



# CONTAGIOUS

Prophet /

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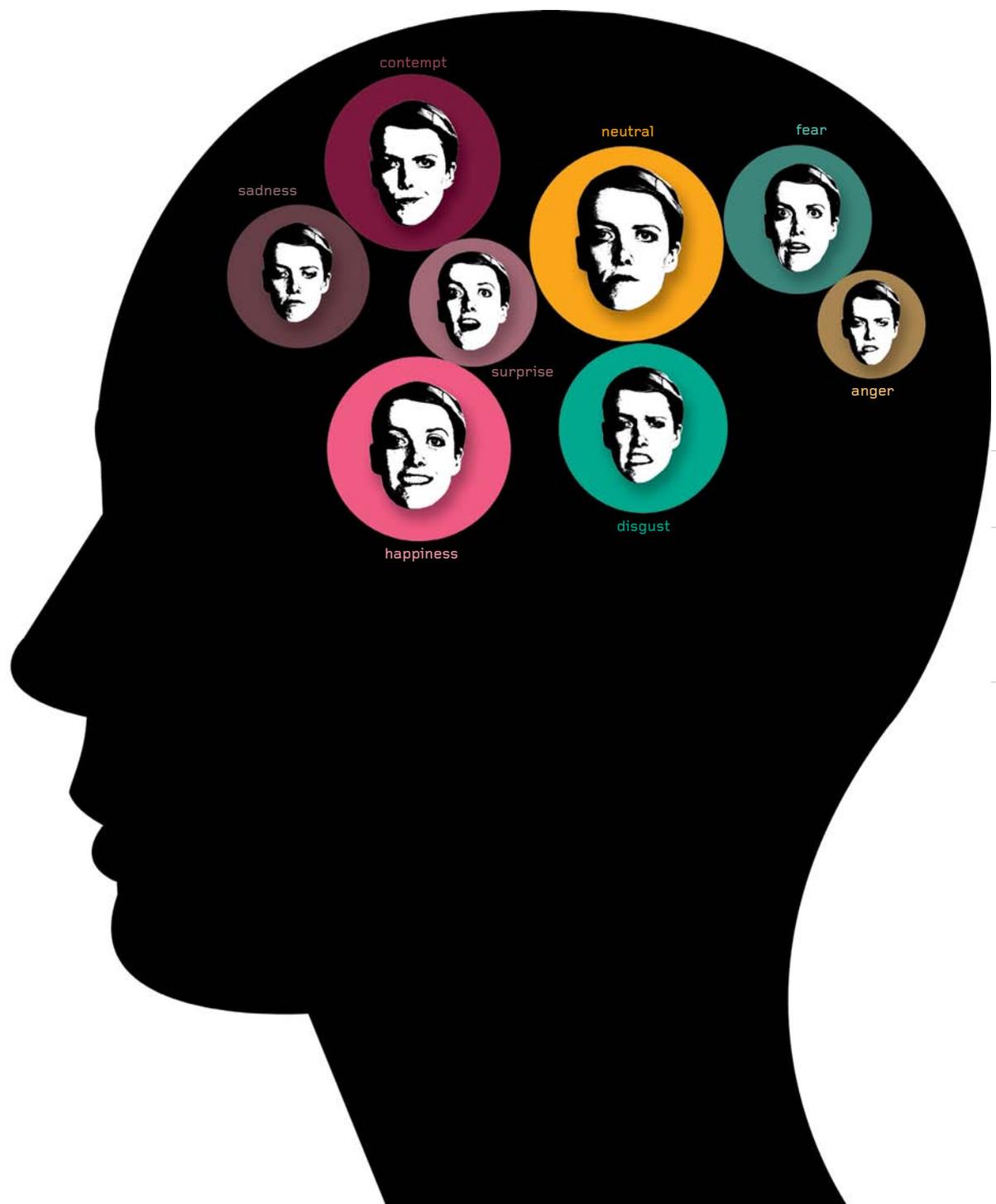
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## Let's get emotional about advertising /

John Kearon, founder and 'chief juicer' at research agency BrainJuicer, examines new evidence suggesting there might be a better approach to advertising pre-testing /



Anyone with an interest in Behavioural Economics and how humans make decisions will be aware of System 1 and System 2 thinking, which describes the two mental processes we use to make decisions. Systems 1 and 2 are terms used by Daniel Kahneman, whose claim to fame is as the only non-economist to win the Nobel Prize for Economics for his work on behavioural economics; he's a psychologist.

