



Wise Up!

Getting ads right for older viewers



itv

System1





www.itvmedia.co.uk



www.system1group.com

Introduction

How can brands connect effectively with the older generation? Wise Up!, created jointly by ITV and System1, the global experts in ad effectiveness, is a guidebook for making ads with greater appeal to older people.

Wise Up! is a sequel to ITV and System1's Feeling Seen report on the benefits of diverse and inclusive ads. In it we celebrate the brands which make ads that appeal to the over-55s, we explore the key themes that make those ads effective and we'll reveal why better representation of older people in ads is a vital commercial goal.

"Ageing is a topic that should interest all of us - hopefully we all get to grow old happy and healthy. With Wise Up!, we set out to see how prominently older people are featured in today's ads and how they perform among this under-represented group. We highlight a range of approaches that work well to give brands and agencies confidence to create brand-building campaigns that will excite, delight and ignite spending amongst this sought-after demographic. Let Wise Up! be your how-to guide for getting ads right for older viewers and a reminder that getting older opens up new opportunities for advertisers."

Jon Evans Chief Customer Officer, System1

"Despite the UK's ageing population, age is often a less discussed aspect of inclusion. But this is a group whose economic power is significant so it's more important than ever for both programming and advertising to feature the full spectrum of age diversity."

ITV is committed to helping its advertisers understand how to bridge this gap and show older generations in a positive and accurate light. Wise Up! is not only a fascinating conversation starter, it's an actionable accelerator of change for our diverse society."

Kate Waters Director of Client Strategy & Planning, ITV



Kate Waters
Director of Client Strategy
& Planning
ITV



Jon Evans
Chief Customer
Officer
System1



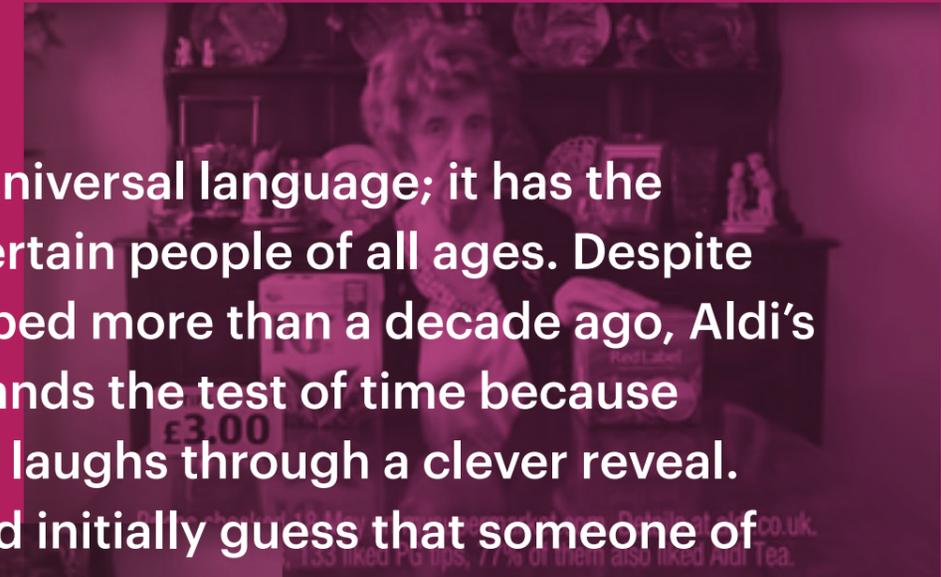
Forward

As the UK's largest commercial broadcaster, we want to use our power as programme makers to enable broad and diverse storytelling and to ensure that these stories are portrayed authentically. When we think about representing the over 55s it is important to take an intersectional approach and authentically and honestly reflect the rich diversity of this group. In this group there will be the founders of the feminist movement, Rastafarians, the first same-sex couples to marry and disability rights campaigners happily existing alongside and in some cases also identifying as Nanas and Grandads.

At ITV, we've made real strides forward over the last year, with highlights including people of colour and disabled people feeling better represented by ITV on-screen, launching our £80 million Diversity Commissioning Fund and supporting Google's Black Founders with £1 million of commercial airtime. We want to create and showcase content by, with and for everyone, connecting and reflecting modern audiences.

