

The Importance of Emotion in Building Meaningful PR Campaigns.

1.0 EMOTION IN THE ATTENTION AGE.

We live at the dawn of the fourth industrial revolution. Never has technology advanced so fast, never has culture changed so quickly and with such diversity (Moore). It's exciting, it's thrilling, and it's very noisy. Brands today have to run increasingly faster to keep up, shout increasingly louder to be heard. Or do they?

In the eye of this storm there is a calm centre. Humans. Versatile and agile, we adapt and bend as the world changes around us. But whilst the world may change, our minds, and the mechanics within it do not. The neural systems that have evolved over millions of years remain fundamentally the same (Grant). Our brains don't pay attention to the loudest messages. They pay attention to the right ones (Damasio). We are alerted to the fact they are the right ones by how we feel. It's time for brands to evolve.

You could say that attention is one of the most precious human resources. Consumers are exposed to over 5,000 brand messages a day (Forbes), on average only 12 will get our attention and only one will lead to immediate behaviour (Yankelovich). For years, brands have used tricks to make people notice them: disruption, novelty, volume. However, these are short-term solutions that don't build trust and are starting to wear thin.

Consumer insight is no longer enough, it's human insight that enables ideas to echo through culture, communities and conversational newsfeeds. With a scientific understanding of the human mind, brands can ensure messages don't grab attention, but *earn* it, making people feel something. This is the route to long-term impact. Stop shouting and start speaking straight to the heart. Brands in the Attention Age must **STIR EMOTION**.

2.0 STIR EMOTION: BUILDING MEANINGFUL BRANDS.

As filtering, ad-blocking and deciphering the real truth in media become routine in our daily lives, the dynamics of communications must evolve to become much more about emotional connections than traditional 'share of voice' vanity metrics. Smart brands forgo mass awareness for targeted and highly-influential messages with specific audiences. They are strategies with relevance, intention and cause. They are strategies that **STIR EMOTION**.

STIR EMOTION can be defined as: "the process of crafting a message that stimulates our subconscious mind, in order to make us consciously notice, feel and act positively towards a brand". It triggers the passions, values and past experiences often held close to our hearts, becoming a springboard to informed decisions. By establishing a value-exchange with their audience's deep-rooted aspirations and goals, whether it's survival or social appraisal, brands elevate their positioning to a higher status (Rutledge). This results in conscious attention (Tiexiera) and delivers maximum benefit for both consumers and brands.

With such an immersive, clear and holistic view of a consumer and their world, brands that **STIR EMOTION** increase the chances of playing a more meaningful role in people's lives and leave a lasting impression beyond any activation window. It not only cuts through amongst the myriad of product launches, discounts, loyalty offers and new announcements continuously bombarding people each day, but it also begins to lay the foundations of long-term relationships where 'share of heart' becomes a new success indicator behind active engagement, positive perception and behaviour change (Lerner).

3.0 STIR EMOTION THROUGH ADVOCATES.

In a socially-driven world, peer-to-peer or brand-to-consumer direct communication isn't always possible, meaning brands must entrust a message into a chain of communication often out of their control. The role of advocates is hugely important, but how do you avoid diluting the impact once out of a brand's hands? Insight from Behavioral Psychology can help to ensure messages retain emotional potency as it spreads through media and communities.

3.1 From *what* to *why*

With the increasing speed and distance messages travel today, the level of accuracy decreases as advocates often retell a brand's story with less detail than originally conveyed at the beginning. While tactics are disposable, emotions are incorruptible, meaning accuracy is more likely to be retained if the emotional intention of the story is made clear (Berger). Brands must communicate not just *what* they are doing, but also *why* they are doing it. The *why* element becomes the real message with a greater chance of evoking an emotional response that can be stored, recalled and shared. In a complex, cluttered and fragmented media landscape, the heartfelt component of storytelling is the only certainty modern brands can depend on.

3.2 From *one off* to *once again*

We know from Game Theory that a repeated interaction induces a stronger sense of trust and openness to emotional signals (Axelrod). We value emotional consistency and it informs how genuine we believe the person or brand to be (Camerer). A brand can not and does not want to repeat content, but they can and should repeat sentiment. This strategically positions the brand in the consumer's mind as one that is genuine and trusted to be engaged emotionally with.

3.3 From *new journeys* to *going the distance*

Emotional potency can be bolstered over long-term narratives if a brand can remain part of a conversation (Dixit). It is vital for a brand to demonstrate that it still has "skin in the game" and is there for the distance. Whether it's championing a social cause, celebrating a subculture, or contributing to a shared passion point with their audience, if a brand can remain beside the consumer it can emphasise its investment and reward in their future. By being present at the right time and in the right place, brands will create emotional presence in the hearts and minds of consumers, eliciting greater attention and ongoing positive affinity.

