The language of brands: Uncovering the essence of a successful ad

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INTRODUCTION

What do successful ads do that unsuccessful ones don't? And what matters most when advertising to different people, in different countries, across different categories, or for different brands? Using Syn-Text, Synovate's proprietary text mining software, we will analyse a database containing over 100 000 verbatim responses from ads tested worldwide. Using this unstructured data will help us understand the emotional drivers that lead to successful advertising, the fundamental values people share, and how all this differs by demography, geography, category, and brand.

BACKGROUND

Connections, Synovate's communications testing solution, goes beyond metrics like intent and recall. By using the latest developments in neuroscience, it taps into an existing web of meaningful and personal consumer experiences. All this enables us to evaluate how effectively advertising connects the consumer to the brand.

As Merry Baskin writes: "Nowadays, measuring emotional response should be central, not peripheral, to consumer communications research. It has been proved that the way people feel about an ad is a better predictor of its potential effectiveness than rational, information-processing measures."[i]

Emotional connection is best understood through the personal relevance of the communication and the extent to which it prompts an emotional response. This response is individual because the existing framework within which each person receives communications will be different.

METHODOLOGY

Our analysis covers studies over the three-year period March 2008 to February 2011. Our core metrics are:

- **Connections Score (CS)** – This number (ranging from 0 to 100) measures the depth and extent to which the advertising creates an emotional connection between the consumer and the brand by evoking personally relevant and meaningful experiences. It is derived from a question that measures brand personality as well as two 7-point scales:

1. To what extent does the ad bring to mind things you really care about?

2. To what extent does the ad bring to mind things you really enjoy?

- **Mind Clouds** – In order to identify which aspects of the communication are creating connections between the consumer and the brand (as well as how and why they are doing so), respondents who answer 5-7 in the scale questions (and are therefore more likely to give usable responses) are asked the following:

    1. What things that you really care about did the ad bring to mind and which aspects of the ad made you think about these things?

    2. What things that you really enjoy did the ad bring to mind and which aspects of the ad made you think about these things?

"Verbatims report the consumer's view of what is important," explains Ross Regennitter, Vice President of Analytic Development and creator of the software. "They capture insight and nuances that may not be measured well with structured data alone. The meaning of closed-ended ratings and leading indicators of issues the client may not yet be aware of can be embedded in open-ended data. This adds depth and detail to recommendations and results. It also provides another dimension to the analysis of structured questions by balancing findings and filling in the gaps."

While unstructured 'consumer voice' data is routinely collected from respondents, it is often too difficult to completely analyse and uncover the information contained. Because researchers can't read through and keep track of thousands of verbatims, useful information remains hidden or is ignored. Even manual coding does not take advantage of underlying patterns in the data because simplification loses meaning and insight.

Syn-Text, Synovate's proprietary text mining software, takes the consumer's own words and indexes them for analysis. Indexing treats words and phrases as variables that could be used in sophisticated statistical analyses. The process begins by breaking apart open-ended comments into specific word units. Words with weak discriminating potential (such as 'the' or 'and') are ignored while those with slightly different endings (such as 'satisfy' and 'satisfaction') are made equivalent through stemming.