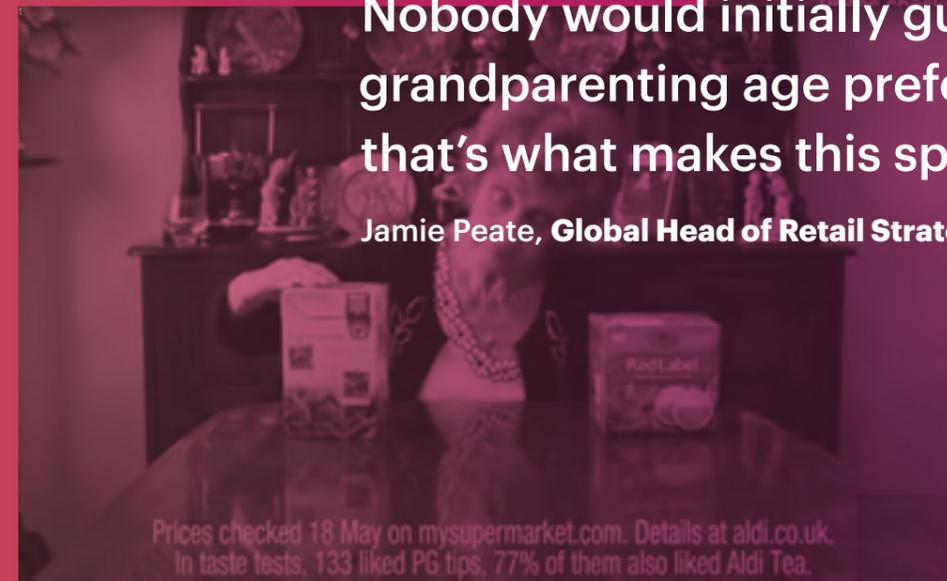
We have more work to do. The structural inequalities we see across society and the broadcasting industry are being addressed at ITV too. We're working to be part of the solution – removing barriers for all under-represented groups, changing the structure of the industry and shaping culture for good.

Ade Rawcliffe, **Group Director on Diversity and Inclusion, ITV**

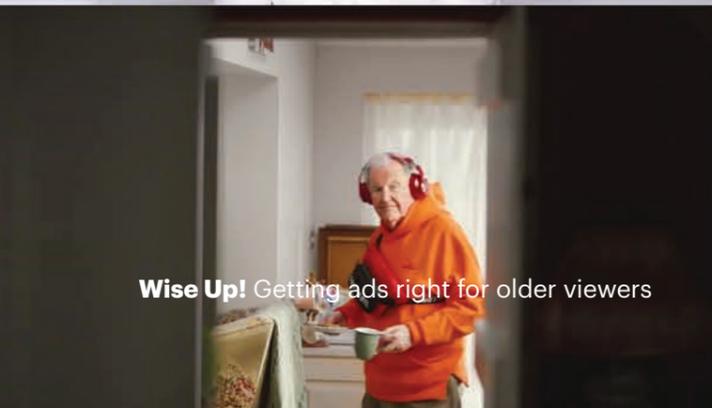


“Humour is a universal language; it has the power to entertain people of all ages. Despite being developed more than a decade ago, Aldi’s ‘Tea’ advert stands the test of time because it delivers big laughs through a clever reveal. Nobody would initially guess that someone of grandparenting age prefers gin rather than tea – that’s what makes this spot work.”

Jamie Peate, **Global Head of Retail Strategy/ Head of Effectiveness, McCann**



Wise Up! Getting ads right for older viewers





The Background

“Family having fun together – different generations. Love it.”

Participant, Nintendo’s “Family Moments”

Older people are a unique demographic when it comes to diversity. It’s the one “minority” everyone ends up joining and almost nobody is in a hurry to do so. Some of the old don’t feel old, others don’t want to be reminded that they’re old and plenty of young consumers don’t want to think about getting old.

The result has been an ad industry where age represents an unspoken taboo. When older people appear in ads, too often brands show them as stereotypes and objects of pity. They miss the complex realities - and the many joys - of getting older.

But things are changing. When we were analysing recent ads for 2021’s Feeling Seen study on diversity and inclusion in advertising, we noticed how many new ads were looking to reflect and uplift the experiences of older people. There’s a raised awareness in adland of the need to do right by the middle-aged and older, and campaigns like “Me No Pause” are working hard to change a culture that renders older women, in particular, invisible.

