



# The Overlooked Power of Media: Enhancing the Memorability of Communications

The **success of marketing communication** is judged on a variety of factors, and one of the fundamental criteria is that people remember the ideas conveyed.



**James Galpin**  
Director, Global Media Practice AMAP

While the variety of ideas that marketing might communicate is endless, the general characteristics of things that people readily remember can be expressed in a short list. People remember things that are:

- Relevant
- Different
- Emotionally impactful
- Recently encountered
- Frequently encountered

Many people assume that the first three qualities—relevance, difference, and emotional impact—evolve out of the creative content, while the last two attributes are functions of media delivery. But it is not really so simple.

The characteristics of the media vehicle used to deliver a message can shape the way people respond to the message itself. A medium can do more than just deliver communications that are relevant, different, and emotionally impactful; a medium can actually play a significant part in making communications relevant, different, and emotionally impactful. And therefore, media play an important role in making communications memorable.

## DELIVERING RELEVANCE THROUGH MEDIA

First and foremost, the relevance of a brand's message derives from the nature of the brand and category being advertised. So, for example,

no matter how cool your creative is, ads that pitch women's fashion and beauty products to men are not likely to accomplish much.

So much is obvious. But assuming that a brand has an appropriate target audience in mind, both the creative expression and the nature of the hosting medium will factor into the relevance of a piece of communication.

## REACHING THE RIGHT PEOPLE AT THE RIGHT TIME

Most media plans are explicitly designed to deliver brand communications to consumers who will find them relevant. Audience measurement research and studies like TGI are used to identify media vehicles that will be good at reaching the appropriate target audience. Media agencies also put much effort into identifying the situations, dayparts, or days of the week that present the best opportunities for brands. For example, out-of-home (OOH) advertising may be used to attract people's attention before they shop; we know that this approach can be effective because our research often shows that OOH has a strong influence on purchase consideration.

Advertising around relevant content is also a tried-and-tested route to reaching people when they are most likely to be open to a brand message. Someone who is reading a fashion magazine is more likely to be engaged with women's fashion and beauty products than someone watching a prime-time TV show, even if they are both members of the brand's target audience.

### MEDIA EFFECTS VARY ACROSS GROUPS

Our CrossMedia research has confirmed the value of understanding in detail how different media perform with different groups. Among groups of people who are more or less predisposed to a brand or category, we usually observe different patterns of channel performance. In a recent study, online video had the greatest impact on one group, while cinema had more effect on another group. And both media outperformed TV overall. Because the same creative execution was used in all instances, we know that the difference in performance reflects differences in the relevance of each medium—and the message in that medium.

### THE CASE FOR NON-TV OPTIONS

On awareness and presence metrics, TV regularly outperforms other media per dollar spent. But on more fundamental measures of brand engagement and brand imagery, TV can be less cost-efficient than more targeted media like cinema, magazines, and online.

This is a revelation to most people. Yes, TV is often important in creating initial campaign awareness, which can subsequently be reinforced and extended through communications in “secondary” media. But this is not the only effective approach, and it is not necessarily best practice. In fact, sometimes it is a misuse of non-TV channels—a result of sheer laziness on the part of advertisers.

A TV ad can be a powerful communications device. But so can a full-page ad in a magazine, or a provocative or eye-catching poster. We have seen great brand impact from non-TV campaigns over the years, even before the digital explosion. The famous “White out of Red” poster campaign for *The Economist* (which featured text such as “I never read *The Economist*” – Management Trainee, age 42”) contributed to building the status of the British newsweekly. More recently, the out-of-home campaign that featured a Mini driving up a wall helped launch the “Mini Adventure” campaign. And in the digital arena, Dove’s viral video “Evolution,” didn’t need TV to succeed.



A TV ad can be a powerful communications device. But so can a full-page ad in a magazine, or a provocative or eye-catching poster.

### HOW CHANNEL STRATEGIES HELP BUILD DIFFERENCE

Brands often set out to use media “differently” from their peers in a deliberate attempt to stand out from the crowd. They may do this by using a media channel that their category does not normally exploit, or they may target advertising or sponsorship around specific and distinctive vehicles within a channel. This phenomenon is behind much of the migration of brands into new media spaces, be they digital, experiential, or whatever.

**A strong brand sets itself apart by offering a brand experience that is meaningfully different; media choices that amplify that difference will be most effective.**

However, the most beneficial strategy is one that not only distinguishes a brand from others but highlights what is truly special about a brand. A strong brand sets itself apart by offering a brand experience that is meaningfully different, so media choices that amplify that difference will be most effective. For example, online shoe merchant Zappos was one of the first brands to advertise

in the bins used for screening carry-on luggage in airports. They scored obvious relevance points by engaging people at a moment when they were unavoidably aware of their shoes, but they also subtly reinforced Zappos' meaningful difference. The travelers who were already aware of Zappos' unparalleled personal service were reminded of it as they endured a process not known for being warm, friendly, or personal. The contrast made what Zappos offered look better than ever.

