

LIES, DAMNED LIES AND STATISTICS

"There are three kinds of lies: lies, damned lies, and statistics." Mark Twain

ISSUE ONE
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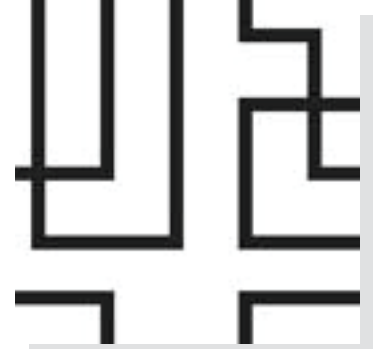
WHAT LIES IN STORE.



WHY THE NAME?



MAKING AN IMPACT
DIFFERENT VS. FUNNY



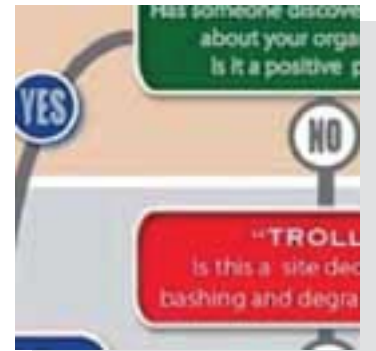
FUZZY LOGOS
PUSH VS. PULL



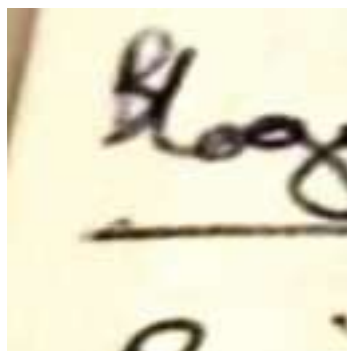
THE HUMBLE TRUFFLE



TV ADS ADD
BLOGGING CODE



BLOG ASSESSMENT



VALUE OF ONLINE REPS
LEISURE TIME ONLINE



DISSENTING OPINIONS
FORGET THE 'SUPER FAN'



MAINSTREAM MESSAGES

DAMNED LIES, QUARTERLY.

Every week we track consumer and social media research and publish it on our blog 'News From the Herd'. We wanted to start compiling some of the best stats we find in a quarterly newsletter, and as a result welcome to the first issue of 'lies, damned lies and statistics.'



WHY THE NAME?

It's somewhat tongue in cheek, and stems from Mark Twain's famous quote that you can pretty much find any kind of research to support your point of view, but rest assured everything here comes from reputable and very often academic sources.

As this is still work in progress, we'd love to hear to your feedback – email us, talktous@thisiscow.com, and feel free to forward this PDF onto anyone who you think might find it useful.

WANT TO MAKE AN IMPACT? CONSUMER DISRUPTION IS THE KEY

According to Australian blogger the Zakazhuka Zoo (who is doing a study for Marketing Magazine in Australia), every day as consumers we're exposed to an average of 1033 ads.



Not surprisingly, a lot of the marketing messages we see are like advertising wallpaper. A number of pieces of research emphasise that the key to cutting through this clutter is to surprise the consumer – to jolt them out of their comfort zones.