This trend isn’t going away. The population in most Western countries is getting older. While not every older person is well-off, as a group their spending power is immense. Their patterns of media consumption are notably different from younger people but their cultural experiences and touchpoints are relevant in ways no older generations have been before.

Imagine someone from the UK entering their 60s now. They were a teenager when Jaws and Star Wars came out; they remember Charles and Diana, not the Coronation and danced to disco not rock’n’roll. It is very unlikely that their lifestyle, interests and shared references match up to the image of “old” they carry around in their heads! Advertisers who want to reach them need to represent them better.

This report addresses the problem of age representation head on. Our aim is to explore the scope of the issue - what advertisers are doing to represent older people - and also to spotlight the ways brands are getting it right to inspire others to make equally effective ads that resonate with the older audience.

The work is in two parts - a meta-analysis of 1,000 ads from the System1 Test Your Ad database to see how prominently older people are featured in ads right now. And then a showcase of best practice across six creative trends, giving a glimpse of the diversity and range of approaches that work for this complex demographic.

The Work

The quantitative phase of our research asked “How visible are older people in UK advertising?” We defined “older” as age 55+, then took 2021’s top 1,000 ads by media spend in the UK, representing creative work from 422 different brands, from AA to Zilch, and coded them for age and gender to determine how many feature older women, older men and older people in general. It’s the most comprehensive study to date on the level of age representation in UK ads.

The quantitative-qualitative phase explored “How do you make ads more effective for older audiences?” We selected 56 ads from System1’s Test Your Ad database that either feature or target older people. We tested these ads with a nationally representative (“nat rep”) sample to understand how the general public feels about the ads (see below for the headline measures our method generates).

We also tested each ad among a custom sample of older people, selecting for age category and gender too where appropriate. The aim here was to understand how these ads land differently among the groups (e.g., 55+, 65+, 55+ women) which feature in the commercials.

In our research, 27 of these ads achieved a Star Rating of 3-Stars or higher among these custom samples. These ads have proven appeal to older audiences and we’ve focused on them in this report to understand the themes and choices that led to this success.



**Aldi
Tea**
(McCann)



Nat Rep



65+ Women

“Interestingly, this ad wouldn’t have worked with a younger person. Eighty-two-year-old Jean takes your assumption of what old people are like and throws it on its back – Jiu Jitsu Jean! This ad became a metaphor for the Aldi brand, too. From what we’ve seen, the humour knows no age group.”

Neil Lancaster, **Creative Director, McCann**; and Dave Price, **Executive Creative Director, McCann**

Headline Measures

The effectiveness model we use in Wise Up! is the same one System1 uses for commercial ad testing. Central to the model is a viewer's emotional response to the ad - positive emotional response builds positive brand associations and reinforces existing memory structures and make the brand more likely to be chosen in the future. The more people feel, the more people buy.

The model combines emotional response with other metrics to create three headline measures of effectiveness.



Star Rating

The Star Rating is based on the degree and intensity of positive emotion towards an ad. It predicts the potential of an ad to contribute to long-term brand growth if invested in, and runs from 1- to 5-Stars. The higher the Star Rating, the more brands should invest in and build campaigns around the ad. Around half the ads in System1's database score only 1-Star, and only around 1 in 100 ads get the top 5-Star rating.



Spike Rating

The Spike Rating predicts the potential for an ad to drive short-term sales. The Spike Rating is based on how intensely viewers respond to the ad and how quickly they connect the ad to the brand. The higher above 1 the Spike Rating rises, the better - 1.3 or higher is a strong score, but highly memorable campaigns for well-known brands can hit 1.5-1.6 or more.



Brand Fluency

Brand Fluency is a measure of how quickly and easily a brand is recognised. Fluency is a warning light - if Fluency is low then the ad may be emotional but isn't making proper use of brand assets. As with Spike, the level of Fluency a brand should aim for depends partly on its existing fame. A Fluency rating of 70 would be strong for a new brand's ad but very poor for Coca-Cola or McDonald's.