Advertising in atypical dayparts or program genres on TV can also set a brand apart. For example, a few years back, Kellogg's started to advertise Corn Flakes on late-night TV in the UK. Consumer research had uncovered the fact that many adults consume this traditional breakfast food as a late snack or supper. The ads airing late in the evening stood out and made the brand seem in tune with its customers.

Sponsorship is commonly used to build difference, as brands adopt some properties to try to differentiate themselves by association with special events or programming. It is remarkable the range of brands you will come across at various summer music festivals around the world. Mobile firms and big banks seem especially eager to get down and funky with youth, in an attempt to stand out from their staid, more businesslike brethren.

### HOW MEDIA CAN HELP DELIVER EMOTION

The role of media in delivering relevance and difference is fairly easy to demonstrate. It is harder to pinpoint media's role in conveying emotion, either indirectly by enhancing a brand's messages, or directly by evoking feelings in relation to the brand itself. But we believe that the media environment provides an emotional context that can transfer to the brand and its communications.

### LEVERAGING CONSUMERS' MEDIA EMOTIONS

Consumers feel strongly about the media they use; as a consequence, we know that they have a sense of some media being appropriate or inappropriate for some brands and categories. In both qualitative and quantitative research settings, consumers accept or reject various media options for particular brands on what seem to be largely emotional grounds. They may see a vehicle as being too youthful, too light-hearted, or too serious for a brand.

Clearly, consumers see that the medium has a role in saying something about the brand—and this information may be very useful to a brand that needs repositioning. A brand that is struggling with perceptions of being old-fashioned and out-of-date may choose to go all out in new media to signal a more contemporary or youthful face to consumers. In a recent study in China, we saw that online advertising was key to building “modern and contemporary” perceptions for a global drinks brand.

---

## Through their ability to carry messages to the right people at the right time, media vehicles can make or break the relevance of a brand's communications.

---

Even the simple idea of being on TV may signal something important. In China's developing consumer market, people have more faith in “big” brands because they seem more trustworthy and reliable. A brand that advertises on TV, and on CCTV in particular, is assumed to be big and trustworthy, especially by the less sophisticated consumers of inland China. This principle motivates many brands in many countries to invest in TV advertising, but it is most relevant for new challenger brands that are seeking to establish their credibility.

### EMOTIONAL TRANSFERENCE FROM ASSOCIATED CONTENT

The other factor that can deliver emotional meaning to communication is the content in which it occurs. Highly engaging content is believed to lead to heightened attention during commercial breaks. So if advertising around engaging content leads to increased attention to ads, we think it reasonable to assume that advertising around specific types of content may transfer the emotional associations of that content to a brand. For example, advertising during serious TV dramas or news programs could lend gravitas and credibility to an insurance company or a financial service provider. Comedy might be a better venue for candy, snacks, or fun vacation destinations.



Red Bull is not seen all over extreme and dangerous sports events just because it is targeting fans of these activities.

As most campaigns run across a multitude of content types, it has been difficult up until now to determine the influence of program content. However, we can see evidence more easily with sponsorships. Consider the success enjoyed by Baileys when it sponsored “Sex and the City” over an extended period. The association lent a sense of glamour and sophistication to Baileys and, perhaps most importantly, linked the brand to the sense of female bonding and togetherness that the show created among fans.

Moving beyond TV, Red Bull is not seen all over dangerous and extreme sports events and media content just because it is targeting fans of these activities. Rather, by associating with activities that engender intense interest and excitement, the brand is trying to capture some of that emotional power for itself. By the same token, Coca-Cola wraps itself around the Olympics and the World Cup because these events are exceptional for their ability to create a sense of community. Across the world, these events bring people together through shared experiences, hopes, and dreams, and so they provide a fitting platform for a brand that 40 years ago aspired “to teach the world to sing in perfect harmony.”

### DELIVERING NOT ONLY MESSAGES, BUT MEMORABILITY

Media can play a far wider role than the simple delivery of brand communications. Through their ability to carry messages to the right people at the right time, media vehicles can make or break the relevance of a brand’s communications. They can help a brand sit apart from the crowd and differentiate its message. Their emotional tonality provides a context that can help a brand get through to its audience and enhance the emotions that their message evokes. In some cases the vehicle may even directly influence the emotional associations of a brand.

In fact, a great media choice may do all of these at once, reaching relevant people in a distinctive and emotionally engaging context and thus substantially enhancing the memorability of brand communications. Of course, if smart media selection can do all this good, we also have to recognize that ill-considered placements may do considerable harm. This just makes getting it right all the more important.

### Across the world, these events bring people together through shared experiences, hopes, and dreams

The quality of the creative is of course a critical element in the success of brand communications. But Marshall McLuhan was also on the right track when he famously stated, “The medium is the message.” For brand communications, the medium is a very significant part of the message. Therefore, advertisers need to go beyond the question of just how *much* to spend. All GRPs are *not* created equal; smart media decisions can significantly enhance memorability and enable marketers to get the most out of their communications investments.