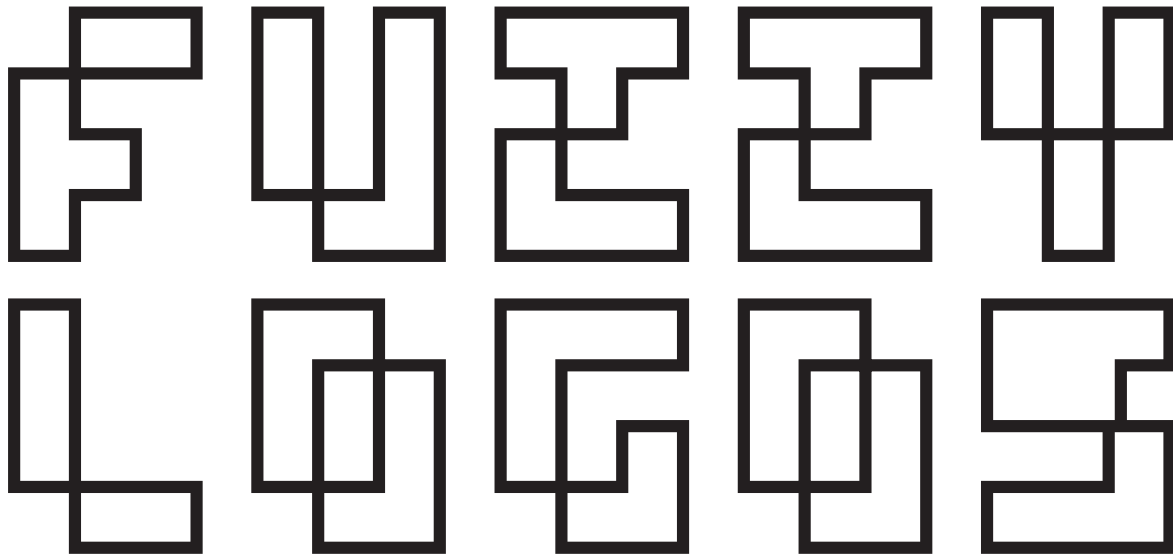
IN ADVERTISING, DIFFERENT IS BETTER THAN FUNNY

Science blog Cognitive Daily addressed the question of whether “funny” works in advertising. In other words, are your campaigns any more effective if they use humour?

The answer is yes, so long as it is unexpected.

Researchers took two fake brands, Windsor Coffee and Jubilee Coffee, with Jubilee Coffee being portrayed as the naturally more humorous one. Test subjects were then shown two funny cartoon ads, however in only one of them did the punch line have any product relevance.

The highest recall rate? For boring Windsor Coffee where the ad had product relevance. And the lowest recall? For 'funny' Jubilee Coffee where the ad had product relevance. In other words, Jubilee Coffee scored better when the ad had very little to do with coffee. The human guinea pigs expected to see humour from Jubilee Coffee and so zoned out. But Windsor Coffee did something unusual and the test subjects took notice. This confirms that brand perceptions are by no means set in stone, something, which is confirmed by a second study:



FUZZY LOGOS

In a study to be published in the Journal of Market Research in April, University of Illinois marketing academic Sharon Shavitt challenged the perception that consumers are intrinsically lazy and you need to make life easy for them.

Research participants were shown a series of brand logos and messages, with some of them being difficult to read or requiring extra effort (e.g. the text was fuzzy).

Perhaps surprisingly, consumers reacted better to the brand messaging that required effort. According to Sharon Shavitt, "Anything that makes it hard to think can create a sense of difficulty that can extend to our perceived understanding of the brand."

ARE YOU A TROLLEY PUSHER OR PULLER?

The next time you are doing your weekly supermarket shop, make a note as to how you approach the tills. If you push your trolley or cart into the checkout, then you are in a minority of 26% according to Illinois company Relevation Research.

Why is that relevant? The items (confectionary, batteries) you see just before you pay are equivalent to a department in their own right, contributing around 1% to overall supermarket sales.



But with 74% of shoppers being 'pullers', stores are often marketing to their backs and it would make sense to place these final impulse shelves further away from the tills. Interestingly, trolley pullers have more assertive personalities, when it could be argued that pushing your trolley when there is someone ahead of you is the more aggressive thing to do.