Diagnostic Measures

We also ask diagnostic measures. These don't feed into the headline effectiveness measures, but they do deepen our understanding of the response to an ad. These diagnostics are vital in creative development - they give pointers as to how an ad can be improved and where its weaker spots are. For ads which look to reflect age diversity, this feedback is invaluable, as the numbers alone can't tell the full story of how an ad performs.



Intensity

How strongly a viewer feels the emotion - if they feel one at all. Both positive and negative emotions can be strongly felt, and Intensity affects the Star and Spike scores as well as being a useful indicator of how hard an ad is hitting its audience.



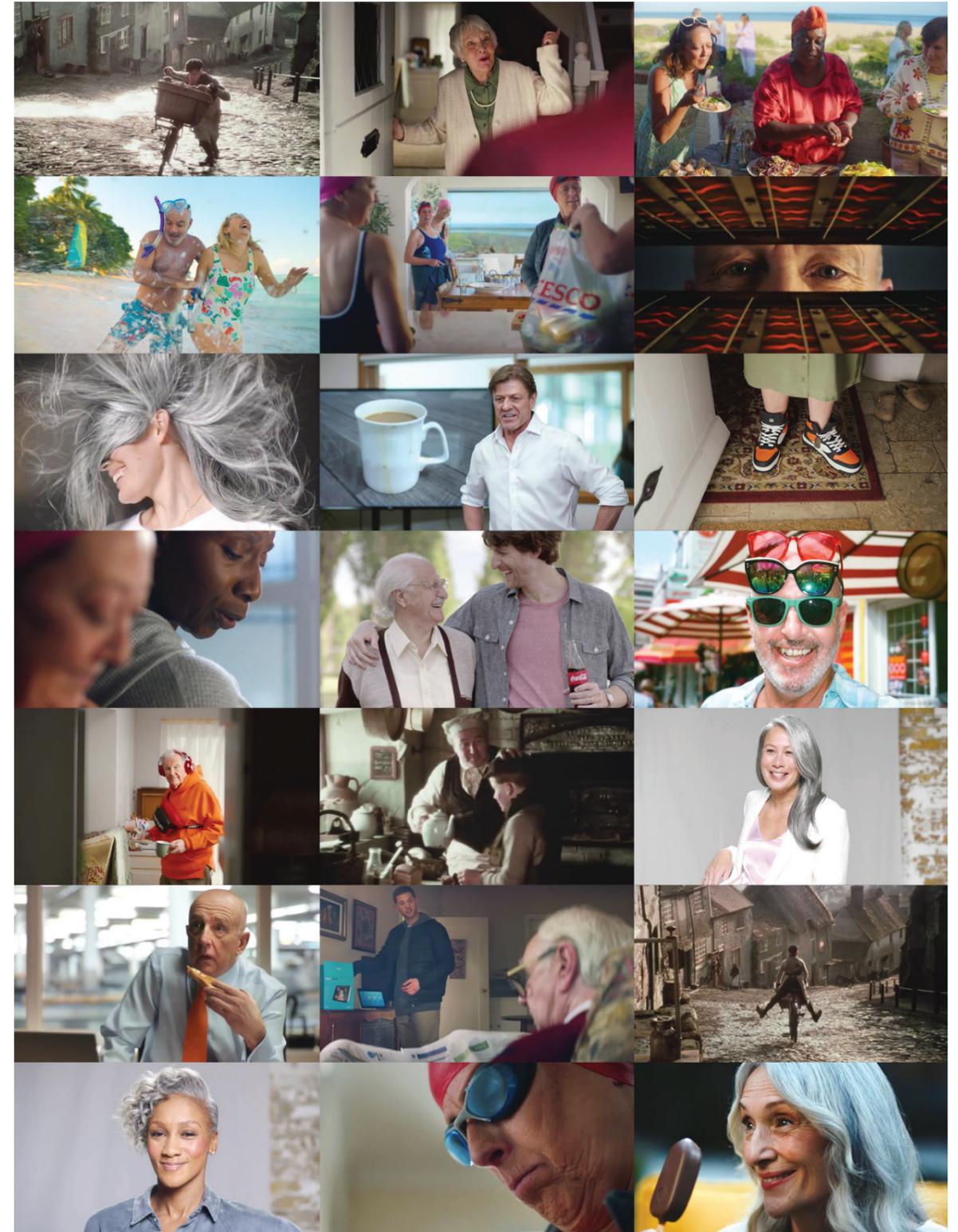
Reasons for Emotion

We ask people why they felt the emotion they did. They can give their reason from scratch, agree with someone else's reason or expand on that reason. This tells us not just what is driving emotion, but which reasons are most widely felt.