System 1 is the older, 'reptilian' brain; a perceptual, intuitive, emotional, unconscious system, generating involuntary impressions that do not need to be expressed in words. This system is fast to react, automatic, associative, effortless and learns gradually over time. System 2 is the more recently evolved, 'higher order' brain, the cognitive, analytical, clever part that we rightly praise and which separates us from other animals. But here's the rub for marketing and our understanding of consumer decision making. These systems are far from equal.

#### Intuition and emotion

If you translated how much we use each system into computing power, System 2 would be 50 bits, versus 11 million bits of System 1. As it turns out, we think much less than we think we think and make the vast majority of decisions using intuition and emotion. Our capacity for System 2 thinking is very limited, as Kahneman's example in his Nobel acceptance speech demonstrates: 'A bat and a ball cost \$1.10 in total. The bat costs \$1 more than the ball. How much does the ball cost?' Go on admit it, the answer that first comes to mind is ten cents, even though because of the set up, you know it's wrong. As Kahneman says, 'We are not accustomed to thinking hard and are content to trust a plausible judgement that quickly comes to mind'. If we think about it (which we don't) it can't be ten cents because then the bat would be \$1.10, making the total \$1.20 – the right answer of course is the ball costs five cents.

By contrast we're really good at System 1: intuitive, instinctive decision making, which is the reason we tend not to bump into people even in busy streets and also the reason why the picture below looks like star gazing but as soon as you see the 15 dots moving at [bit.ly/BMLwalker](http://bit.ly/BMLwalker) you immediately recognise it as a walking man. If you've read Malcolm Gladwell's *Blink*, then you've read a whole book about our capability to make smart decisions incredibly quickly. As psychologist Antonio Damasio says, 'We're not thinking machines that feel, we're feeling machines that think'.

#### Dramatic implications

This has some fairly fundamental implications for the way we think about advertising. The traditional view is that, in order to be effective, advertising needs to communicate a well-branded and persuasive message with sufficient cut-through to gain the viewer's conscious attention. In other words, we currently think about advertising entirely in System 2 terms – our System 2 mind with its limited processing ability is alerted to a new piece of information, which, when considered, persuades us of a brand's benefits. This thinking dominates the research industry's measures: persuasion, brand linkage, cut-through, key message – these are all evaluative System 2 measures. If behavioural scientists have taught us anything, however, it's that the vast majority of our decisions and judgements are not made via System 2 but using System 1, intuitive gut-feel. So how do we measure System 1 response and could it be more predictive of real-world business effects?

**'We're not thinking machines that feel,  
we're feeling machines that think.'**

BrainJuicer has recently conducted two experiments to examine the predictive ability of both traditional System 2 advertising measures and BrainJuicer's emotional approach ComMotion™, which uses pictures of a face in seven different emotional states (plus neutral), to elicit emotional response. The worst response you can get to a piece of advertising is a neutral one because if you feel nothing, you'll do nothing. Psychologists such as Damasio assert that emotions are an important component of System 1 judgements, influencing not just what we pay attention to but automatically channelling our subsequent thoughts and associations, thus simplifying decisions and guiding the judgements we make.



### Breakthroughs and business

Working with the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising (IPA) in the UK in 2009, BrainJuicer post-tested 18 TV ads. Now 18 ads doesn't sound like a lot so it's worth pausing to consider exactly what we were testing. The IPA has been running an advertising effectiveness competition for over 30 years and has probably the world's largest and most robust database of what good advertising can do for a brand; ranging from small business effects to those adverts with large scale business effects that transform the fortunes of a brand. When the IPA talks about business effects, it is referring to market share gain, reduction of price sensitivity, customer acquisition, profit and loyalty gain i.e. direct profit contributors and not interim effects often talked about such as awareness and attitude shift. The 18 ads were carefully selected across six different categories to represent ads that created small, medium and very large business effects. It is important to remember that even the small effect ads would be considered good by normal advertising standards and the large effect ads are those rare breakthrough ads that make a brand famous.

The results (Figure 1) are highly controversial. In fact the head of communication for one well-known packaged goods bastion of message-based/System 2-based advertising, went so far as to say, 'this is heresy!' However, she also went on to say, 'but it's absolutely intriguing'. We are currently experimenting with the IPA to test some ads that failed traditional pre-testing but which they believe could be break-through ads.