HOW THE HUMBLE CHOCOLATE TRUFFLE CAN GET CONSUMERS TO START SHOPPING

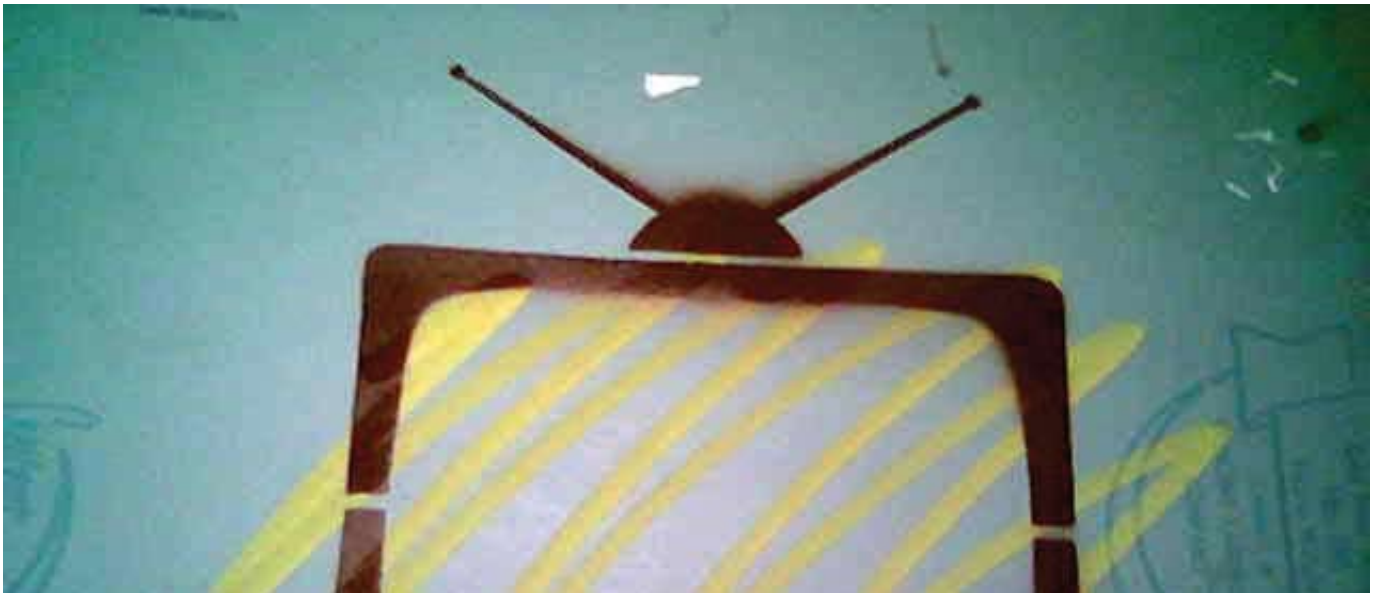
Another study published in the Journal of Consumer Research (April 2009) talks about the value of low cost but indulgent 'freebies' as a prompt to get consumers to buy more. Juliano Laran (University of Miami) and Chris Janiszewski (University of Florida) gave study participants chocolate truffles to eat. Not only did this make them more likely to want further calorific food such as pizza and ice cream, it actually made them more likely to desire luxury goods:

According to the authors: "A second study again had people eat or resist a chocolate truffle and asked them to indicate how much they desired several products that are symbols of status (a nice shirt, an Apple computer)."
Let's think about what this study is telling us.

Doing something as simple as offering your customers a small (but perceived as 'classy') freebie can set off a psychological trigger that gets them to open their wallets. Maybe our politicians needn't print money to save the economy after all, a bulk order with Ferrero Rocher and a delivery to every household in the land could do the trick in sending the shoppers back onto the high street!

TV ADS ADD TO TV ENJOYMENT

What do TV viewers find more enjoyable: Watching something on a commercial free public broadcaster such as the BBC? Or watching a programme interrupted by ads, on a channel such as Sky One or Channel Four?



You'd think commercial free programmes are more enjoyable, but research shows the opposite to be true. According to the Journal of Consumer Research, US college students were made to watch the 80s TV series Taxi. Half had an ad break, while half watched an episode straight through. The ones who had the ad break were the ones more likely to want to watch a second episode.

A second group of students then watched the first group watching TV. They assumed the ads would kill group one's viewing enjoyment, demonstrating that what we think to be true of ourselves often isn't. The researchers summarised that this could be a case of us compartmentalising everything and seeing programmes = good / ads = bad, rather than thinking about it in its totality.