Words are then grouped together to create topics. These are built using a clustering algorithm that searches for groups of highly correlated words or phrases. In building topics, we are able to allocate specific words to specific groups. A graphical model then groups together topics to better understand their interconnections. The end result is a Mind Cloud. This visual representation illustrates the key associations and strongest themes consumers connect to the brand.
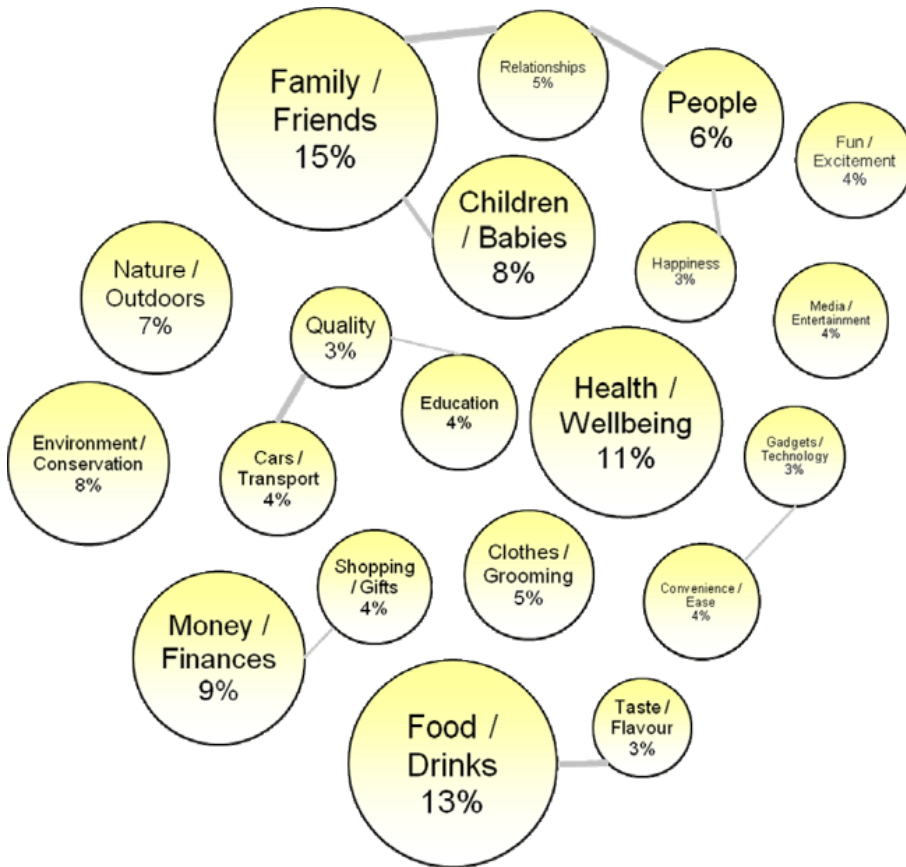
OVERALL FINDINGS

The top ten topics (with example comments) are:

Quote	Topic	%	Quote
"My mom used to eat ritz crackers with cream cheese and caviar frequently for lunch when i was a child, and this reminded me of that & how much she enjoyed it." – USA	Family/Friends	15%	"Friendship, brotherhood, friendship with clients, caring of family members." – China
	Food/Drinks	13%	
	Health/Wellbeing	11%	"TO GO TO THE GYM; BEING ACTIVE IS GOOD; TO WORK ON THE GYM MACHINES TO SEE AND FEEL WELL." – Peru
"Enjoy discount by settling the payments with credit card; even save more when buying on sale products." – Hong Kong	Money/Finances	9%	
	Environment/Conservation	8%	"I need to contribute to helping lower carbon emissions and this helped remind me and show me a way I can do that." – UK
"Seeing the child smiling reminds me of my kids when they were young" – Australia	Children/Babies	8%	
	Nature/Outdoors	7%	
"I CARE ABOUT PEOPLE AND IT'S GOOD TO LEARN OTHER PEOPLE'S CULTURE AND WAYS OF THINKING" – South Africa	People	6%	"Farming and cultivated lands in the beginning of the advertisement. I would love to farm and I love planted lands." – Egypt
	Clothes/Grooming	5%	
"I like colours and the fact that every woman in the ad wears high heels, I wear high heels as well." – Slovakia	Relationships	5%	"The end kiss scene made me think of my partner and how keeping in touch is important." – UK

The word 'family' was the most common in our database and featured in almost 10% of all comments. This was even more than the word 'good', which came in second and featured in 8% of all comments.

