a legacy brand, demand for its product would be built outside of the toy aisle. The brand is benefiting immensely from the future demand created by the film (and cultural) phenomenon that was the Barbie movie, released in the summer of 2023. With marked improvements in both awareness and consideration for Barbie (the toy) since the launch of the film, as shown in Tracksuit's data below. Not bad for a brand that was created in 1959.

Tracksuit's research shows in any given category consumers only consider 2-3 brands at any one time.

Pride

Pride.

The deadly sin centered around arrogance, self-importance and excessive vanity. In marketing terms pride is the belief that you only need to talk about your product's features for it to be successful. This leads to rational, product-driven advertising that will likely have little or no emotional connection to the audience.

As we've shown Google and Ipsos' research builds on the IPA's findings: that brand differentiation scores are much higher with emotional campaigns compared to rational campaigns. It's pride that leads marketers down the dark path of focusing on rational product features rather than the powerfully sticky, and memorable, emotive benefits. When a brand avoids this pitfall and gets the emotion right, the results are outstanding.

Take Volvo Trucks for instance. Volvo could easily have run a rational campaign that talked to the truck's precision steering system, but they didn't. And even though 99.99% of us are not in the market to buy a commercial truck right now, and never will be, chances are, you remember Jean-Claude Van Damme doing the splits over two Volvo trucks reversing down a highway with Enya playing in the background.

Why on earth did you pay attention to that ad when you'll never buy a truck? Because it surprised you, it excited you, it made you feel happy. It was memorable and it activated your positive emotions.

Volvo ran that ad on YouTube with zero media budget. Over 100 million people saw it in its first year. It increased sales of Volvo trucks by 24%. It won the creative effectiveness grand prix at the Cannes Lions International Festival of Creativity in 2015.

> “ Many of the people who saw that ad weren't in the market to buy a truck at the time. But it reached them, and they remembered it when they came into the market the next year, or the year after. Between 2015 and 2022, Volvo Trucks' market share just kept increasing, as people who remembered that amazing YouTube ad arrived in the market, remembered the way that ad made them feel, and chose Volvo.
>
> James Hurman, Co-Founder of Tracksuit

gLuTtOny

Gluttony: Overindulgence.

Gluttony, the sin of overindulgence, manifests in marketing when advertisers try to use a single ad to achieve multiple objectives across the entire marketing funnel.

Research shows this approach is largely ineffective. According to Google's findings, over 50% of ads that attempt to serve all objectives fail to achieve top performance on any single goal. Less than 10% manage to achieve top performance on three objectives. This data clearly demonstrates that one ad cannot effectively rule them all — marketers must resist the temptation to overindulge in a single-ad strategy. Global Head of Research at Google, Ariane Pol, says the most effective advertising strategy is when the creative is fit-for-purpose.[4]

> " Where we've seen a lot of success is when advertisers actually have a strategy that is balanced between the short and the long. It's really hard to ask one creative to do everything for you. So we're really trying to work with advertisers on a strategy that will both hit the long and short term goals with different pieces of creative with different stories.
>
> Ariane Pol, Global Head of Research at Google

One ad cannot rule them all

Performance by marketing objective for advertisers using a single video ad across the funnel. Global Creative Works observed that out of all advertisers who used one ad across the marketing funnel:

- Over 50% of ads did NOT achieve top performance on ANY marketing objective
- Less than 30% of ads achieved top performance on 1 objective only
- Less than 15% of ads achieved top performance on 2 objectives
- Less than 10% of ads achieved top performance on 3 objectives

Source: Action ABCDs Deep-Dive, Google Global Creative Works, 2021[5]

A great example of a brand benefiting from a tight alignment between message and objective in their emotive advertising approach is SURREAL cereal in the UK. In one instance, SURREAL used fake celebrity names like Dwayne Johnson (a bus driver from London) to capture attention.

When comparing SURREAL's brand image statements to competitor averages among the 47 million consumers in the UK breakfast foods category, their humourous and irreverent out-of-home advertising executions are not only eye-catching, but are also reinforcing the authentic values of the brand. We can see this in the Tracksuit data, where SURREAL is winning on key strategic brand perceptions like "Tastes the best" or "Is a brand I trust".

Source: Tracksuit

eNvy

The seventh deadly sin is envy, which represents resentment and bitterness towards another's good fortune.