BLOGGING CODE OF CONDUCT

The US Air Force has published a blogger code of conduct, and companies could do worse than to more or less adopt it wholesale. It's a flow chart that takes Air Force desk jockeys through a set of scenarios about what to do when a blogger comments on the organisation. It manages to be both incredibly comprehensive and simple to understand and includes considerations such as disclosure (say who you are), sourcing (provide source references) and timeliness (take the time to craft a good response).

At a time when many brands are questioning the need to invest in social media, the US Air Force has a 'Chief Emerging Technology Officer' and maintains a Twitter (the micro-blogging platform) feed, a YouTube Channel and a blog. See their blog assessment graph on the next page.

AIR FORCE BLOG ASSESSMENT

AIR FORCE PUBLIC AFFAIRS AGENCY - EMERGING TECHNOLOGY DIVISON

ASSESSMENT

BLOG POSTING

Has someone discovered a blog post about your organization?
Is it a positive posting?

YES

NO

CONTACT INFORMATION

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Ballston, VA 22203
Tel: 703-696-1158
E-mail: David.Faggard@pentagon.af.mil
Blog: www.airforcefive.blogspot.com

EVALUATE

CONCURRENCE

A factual and well cited response, which may agree or disagree with the post, yet is not negative.

You can concur with the post, let stand or provide a positive review.

Do you want to respond?

NO

YES

LET POST STAND

Let the blog post stand -- no response.

"TROLLS"

Is this a site dedicated to bashing and degrading others?

NO

YES

MONITOR ONLY

Avoid responding to specific posts, monitor the site for relevant information and comments.

"RAGER"

Is the posting a rant, rage, joke, ridicule or satirical in nature?

NO

"MISGUIDED"

Are there erroneous facts in the posting?

YES

FIX THE FACTS

Respond with factual information directly on comment board.
(See 5 Blog Response Considerations below).

NO

"UNHAPPY CUSTOMER"

Is the posting a result of a negative experience from one of our Stakeholders?

YES

RESTORATION

Rectify the situation, respond and act upon a reasonable solution.
(See 5 Blog Response Considerations below).

NO

RESPOND

SHARE SUCCESS

Proactively share your story and your mission with the blog.
(See 5 Blog Response Considerations below).

YES

FINAL EVALUATION

Base response on present circumstances, site influence and stakeholders prominence.
Will you respond?

YES

YES

BLOG RESPONSE CONSIDERATIONS

TRANSPARENCY

Disclose your Air Force connection.

SOURCING

Cite your sources by including hyperlinks, video, images or other references.

TIMELINESS

Take time to create good responses, from a few hours to a day.

TONE

Respond in a tone that reflects highly on the rich history of the Air Force.

INFLUENCE

Focus on the most influential blogs related to the Air Force.

The Air Force's Rules of Engagement for Blogging - globalnerdy.com

THE VALUE OF ONLINE REPRESENTATIVES

A question we're often asked is whether there is any point in putting staff resources into monitoring and participating in social networks. A piece of research by DEI Worldwide suggests that the investment will pay off.



In a study, over half (54%) of consumers said that information received from a brand representative is more valuable than information on a company website....actually it's surprising that corporate sites score so highly.

Though it's not 100% clear by what DEA defines as an "online brand representative" – the assumption is they mean an actual human being who has a social media presence – once consumers have engaged with him / her, 67% will pass on the info they've received to their peer group and 62% value their input more than run of the mill ads they may be exposed to.

BLOGS, PRINT MEDIA LACK CREDIBILITY / LEISURE TIME SPENT ONLINE

An excellent study about consumers and digital media was released by TNS Global before Christmas. Conducted in 16 countries, it shows that in the developed world we are spending between a quarter to a third of our leisure time online. Those are hours when consumers are not exposed to traditional marketing campaigns.

For the US the figure is 30%, for Australia is 29% and for the UK 28% free time spent on the Internet. However for UK housewives, that figure goes up to 47%, showing that women at home is a huge online growth area and opportunity.