Consumers who mentioned 'Family/Friends' had a CS of 70 compared to the average of 68. More strong topics with CS above average include 'Relationships' (77), 'Food/Drinks' (74), 'Health/Wellbeing' (72), and 'People' (71). In other words, ads that connect to these themes are rated better than those that don't.

The following Mind Cloud shows the relationship between the top twenty topics. Those that are related to each other (because they share comments) are linked. A thicker line indicates a stronger association.

The bubble chart shows category mention percentages:
- Family / Friends 15%
- Relationships 5%
- People 6%
- Fun / Excitement 4%
- Children / Babies 8%
- Nature / Outdoors 7%
- Quality 3%
- Happiness 3%
- Media / Entertainment 4%
- Education 4%
- Health / Wellbeing 11%
- Environment / Conservation 8%
- Cars / Transport 4%
- Gadgets / Technology 3%
- Shopping / Gifts 4%
- Clothes / Grooming 5%
- Convenience / Ease 4%
- Money / Finances 9%
- Food / Drinks 13%
- Taste / Flavour 3%

CATEGORIES AND BRANDS

Across the 15 categories we studied, the four with the highest CS were Healthcare (78), Telecommunications (78), Social (74), and FMCG (72). This indicates that consumers can connect with advertising across a diverse range of categories. In studying over 150 brands, one of the highest rated was Coca-Cola (86).


The 'Open Happiness' campaign is yet another initiative that continues the shift from functional benefits toward emotional ones. We conducted three Coca-Cola studies: one in Peru (May 2009), one in Argentina (September 2010), and one in the USA (February 2011). Overall, the percentage of Coca-Cola mentions for Family/Friends, Relationships, and People were almost twice the average of all studies in the database. Meanwhile, the percentage of mentions for Taste/Flavour was only

half the average for FMCG.

DEMOGRAPHY

Across gender, women are more likely to have strong connections with advertising compared to men (CS of 70 vs. 66). Across age, young consumers are most likely to connect with advertising. The level of connection drops as consumers enter their thirties and forties but picks up as they approach their golden years. This is consistent with the December 2010 findings The Economist reported in *Age and Happiness – The U-Bend of Life*: "When people start out on adult life, they are, on average, pretty cheerful. Things go downhill from youth to middle age until they reach a nadir commonly known as the mid-life crisis. So far, so familiar. The surprising part happens after that. Although as people move towards old age they lose things they treasure—vitality, mental sharpness and looks—they also gain what people spend their lives pursuing: happiness."

Connections Scores by Age:
10-year Moving Average
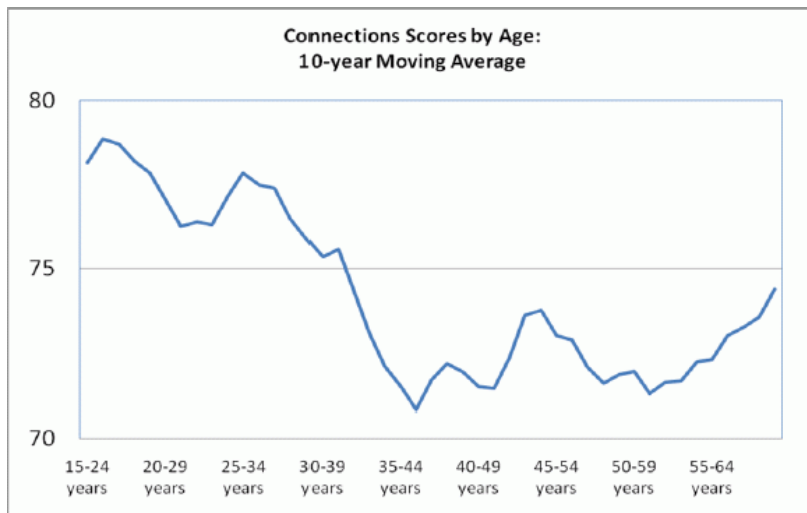
To test for differences across demography, we examined data collected from a July/August 2010 study for Hyundai's sponsorship of the FIFA World Cup. Respondents were shown the same ad and interviewed in South Africa, Chile, and Brazil. The demography differences in Connections Score were in line with the findings we see across all ads in the database. Firstly, women have higher Connections Scores compared to men (79 vs. 75). Secondly, Connections Scores are highest among young respondents and decline as they age:

- 20 to 29 years – 77

- 30 to 39 years – 76

- 40 to 49 years – 75

Hyundai, Official Partner of the 2010 FIFA World Cup™

As for Coca-Cola, the social themes come through strongest:

Happy/Joyful people	36%
FIFA World Cup event	32%
Football/Soccer matches (sports)	31%
Gathering crowd (united together)	27%
Celebrating/Partying	19%
Having a fun/good time	18%
Different countries/flags	15%
Hyundai brand/trademark	15%
Music/Singing/Dancing	12%
Supporting national teams	12%

Women had 45% more mentions for:

- Happy/Joyful people

- Music/Singing/Dancing

- Smiling/Laughing

- Cheering/Shouting

- Excitement/Energy/Enthusiasm

Men had 19% more mentions for:

- Football/Soccer matches (sports)

- Watching games

- Different countries/flags

- Supporting national teams

- Cars

This isn't to say that men are stereotypically unemotional or that women don't care for sport. Women had 11% more mentions for 'FIFA World Cup event' while men had 15% more mentions for 'Family/Friends'. The results indicate the complexity of personal preferences and the danger of profiling demographic groups.

GEOGRAPHY

In studying over 30 countries, emerging nations were more likely to have strong connections with advertising than developed ones (CS of 79 vs. 62). The most 'connected' regions were Africa (87), Latin America (83), South Asia (82), and the Middle East (85) while the least connected region was Western Europe (53). The most connected country was Egypt (94) while the least connected country was the UK (51). The fact that the UK scored lowest may simply reflect the tendency for respondents in emerging countries to 'top-box' in surveys and not necessarily that British people are stereotypically miserable. And the fact that Egypt scored highest related to one particularly successful execution and not our ability to forecast geopolitical risk.

REGION (CS)	COUNTRY (CS)	ECONOMIC STATUS [1]
Africa (87)	Nigeria (91)*	Emerging
	South Africa (85)	Emerging
Central/Eastern Europe (71)	Bulgaria (63)	Emerging
	Russia (75)	Emerging
	Slovakia (67)*	Emerging
Latin America (83)	Argentina (77)	Emerging
	Brazil (85)*	Emerging
	Chile (72)*	Emerging
	Colombia (85)*	Emerging
	Mexico (62)*	Emerging
	Peru (91)	Emerging
Middle East (76)	Egypt (94)*	Emerging
	Saudi Arabia (71)	Developed
	UAE (79)*	Developed
North America (68)	USA (68)	Developed
North Asia (61)	China (65)	Emerging
	Hong Kong (56)*	Developed
	Taiwan (54)*	Emerging
Oceania (61)	Australia (59)	Developed
	New Zealand (70)	Developed
South Asia (82)	India (87)	Emerging
	Indonesia (78)	Emerging
	Malaysia (63)	Emerging
	Philippines (89)	Emerging
	Singapore (68)*	Developed
	Thailand (77)	Emerging
Western Europe (53)	France (72)*	Developed
	Germany (63)	Developed
	Italy (71)*	Developed
	Spain (60)*	Developed
	UK (51)	Developed

Small base size (less than 500 respondents)

CONCLUSION AND IMPLICATIONS

From our analysis, we conclude that successful advertising requires three things:

1. Brands must engage all our senses in creating a story with themselves at the core

Much of advertising activity in the 20th century was focused on delivering one-way functional claims about a product or service in the hope that consumers would make decisions rationally. But advances in neuroscience have replaced the belief that thought comes first with the correct assertion that an emotion (whether conscious or not) is the first reaction to any stimulus (whether conscious or not) and is the driving influence of action.[ii]

Advertising must now strive to create powerful and lasting ideas by engaging consumers in a story rather than bombarding us with the same bland messages. Consumers must be seen as human beings who use personal experiences to interpret advertising and co-create relationships with brands. It is only by ensuring key 'connections' occur during brand moments that emotional ties will be strengthened and associations firmly entrenched.