In the marketing world, envy is rife, with businesses blatantly copying their competitors or following what the category is doing. While it's easy to lift and shift the blueprint that another brand has created, this isn't the most effective way to build familiarity and memorability with consumers. To stand out from the crowd, businesses need to behave independently or even go against category norms by showing up in a way that provokes strong emotions.

According to Tracksuit's data, people only consider, on average, between two to three brands in a category. Getting into this already exclusive consideration set means being a business that is easily recalled and remembered, rather than blending into a sea of sameness. Strong consideration means lower price elasticity (meaning that people are willing to pay a bit more for your product), which creates improved profitability.

> “ If you're trying to build your brand long term and people might not be in the market for it right now, it's about taking them on the a journey and sharing why you're different, taking a new spin in the category and being perceived as a different brand that aligns with what they need, with what they want.
>
> Ariane Pol, Global Head of Research at Google

One business that does this in a highly effective way is canned water brand, Liquid Death. By rebelling against the category norms of the cookie-cutter water industry. Instead of using minimalist, soft branding with imagery of nature and water that is pure, pristine and natural, the brand goes in the complete opposite direction.

Its tagline is 'murder your thirst', its brand identity evokes death metal references and more closely resembles an energy drink, and its ads often aim for entertainment or shock value. Notably, its 2024 SuperBowl ad featured a bunch of kids at a birthday party chugging back on Liquid Death and going wild, with the tagline 'Don't be scared. It's just water.' Tracksuit's data shows that Liquid Death's awareness in the US has grown by 8% or ~18.1 million people, while consideration has grown by 3% or ~5.9 million people.

Source: Tracksuit

Sources.

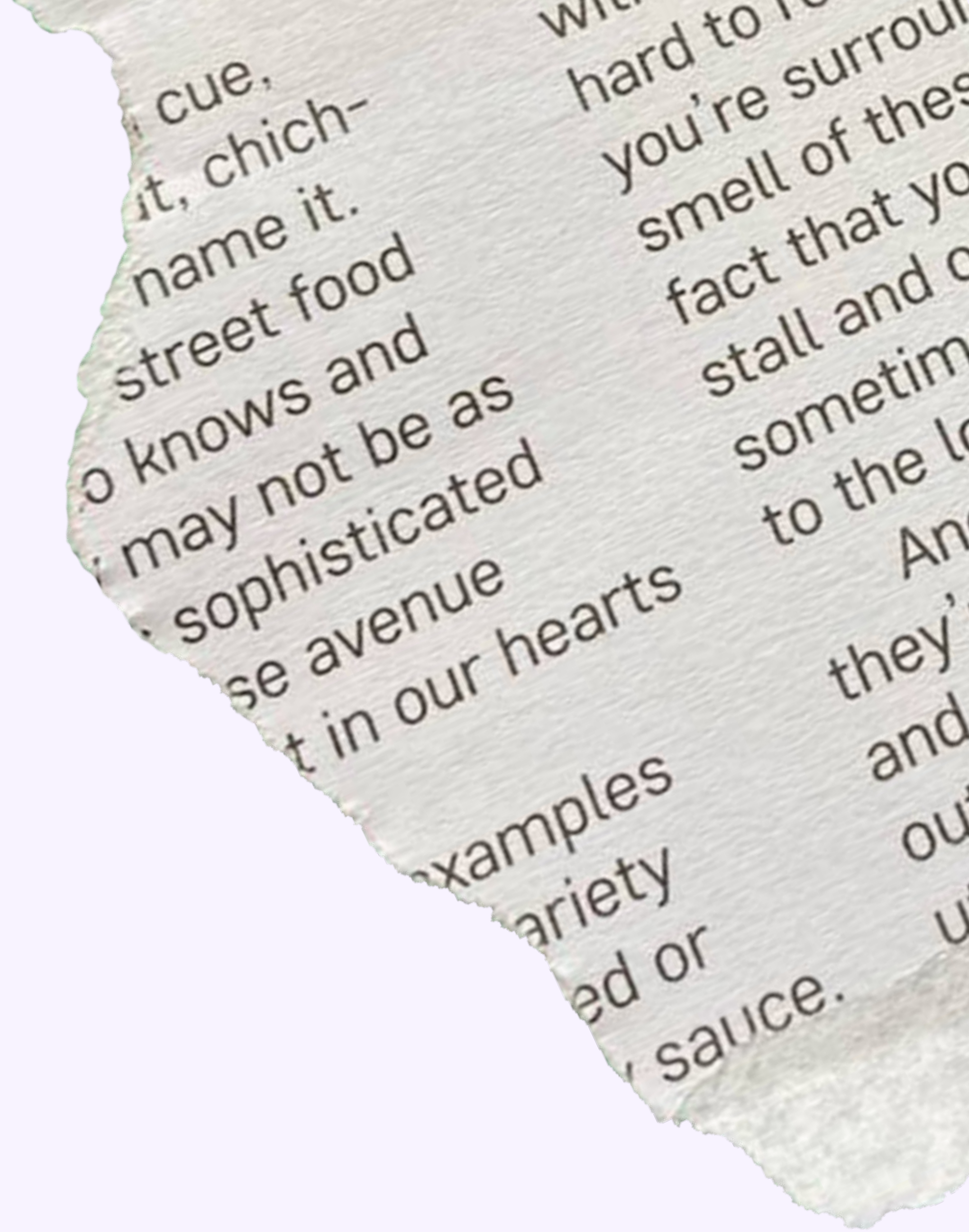
[1] Google/Ipsos, Long Term Impact of Creative Effectiveness on YouTube Creative Spark Pre/post survey, US, 2022, n=15,000 respondents, November 2022
Note: Highly pleasant emotions: Measured through Valence: Average % of answers to “This ad made me feel…”. Scale: 0 (Unpleasant) to 100 (Pleasant). Valence is a validated metric from the VAC model, validated in the US to measure emotions, by the Ipsos Global Science Organization (GSO). Long-term brand growth for forced exposures:: Brand Relationship Change Index (BRI) measures brand equity shift (post-pre) after ad exposure according to Ipsos’ Brand Value Creator (BVC) sales validated model. Long-term brand growth for skippable: Equity Effect Index (EEI) = Brand Attention (RBR) x Brand Relationship Change Index (BRI). In-market validated; Price sensitivity: ‘[BRAND]...is worth paying more’: Average % of answers to Top Box: “A lot more” in “How much did this ad make you think that <the advertised brand> …‘is worth paying more?

