

New GfK study shows purpose-driven ads fall short in gaining, holding attention -- pointing to need for new approaches

Collaboration with Goodvertising Agency reveals value of “transformational” campaigns – making consumers heroes

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/EINPresswire.com/ -- At a time when so many companies are rushing to claim sustainability, social justice, and other causes as core to their brands, discussions about the effectiveness of these campaigns have been largely absent. With millions of dollars being spent to define and promote the “purposes” of brands, what are the real outcomes?

The first findings from The Purpose Impact Monitor – a new, ongoing study developed by [GfK](#) in association with Goodvertising Agency – show that brand purpose ads generally underperform mainstream ads* when it comes to grabbing and holding viewers’ attention. (See Table 1.)

[Download a booklet](#) with more results from this study

While three-quarters of mainstream* ads were able to capture attention, the proportion dropped to two-thirds for purpose ads. And while more than half of mainstream ads kept viewers engaged, the figure was 11 points lower for purpose creatives.

* Mainstream ads = Top 40% of creatives in hook/hold performance

Table 1. Breaking through and holding attention

	All ads (benchmark)	Purpose ads
Ability to grab attention	74%	65%
Ability to hold onto viewers	56%	45%

Table 1 -- brand purpose study



Table 2 -- brand purpose study



Table 3 -- brand purpose study

The study also compared two types of purpose creatives –

- Traditional purpose ads, in which the brand presents itself as the hero, and
- “Transformational” purpose ads, which put the spotlight on what consumers can and do accomplish.

The latter category was identified and named by Thomas Kolster of Goodvertising Agency, a leader in innovative approaches to purpose-driven marketing, in his book *The Hero Trap*.

The new research showed that transformational ads performed best when it came to delivering a clear message. (See Table 2.) Nearly half (48%) of transformational ad viewers reported that the message was clear, compared to just one-third (33%) for mainstream ads and 43% for traditional purpose spots.

When it came to branding metrics – such as recall – the purpose ads overall were on par with mainstream ads. (See Table 3.) But traditional purpose ads bested transformational ones significantly in this area – most likely because the traditional ads are more aggressive about promoting the brands themselves within the spots. Transformational ads, by definition, downplay the brand and make consumers the heroes, which might cause a deficit when looking at common brand markers.

One telling contrast can be seen in purpose spots from Dove (“Reverse Selfie”) and Chipotle (“Can a Burrito Change the World?”). The former takes a transformational approach, showing what it takes to push back on the pressure girls feel to look perfect on social media, while Chipotle’s is a classic purpose spot focusing on the product itself. While diagnostics for the two were similar in some ways, Dove scored significantly higher on agreement with key attitudinal statements such as “inspires me to be part of the change.”

“I’ve been in the purpose space for more than a decade,” said Kolster, “and there’s no doubt it is increasingly difficult to cut through with a classic purpose angle – ‘We care!’ It’s time brands stop pitching themselves as the heroes and instead turn people into the heroes. When brands help people become healthier or greener, consumers can feel the difference; it is not just another grandiose brand claim.”

“Purpose marketing represents billion-dollar investment for brands — so these campaigns need to meet high standards,” observed Eric Villain, Managing Director Marketing Effectiveness GfK North America. “While branding cues are somewhat more frequent in traditional purpose ads, we found that those creatives underperform on key metrics, suggesting that new approaches may be needed. Our hypothesis is that the very definition of a transformative approach may take viewers more time and viewings to understand how they, along with the brand, can be part of the story. Because viewers are more accustomed to messages in traditional purpose ads, those are easier to grasp.”

Using its proprietary [Ad Fit Optimizer](#) (AFO) ad testing solution, GfK surveyed 2,408 respondents and measured 20 advertisements, divided equally between traditional purpose branding and transformational branding ads. Field dates were March 28th – 31st 2022.

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David Stanton

GfK

+1 908-875-9844

[email us here](#)

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