

STORYTELLING

While there are many routes to successful advertising, storytelling can be a powerful form. Ads that tell a story tend to generate stronger emotional responses, and stronger cut through. But to be effective, their structure needs to emphasise the brand, and the intended impressions.

STORYTELLING AND ADVERTISING

Ads that are most engaging tend to be described as: clever, sexy, funny, intriguing, surprising or exciting. And the most involving ads tend to have one or more elements of great storytelling that may include: a distinctive setting; a distinctive story; distinctive characters; music or humor; the element of surprise; celebrities, sex, etc. By dramatising messages for people, and showing them in the form of stories, they are easier for the brain to digest without having to work hard.

Storytelling is used in ads around the world, but to different degrees. We conducted research looking at ads in 14 countries on mainstream TV. Overall, 42% were 'story' ads; but this varied widely by country. In Brazil, Kenya, Poland, UK, and US stories were used in over 50% of ads. In Australia, China, and South Korea stories we used in under 30% of ads. On both Facebook and YouTube the proportions were similar with 39% being story ads.

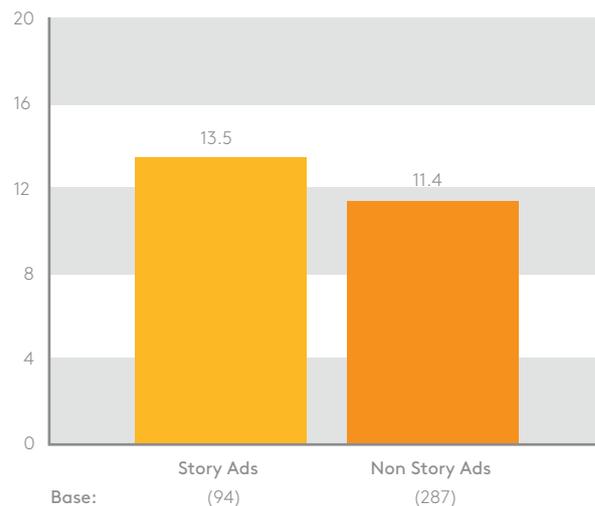
To understand the power of storytelling, Kantar Millward Brown ran a project in the US involving nearly 60,000 participants, and 383 ads, which were classified into story ads and non-story ads.

EMOTIONAL RESPONSE

The ads featuring stories were more likely to generate emotions. Facial coding showed respondents were slightly more likely to respond with expressions to story ads.

Slightly higher levels of expressiveness

Average level of expression throughout watching

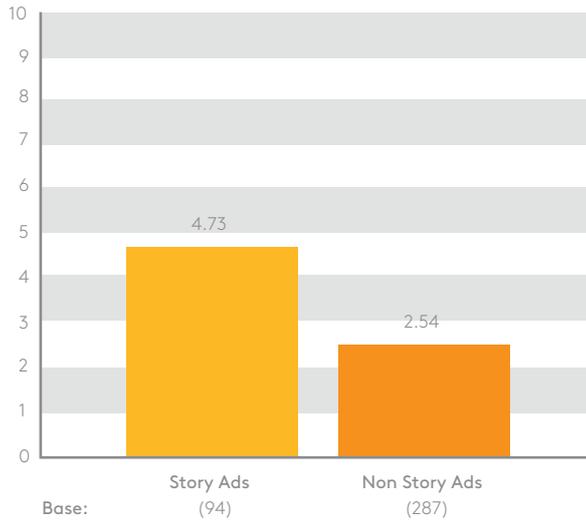


Base: Number of USA English ads
Source: Kantar Millward Brown database, 2017 facial coding data - mean

In particular, story ads were more likely to generate smiles.

