

Five ways communications testing lets your brand down and how to avoid them

We have all seen the rise and fall of many a trend (and fad) in communications testing in the hunt for the perfect campaign – and witnessed the success and misfire of many of those campaigns. But what lessons have been learned along the way?

Comms testing is all about knowing if your message hits the mark. Understanding the response of your target audience should be simple—but too often, comms testing turns into a box-ticking exercise instead of a powerful insight-gathering tool. **In a recent webinar, Branding Science experts Aurora Albert and Nick Ross shared five critical ways communications testing often fails – and how brands can avoid these pitfalls.**

Read our article below to dive into their key insights, or for a more in-depth look, **click here to watch the webinar in full on demand.**



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The purpose of communication is not to communicate

Too often, research focuses on assessing the target audience's interaction with your future communication i.e. how they engage with and relate to the information provided. However the goal of communication is not to communicate, it is to drive behaviour change.

Research shows that information is ineffective in this matter: 55% of interventions using information as a key behaviour change technique failed to deliver impact. So instead of focusing on the interaction with your comms, research should focus on understanding how the message is translated and integrated into knowledge for action.

HOW TO AVOID THIS:

- **Find your 'butterfly effect':** focus on a small behavioural goal that can kick-off a big change.
- **One size does not fit all:** choose your audience based on the behavioural goal you want to achieve, and test with them specifically - the more focused the better.
- **Context is king:** use models such as Com-B or our 3i's framework to gather and make sense of your data in context of your goal, to test your comms ability to pull specific triggers.



Traditional communications testing happens in a vacuum

Many times, communications are tested in isolation, without considering the real-world context in which their audience will engage with the content and messages. But in real-life healthcare professionals are bombarded with data, messages and distractions.

This is especially a challenge for brands who need to disrupt a market behaviour. If communications testing does not account for this reality, it fails to predict actual impact.

HOW TO AVOID THIS:

- **Ideas first:** test the campaign idea before you test the campaign execution.
- **The only way to eat an elephant is one bite at a time:** take an iterative approach, gathering feedback throughout the creative development process.
- **Face your competition:** test communications in real-life scenarios and ensure testing includes how messages compete with other content in the same space.



The winner isn't necessarily the winner

Communications testing often focuses on choosing the best-performing creative. However, if success metrics are not well-defined from the start, brands may end up choosing a message/story/concept that is 'engaging' but ineffective in driving the desired action.

HOW TO AVOID THIS:

- **Understand why you are testing:** and share your strategic challenge with your PMR agency, whether you are trying to convince internal stakeholders or are truly stuck with the brief. Crucially, this will help share the approach and design.
- **Define your ultimate KPI:** unless you know what you're evaluating your communications against, everything wins, and everyone loses.
- **Trust your agency with the thinking:** great comms testing starts with great cooperation between the client, ad agency and research agency. Onboard your PMR agency at the creative briefing stage, allowing them to become strategic advisers.



Benchmarks are irrelevant

Brands frequently ask how their communications compare to industry benchmarks.

Yet your creative brief is unique to your brand history and current/future commercial challenges. It is highly dependent on variables that can hardly be replicated. Comparing a campaign for a rare disease drug to one in a mass-market category, for example, is meaningless.

HOW TO AVOID THIS:

- **Know when and how to use a quantitative approach:** ‘benchmarking’ your comms should never take precedence over gaining an in-depth understanding of how your comms work for your customers.
- **Don’t compromise on your ultimate KPI:** measure success based on the specific behaviour change the communication aims to achieve and the KPI that operationalises it. This is your North Star – compare performance on this within your set.
- **Maximise your opportunity:** if your executions are a variation of a same creative idea, quant will not yield results (nor will benchmarks be helpful).