[2] Google/Ipsos, Long Term Impact of Creative Effectiveness on YouTube Creative Spark Pre/post survey, US, 2022, n=15,000 respondents, November 2022; Note: Long-term brand growth: Brand Relationship Change Index (BRI) measures brand equity shift (post-pre) after ad exposure according to Ipsos’ Brand Value Creator (BVC) sales validated model. Uplift measured by Upper vs. lower tertile of each lever. Value levers: Avg % of answers “Completely” in “How well does each of the following statements describe the ad?”. For Differentiation “Makes me think that the brand is different from other brands”; For Relatability: “Is for people like me”; For Newness: “Told me something new”.

[3] Google/Ipsos, Long Term Impact of Creative Effectiveness on YouTube Creative Spark Pre/post survey, US, 2022, n=15,000 respondents, November 2022
Note: Highly pleasant emotions: Measured through Valence: Average % of answers to “This ad made me feel…”. Scale: 0 (Unpleasant) to 100 (Pleasant). Valence is a validated metric from the VAC model, validated in the US to measure emotions, by the Ipsos Global Science Organization (GSO). Long-term brand growth for forced exposures:: Brand Relationship Change Index (BRI) measures brand equity shift (post-pre) after ad exposure according to Ipsos’ Brand Value Creator (BVC) sales validated model. Long-term brand growth for skippable: Equity Effect Index (EEI) = Brand Attention (RBR) x Brand Relationship Change Index (BRI). In-market validated; Price sensitivity: ‘[BRAND]...is worth paying more’: Average % of answers to Top Box: “A lot more” in “How much did this ad make you think that <the advertised brand> …‘is worth paying more?

[4] Tracksuit data. Average number of brands considered per consumer in AU and NZ. 4069 brands, 362 categories.

[5] Numbers were rounded for external use. Source: Google Brand Lift Survey 2.0 meta-analysis, Global, April 2019 - Nov 2022. Data from 6,718 videos from 6,761 advertisers. Videos tested for 3 marketing objectives (Upper Funnel (Awareness or the ask), Middle Funnel (Consideration), Lower Funnel (Purchase Intent)). Top performance defined as top quartile for BLS results. Note: "one-on" is defined as a single video asset, such as a skippable in-stream or a bumper ad.



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