More smiles with story ads

Smiles

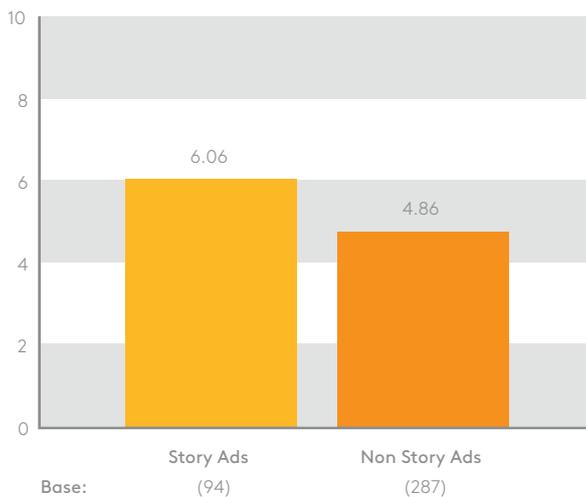


Base: Number of USA English ads
Source: Kantar Millward Brown database 2017, facial coding data - mean

Story ads were also slightly more likely to be rated as involving (although enjoyment levels were similar).

Slightly higher levels of involvement

Active Involvement Rating

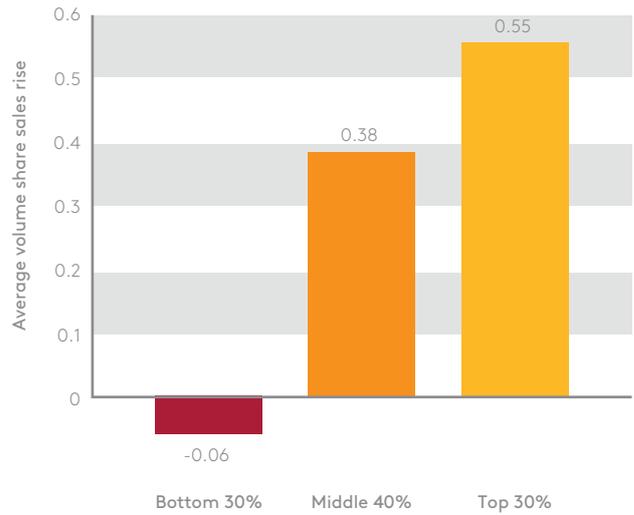


*10 point scale
Base: Number of USA English ads
Source: Kantar Millward Brown database 2017

Eliciting genuine emotional responses through advertising is vital. We have found that expressiveness relates to sales.

Expressiveness helps drive sales

Expressiveness percentile

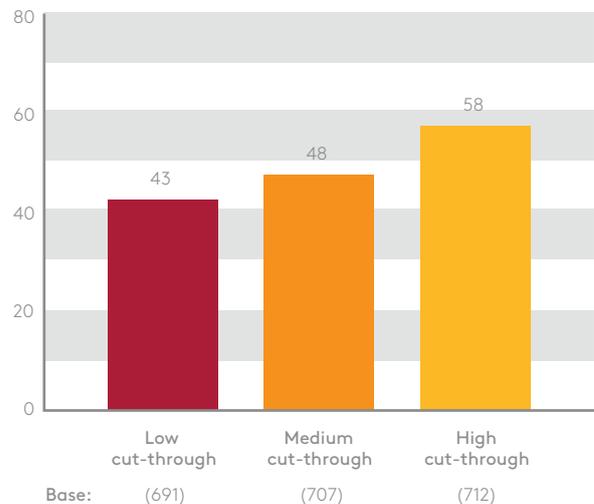


Source: Kantar Millward Brown database

This relationship seems to have two causes. First, ads with high expressiveness tend to have stronger cut through, and be more memorable, as measured by our Awareness Index. And the Awareness Index has been validated against sales.