2. This story must be about things we care about and enjoy (engage emotions by having personal meaning to each individual)

Neuroscience tells us that branded goods will be experienced differently from unbranded goods if they are connected to areas of the brain involving long-term memory, higher-order goals, and personal values. We also know that consumers will seek out brands that share and uphold values while providing connection on a deeper emotional level. This is why advertising must constantly connect the brand to what consumers care about or enjoy and why we must measure the extent to which this is done.

As Alan Hedges wrote in the preface to Testing to Destruction: "On the surface advertising changes very rapidly, is perhaps sometimes even oversensitive to the latest twists of style and fashion. Beneath the shimmering surface public attitudes, values and beliefs change more slowly and beneath that again, the basic dynamics of persuasive communication change very little." While many believe in 'new consumers' emerging after the recession and 'new media' changing the rules forever, this is not true. We're still the same basic people with the same basic needs. Brands that understand this and connect to what matters most are those that do well."

3. The story must be consistently repeated using multiple touchpoints over the long-term in order to be remembered and recalled at the point-of-sale.

Because advertising does not occur in a vacuum, one cannot establish the contribution of planned communications without taking into account ALL factors that impact on equity. And while direct experience is the primary driver of brand image, good marketing puts personal experience in context, reinforces feelings about the brand, and insulates it against negative or uncontrollable information.

Simply put, advertising encompasses everything. This is confirmed by Sally Ford-Hutchinson and Annie Rothwell in the findings from their 2002 qualitative study for the Advertising Standards Authority: "The first interesting finding was the extent to which the term advertising encompassed for consumers every piece of brand, product or service communication. It obviously included the key media of television, posters (surprisingly high in a strong second place), press, cinema and radio. It also included other aspects of selling, such as direct mail, door drops, the internet, branding in-store, branded clothing, sponsorship, commercial text messages and even telephone sales. Advertising is simply everything that has a name on it."

It takes up to six months for the brain to create a hardwired association between things it sees and puts together. But once that connection is made, it takes at least two years to erase.[iii] In other words, attitudes and perceptions can be embedded over the long-term in order to elicit universal emotions consumers want to feel. As Chris Baker writes: "Arguably the most important

task for marketing and communications is the creation, maintenance and commercial exploitation of hardwired associations that are the basis of brand meaning… Brands still need fresh news and innovation to stay relevant and interesting, but while doing this it's critical that a brand identifies and maintains its 'golden thread' of continuity."[iv]

Ultimately, we need brands that are able to clearly define who they are and consistently maintain this stance across all interactions in order to build trust. We need brands that can be stable without becoming staid. As James Gilmore and Joseph Pine write: "Goods and services are no longer enough; what consumers want today are experiences – memorable events that engage them in an inherently personal way."[v] It's the only way they will win our hearts and wallets time and again.

RECOMMENDED READING

i. Measuring effectiveness, Warc Best Practice, July/August 2010

ii. Micu AC and Plummer JT (2007), 'Measuring Emotional Responses to Television Advertising', 'AAAA/ARF Task Force March 2007')

iii. What price continuity in a short-term world?, Market Leader, Quarter 3, 2010

iv. What price continuity in a short-term world?, Market Leader, Quarter 3, 2010

v. In search of authenticity, Market Leader, Quarter 2, 2010

FOOTNOTES

[1] All countries were classified as emerging or developed based on the Morgan Stanley Country Index.

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