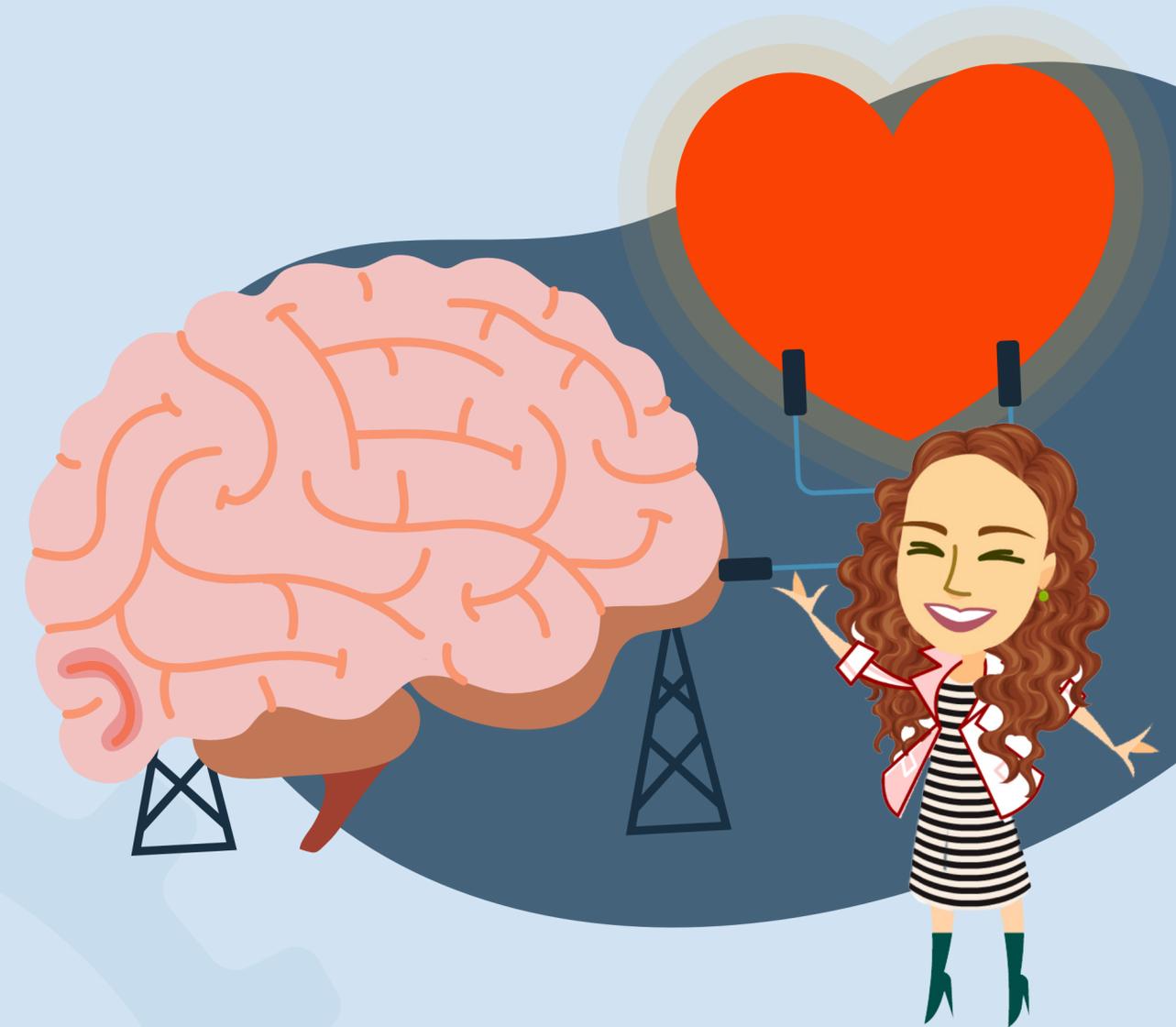
Emotional response is the best indicator of campaign ROI

“People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”

We remember how a message/story/concept makes us feel far more than the details of the message itself. Science/data (and related education) is not an effective sales/brand building tool – it needs to be used at the right time, but not as a primary sales vehicle. A campaign that provokes a strong response – even if it is initially discomforting – may be more effective than one that is simply “resonating”.

HOW TO AVOID THIS:

- **Know how you want your customers to feel:** define your ‘emotional’ KPI and use a methodology that can measure it. Consider how your campaign creates an experience, rather than just delivering information.
- **Start with an end in mind:** relying on over-rationalisation in research is an easy trap to fall into. Ask the most important questions first, to avoid a progressive priming of your audience, leading to them telling you what you want to hear.
- **Recognise and look beyond likability:** ‘preference’ is an insight that needs dissecting and challenging. There is something to learn – it may not be what you think.



Final thoughts

Communications are for building a brand – not a product.

Effective communications testing is about ensuring you are delivering the right brand experience for your customer target group. Good communications testing places this at the heart of the approach taken.

Click here to watch the webinar in full on demand.



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