More expressiveness = better cut-through

Expressiveness



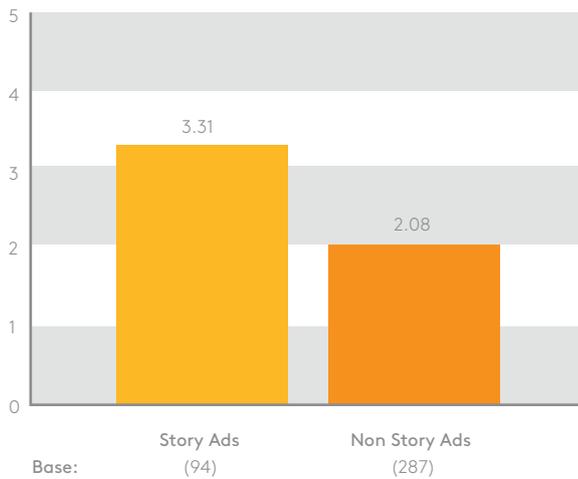
Base: Number of USA English ads
Source: Kantar Millward Brown database 2017

Just as importantly, emotional responses to advertising can help build positive emotional associations with the brand. It is only when we make people actually feel something that those associations can build in the brain. Building positive associations with the brand is often one of the main objectives of any advertising, because these associations on their own can make people predisposed to choose the brand in future.

The analysis also demonstrated that with story ads, expressions were more likely to change. It is often the 'events' and 'reveals' that provoke the strongest responses in people. Stories can build tension as they progress, and they can make you empathise with the characters, so you care about – and react to – what happens to them.

More changes in expressiveness

Average variability in expressiveness during the ad



Base: Number of USA English ads
Source: Kantar Millward Brown database 2017 from facial coding data - standard deviation

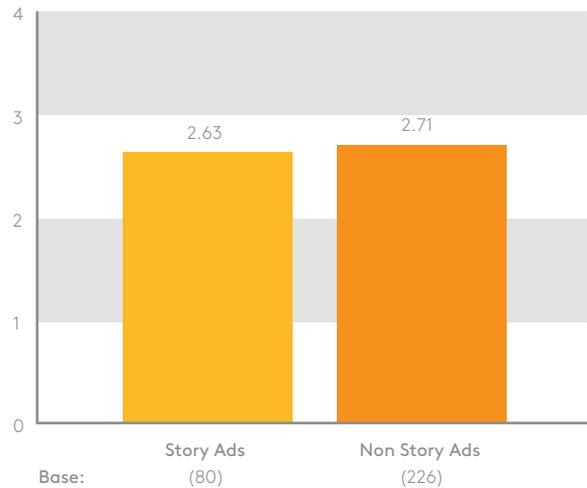
IMPRESSIONS

Stories can also deliver brand information in an interesting way, particularly since stories tend to 'show' rather than 'tell' the information; and by demonstrating how, when and where you use a particular brand they can create associations with particular situations and occasions, as well as setting expectations of what the product experience will be like. But to do this effectively, the story should, generally, be easily comprehensible. People shouldn't have to work hard to 'get it'.

It is worth mentioning that stories have little effect on persuasiveness; persuasiveness tends to be related less to creativity and more to the presence of relevant, differentiating, credible brand news.

Little difference in persuasion

CPG Persuasion

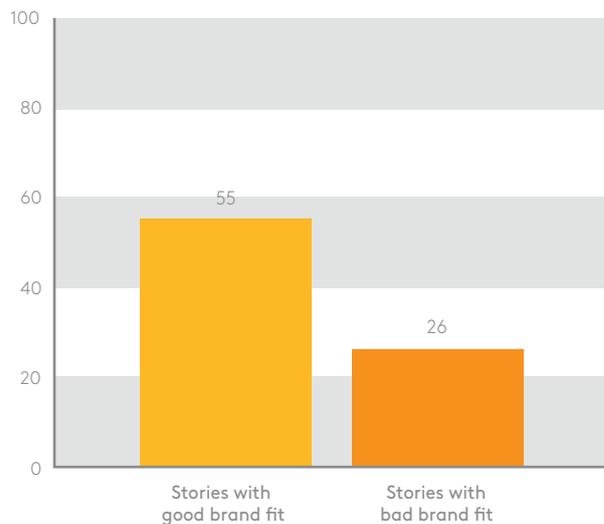


*4 point scale
Base: Number of USA English ads
Source: Kantar Millward Brown database 2017

However, there is a relationship between persuasiveness and brand fit; if the story doesn't fit with the brand, persuasion will be hindered.