Key Associations

We also ask what viewers took away from the ad - the main words, phrases or associations they're left with. It's a way of uncovering whether the ad is communicating what the brand wants it to.



What We Found

A massive opportunity

Why should brands care about older people? The numbers speak for themselves. Older people are a massive segment - almost one-third (32%) of the UK population (source: ONS). What's more, they own the majority (60%) of the nation's wealth (source: gov.uk). Not every older person is wealthy or has high disposable income, but many have both purchasing power and the freedom to use it.

From a media perspective, 55+ viewers are an important audience for advertisers. BARB figures show that the segment accounts for 65% of TV impressions.

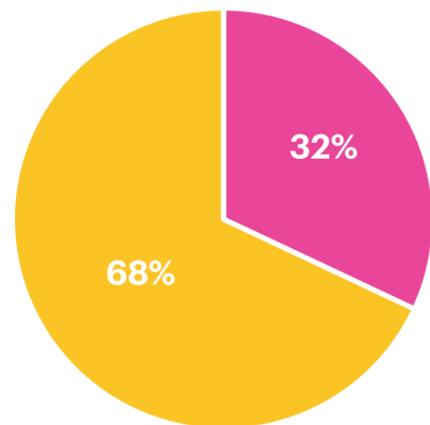
They're numerous, they're wealthy and they're watching your ads - a massive opportunity for brands. And yet our study showed that only 23% of the 1,000 highest-spend UK TV ads even featured older people.

A nearly invisible generation

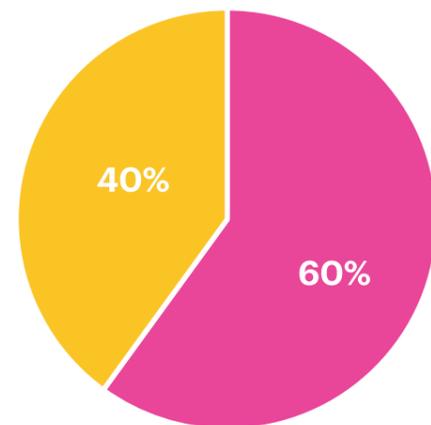
Older people are under-represented in ads. As this report will make clear, representation isn't a magic wand - particularly for older consumers. But the fact that only 23% of ads feature people aged 55 and older strongly suggests that this segment isn't top of mind for brands and agencies. For older women and for those 65 and over, the gap between population and representation is even wider. What's holding advertisers back from featuring older people?

One issue is that the people making the ads are themselves far younger than the population as a whole. The average age of UK ad agency employees is 34, with only 6% over the age of 50. Ageism in the advertising industry is outside the scope of this report - but when the older generation is invisible within the agencies making ads, is it any wonder its on-screen visibility is also so poor?

Share of Population by Age (ONS)



Share of Wealth by Age (GOV.UK)



Key ● 0-54 ● 55+



Watching Ads

65%

Of TV impacts from viewers 55+



Creating Ads

34 YRS

Average age of an agency employee

6%

Of agency employees are over 50



Starring in Ads

23%

Of TV ads feature a 55+ character

Easy to reach, hard to please

Older people are a huge commercial opportunity for brands, and under-represented on screen. So the obvious solution might be to improve the level of representation. But it's more complicated than that. Representation alone doesn't make ads effective for older people.

In the second phase of this study, we chose 56 ads which do feature strong roles for older people and tested them among both the general public (a nat rep sample) and a custom sample of older people (55+). We were looking for a "diversity dividend" - evidence of improved performance among demographic groups when they see themselves represented in ads. For other demographic groups - from Black British to LGBTQ+ people - we've found plenty of evidence that representation can produce an uplift in emotional response.

But among older people, "diversity dividends" are far rarer. Only 5 out of 56 ads showed an uplift, with some performing considerably worse among the custom sample. Older people may be easy to reach, but they're harder to please.