The study also shows that online news is becoming more credible. Globally, 41% 'trust' TV news, 40% online news and 39% newspapers. In the UK trust in print media was at 23% compared to 40% for online news sites.

However, the definition of 'credible online news' does not extend to blogs. According to a report by analyst group Forrester, corporate blogs score a 16% trust rating, compared to a 77% rating for emails from someone you know, underpinning the value of things spreading virally.

WORD OF MOUTH AND THE VALUE OF DISSENTING OPINIONS

At the same time if the word of mouth endorsement you are getting is too good, consumers won't think it's credible. There is value in giving airtime to dissenting opinions.

A piece of research by a group of Korean academics (reproduced in the Journal of Cyber Psychology and Behavior) showed that consumer review websites where 10% of the comment about a brand was negative, had a better credibility rating than ones that were 100% positive.



BUT FORGET THE 'SUPERFAN'

There's a school of thought that getting large groups of consumers engaged with your brand is all about targeting and picking out certain key influencers or 'super fans'.

Not so says Duncan Watts of Columbia University in New York. It's actually about engaging with communities and groups of people as a whole. Quoted in the New Scientist Professor Watts says:

"A central idea in marketing and diffusion research is that influentials — a minority of individuals who influence an exceptional number of their peers — are important to the formation of public opinion."

Professor Watts and his colleagues looked at this “influentials hypothesis” and found that: “Under most conditions that we consider, we find that large cascades of influence are driven not by influentials but by a critical mass of easily influenced individuals.”

This is supported by a fascinating study conducted by Harvard Medical School, which shows that a friend who lives several miles away is 6x more likely to infect you with his / her happiness than your partner. Although social contagion like this only works to three degrees of separation (because on the periphery, friends of friends are unlikely to be a constant group), that’s potentially quite a large number when you translate it to online networks.

The obvious take out from this is that it proves how you can 'broadcast' moods, concepts and emotions through a group of people from one to the other. And as a result at Cow, rather than talk about ‘super fans’ and influencers, we prefer to steer clients towards targeting clusters of people with shared interests or bonds.



BRAND MESSAGES LESS EFFECTIVE IN MAINSTREAM NEWS

The crashing sounds of the economy means that consumers are now less receptive to brand messages in mainstream news media. According to a survey by Experian, “when Americans want to escape, the last place they’ll turn to is the news”, with only 28% of consumers being influenced by marketing messages in news media, compared to 40% in other media.

At the same time, a global study by Synovate shows that Brits are world leaders in pessimism, with 75% predicting that the economy will get worse over the next year, closely followed by Americans at 69%.

The same study shows that people in the US and UK are least likely to agree with the statement: “I find the economy boring and don't pay much attention.” So the countries which pay the most attention to the market doom and gloom are also the ones who are the most miserable and so it goes in a vicious cycle. At the same time, until economic disaster fatigue sets in, brands might have more success targeting lifestyle media. It also makes it a good time to dip the toe in the social media water.

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WHAT CAN WE DO FOR YOU?

Finally, and we've left it to the end, the sell about Cow. PRCA Agency of the Year 2008, we offer joined up PR that combines media relations, online work and brand experiences.

We can also produce bespoke industry trend reports for your marketing departments, which involves compiling research, drawing the relevant conclusions, writing a report and presenting it back to you. Please contact Dirk Singer – dirk@thisiscow.com if you are interested.

WHERE TO FIND US ONLINE:

Our Website: www.thisiscow.com

 **Blog:** www.thisisherd.com

 **Netvibes:** <http://www.netvibes.com/cowpr>

 **Twitter:** <http://www.twitter.com/thisiscow>

Second|Brain™ <http://cowpr.secondbrain.com>

 **Delicious:** <http://www.delicious.com/dirkthecow>

Press Releases: <http://cowtimes.blogspot.com>

Or email Dirk Singer, dirk@thisiscow.com, tel +44(0)844 967 0630


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