So what did the IPA experiment tell us? Shockingly, the ads that perform well on traditional System 2 pre-testing measures (persuasion, cut-through, brand linkage, key message on message), were far less effective in the market. It would seem that designing ads to perform well on such measures actively discriminates against maximising the ad's effectiveness. It's worth remembering that even the worst ads in this experiment did still achieve some effectiveness in the market, so it is possible to produce a positive return on investment (ROI) using this approach but it's just not the most effective or efficient. The ads that perform well on System 1 emotional pre-testing measures were far more effective in market. It seems that if an ad makes you feel a lot, you do a lot. The challenging part, given current dogma, is that these System 1 ads have little or no obvious brand message and yet if they move people sufficiently, they produce far greater commercial effects.

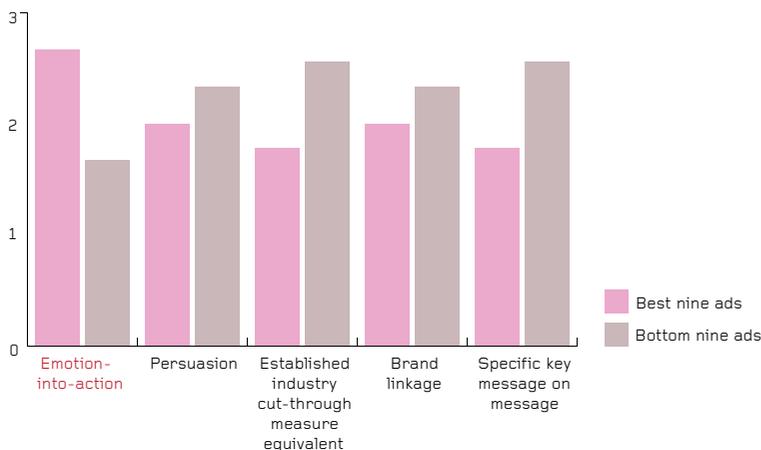
*'The worst response you can get to a piece of advertising is a neutral one because if you feel nothing, you'll do nothing.'*

The sort of ads from recent years that we're talking about would include Cadbury Gorilla, Evian Roller Babies, Heineken Walk-in Fridge and VW's The Force (Darth Vader) ad. In the case of Cadbury Gorilla, the chairman of Cadbury is on record as saying the ad saved the company (since it had been struck by a foods scare the year before and the introduction of the ad seemed to override the memory of this and put Cadbury back into a special place in the Brits' hearts). It has also been one of the most commercially successful ads Cadbury has ever made, with a £4.88 revenue return for every £1 spent and it improved price elasticity by 27%. No data is yet available on this year's Super Bowl hit, the VW Passat Darth Vader ad, but the tremendously positive emotions it generates suggests it is likely to produce large scale business effects, just like the Cadbury Gorilla ad.

The results from the IPA experiment have enabled us to create a star rating system indicating an ad's commercial potential, from one star 'Straight to Video' (it will cost you more money to make and air this ad than you will ever get in return), through a three star, 'Solid Performer' which is likely to produce a small but positive return on investment, to a four star 'Must See', and five star 'Blockbuster' ad that will produce large scale business effects. You can see from Figure 2 that Cadbury Gorilla (UK) and VW's The Force (US) are both 'Blockbuster' ads with significant business effectiveness.

Figure 1 / IPA experiment in UK shows predictive ability of an emotional measure to persuasion & information measures

Average number of very large business effects achieved by top and bottom nine ads when ordered in each measure



Base: 18 ads for which business effectiveness data is available from the IPA

In a further experiment to show this wasn't just a UK phenomenon, we retrospectively tested four TV ads in Canada in 2010 that had won CASSIES awards for their impressive sales effects. Along with each of these ads, BrainJuicer tested a benchmark competitor ad that ran at around the same time but that had not won or been entered for a CASSIES award. We have no reason to believe the benchmark ads were in themselves poor ads; they simply give us a baseline against which to assess the strength of the award-winning ads. As in the UK, it was emotion rather than the System 2 measures that singled out the award-winning ads from the benchmarks, with 'persuasion' favouring the non-award winner in most cases.

In 2010 the IPA published a report demonstrating the superior efficiency of creative advertising. Creative advertising works because it is highly emotional and gets brands talked about. Game-changing success is not achieved by performing well on System 2 measures that require people to evaluate an advert's persuasive effect on them. Only when we look to how well advertising can influence System 1 decision-making will we learn to endorse and seek highly efficient and emotional fame advertising.

For advertising that can transform a brand's fortunes, seek pure System 1 emotional adverts and aim for fame. Your consumers will thank you for moving them, your CFO will be pleasantly surprised and your shareholders will thank you for increasing the value of their holding. 🌟

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Figure 2 / Prediction of efficiency using Emotion-into-Action™ Score  
 Efficiency defined as likely share gain/extra share of voice