Brand 'fit' is important in making story ads compelling

Persuasion



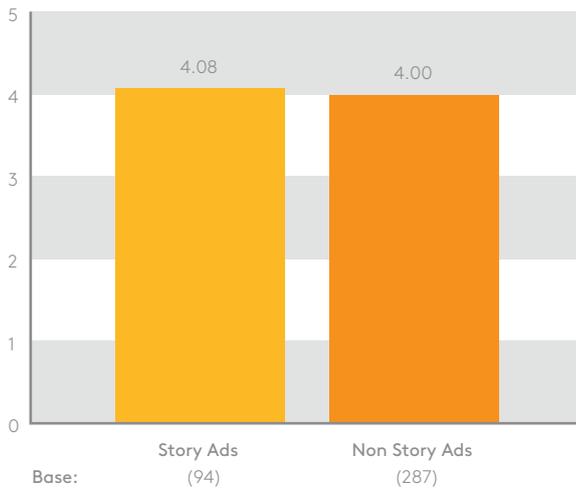
Source: Kantar Millward Brown database

BRANDING

There is little difference in branding scores between story ads and non-story ads.

Little difference in branding

Overall Branding



*5 point scale
Base: Number of USA English ads
Source: Kantar Millward Brown database 2017

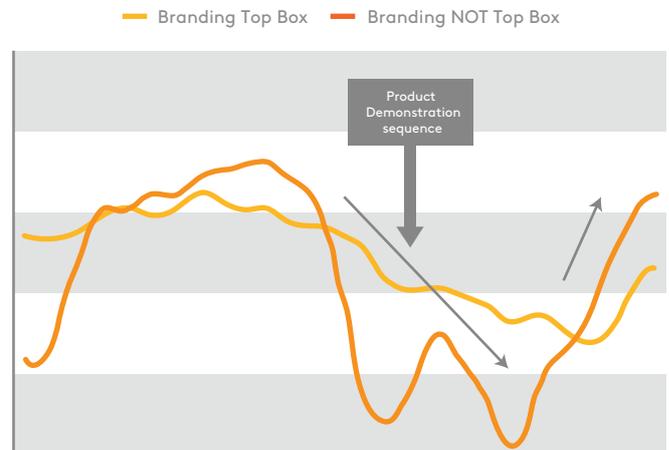
Stories can be very powerful for brands. However, you need to tell an appropriate story, in which your brand can play a credible role. If you can tell the story of the ad without mentioning the brand, your brand may not be important enough to how the ad works, and is unlikely to be remembered, and the ideas evoked by the story are unlikely to be transferred onto it.

There is no 'right' or 'wrong' role that brands can play; we've seen many ways in which the brand can be integrated into the storyline; these include: animating the brand; having key characters displaying interest in the brand; showing people experiencing the brand with appreciation; characters going to lengths to obtain, protect or deliver the brand; characters talking about the brand; showing the importance and value of the brand to the consumer; using established branding devices; showing the brand solving a problem; and having the brand make sense of what has gone before.

As an example of integrating the brand into the storyline, one brand was planning to launch a new form of its mosquito repellent. The launch advert was observed to be persuasive; however, weak branding & passive involvement resulted in only moderate cut through for the ad. The context was set by a relatable slice of life story with a mother and her children, However, the brand entry, the product demonstration and benefits were shown with the help of a male voiceover. Facial coding demonstrated a clear dip in the positive response during this part of the ad; and the dip in valence curve was much sharper among the respondents giving weaker branding scores. Recall of the product demonstration sequence was also lower among these respondents. The weak performance of this scene was pulling down the branding of the ad and leading to only moderate cut through.

The dip in valence curve is much sharper among audience with lower branding

Yzx E Chop Animatic - VALENCE (Net positive expression)



Source: Kantar Millward Brown case study 2016

To better integrate this sequence into the storyline, we recommended they use the mother to show the product demonstration. This learning was used in next ad resulting in a much more positive response during the product demonstration, stronger branding, and improved cut through.

While no 'magic bullet', storytelling can be a highly effective advertising route; but the creativity needs to be harnessed to the brand and the intended impressions.