3.4 From *contained* to *contagious*

Iconic brands appeal to and resonate with more people than just today's customers. They reach beyond categories and become 'cult' as they speak mindsets rather than demographics. Nike, Supreme, BrewDog, Tesla, Apple - these are all brands that possess unique personalities and traits that spread beyond a contained target audience. They all realise the power of emotions and benefit from the fact that emotions spread faster and further than words. Known as "Emotional Contagion" (Barasade), humans pay greater attention synchronising their own emotions with those expressed by those around them. Brands that simply adopt a transactional relationship with advocates will be unable to create this contagion. However, those that can inspire advocates will be more likely to receive emotionally-charged endorsement, resulting in a ripple effect of positive feeling towards the brand.

4.0 EARN APPRAISAL, ACTION AND ADVOCACY.

Brands that **STIR EMOTION** unlock huge opportunities. By taking the time to craft messages in light of emotional insight, brands won't just earn attention but earn appraisal, action and advocacy (Damasio).

4.1 Earn Appraisal

Emotion is the body's reaction to an external message that has earned our attention as deemed important (Damasio). The message then goes further into the brain's central appraisal system which cross-checks and validates it against various factors: subjective (values), objective (social and cultural biases) and contextual (needs and wants) (Scherer). If the message is believed to offer a valued payback, our head marries with our heart and it holds our attention (Zak & Damasio).

4.2 Earn Action

Emotion is not devoid of reason, but actually the basis of all decisions and all actions (Damasio). If a message doesn't make us *feel* something, we probably won't act on it (Dolan). It is not necessary enough just to know what should be done; it's also necessary to *feel* it if we are to do something about it (Zaltman.) Emotions are guides for every consumer decision, stir them and you will drive action.

Not only do we act on emotion, but when we do we actively seek guidance from those who stirred it (Pereda). A brand has an opportunity to not just drive behaviour but design it, by offering clear routes the consumer can achieve the goals the message aligns with. The 'This Girl Can' Campaign by Sports England was based on carefully crafted insight showing 75% of women want to exercise but feel inhibited to. It not only stirred emotion by identifying our fears and goals, but provided a clearly signposted and supported (both physically and emotionally) way to overcome and achieve them. It gained huge public support and industry recognition winning nine Cannes Lions.

Once a brand identifies the desired action, such as social engagement, content sharing, registering for a service, or purchasing an item, it's easier to forecast the appraisal process and which messages will be most effective.

4.3 Earn Advocacy

Emotion forms not just the basis of our decision on how to act now, but gives us important guidance on how to act in the future. It forms the basis of who we trust (Tiexiera). We base further cycles of appraisal and action on previous positive ones. This cycle causes the brain to release the reward hormone dopamine. It produces a feeling of happiness and over time it causes the brain to build neural pathways of trust (Dolan). The more times this occurs the stronger and more ingrained the trust becomes. If a brand prioritises the emotional connection with the consumer in the long-term, they will build greater advocacy.

As well as being the brands we return to, the ones that stir our emotions are the ones we recommend to others too (Axelrod). A recommendation from a friend is scientifically more trusted than that from the brand itself. It leads to a greater social value reward (Fareri), and a huge gain for the associated brand. It is how a brand can build a community. Nike is a brand that consistently prioritises emotion. Its recent "Nothing beats a Londoner" campaign, speaks to and champions urban youth by reimagining a brighter future. As a brand, Nike carefully and repeatedly align context and aspiration of an audience with single-minded messaging that sparks mass response, positive action and networks of advocates.

Over time, trust is literally hardwired into our brains. By consistently stirring emotions, earning appraisal and action can over time build invaluable and solid advocacy ensuring each campaign builds on the legacy of the last.

5.0 CONCLUSION.

With too many channels vying for too much of our interaction, it's time for brands to accept there are limits to our attention. They need to stop trying to grab it for short-term wins, and instead embrace a new age where authenticity, experience and sharing outweigh any material gain. Brands that **STIR EMOTION** unlock new ways to connect and turn limited attention spans into unlimited opportunities.

By stirring emotion every message will not just gain attention but earn it, leading to appraisal, action and advocacy. Ideas that offer clear emotional value can turn consumers into bastions of the brand where sharing, virality and contagions occur. By leveraging scientific understanding of the human brain and the systems that have evolved for our survival (Kinglebach), a brand can establish a cultural voice that will not get lost in the noise, but one that earns a place in a consumer's heart.

Investing in emotion pays off in the short and long-term. It's impact is witnessed through solid relationships that can stimulate positive and immediate engagement, whilst weather through heavy storms. Emotion is equity: one of the most potent currencies a brand can possess. The sooner brands realise the how to stir it, the more valuable they will be to people.

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