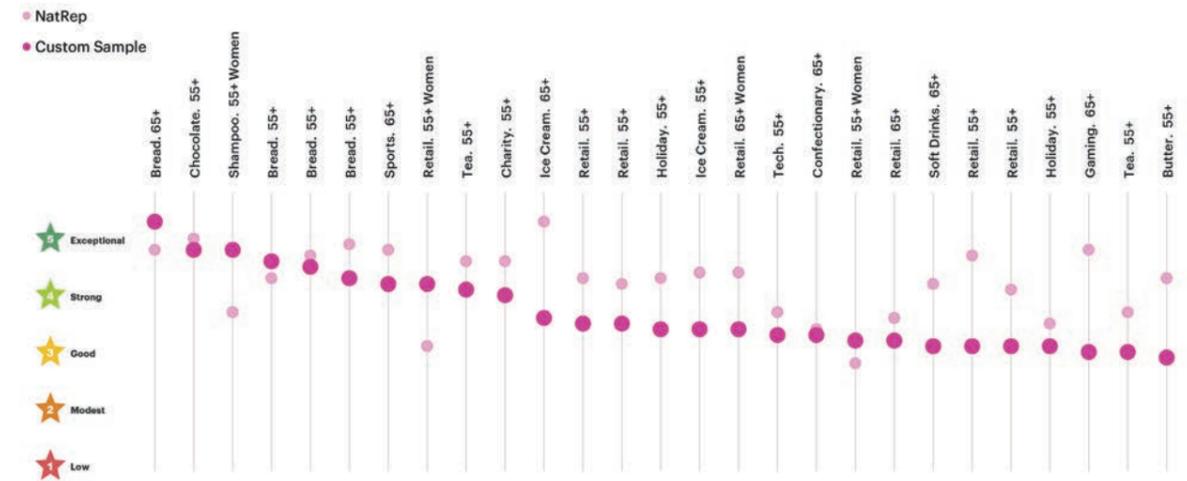
What drives this? As mentioned above, it's very rare for older people to actually have a hand in making the ads which star them. That won't help matters. But when we analysed comments on the ads we tested, we saw wider complaints about length, generic content and lack of interest. Evidence from System1's Test Your Brand database shows that older consumers feel less emotional engagement towards brands in general.

There's also evidence of an attention deficit among older viewers. Research from Amplified Intelligence has shown that attention improves with age both in terms of quantity and sustainability - people pay attention to screens in front of them for longer. But there's a sharp drop off for the 55s-and-over, when attention plunges back to the levels of easily distracted 18-24-year-olds. It's simply much harder to get older people to pay attention to your ads.

In other words, you need to tear up any stereotypes you have of older audiences being easily pleased, passive viewers. They are ad-literate, ad-weary, demanding and hard to engage. Older audiences are tough crowds who need understanding, not just visibility.

So while better representation can help, the issue runs deeper.

Age 55+ | Nat Rep vs. Custom Sample



Gender disparity

As we explored the data from the meta-analysis further, it became clear that even within the overall category of 55+ consumers there was a real disparity along gender lines. There's a visibility issue among older people in ads generally, but this becomes truly acute when you consider older women. While we found several ads which prominently featured older men, it was far rarer for older women to star in ads.

Despite this, some of the ads which did star older women - like M&S' anniversary ad featuring Twiggy, and Tesco's commercial starring a group of older sea swimmers - were among the most successful with the custom sample and even managed to score "diversity dividends" (uplifts in effectiveness with the custom sample). The rarity of ads featuring older women means we don't have enough data to fully explore this trend, but we would at least offer the hypothesis that older women consumers respond better to age representation on screen. Later on in the report, we explore ideas about why this might be, rooted in the different ways older men and women are shown in ads.

System1's methodology has been validated in experiments with The Institute of Practitioners in Advertising (IPA) and shown to predict market share change within categories.

For this study it's a perfect fit because of the central role it gives to emotion. How people feel about an ad - happiness, anger, surprise or a range of other emotions (including none) - is crucial when you're trying to measure the degree to which an ad makes an under-represented group feel included.





The Themes

123456

Despite the fact that older people are poorly represented on screen and are less likely to enjoy the ads they see, we were able to analyse a selection of ads which do perform well with older viewers. Our study identifies six key themes which consistently work for older viewers. With these themes in mind, advertisers can better represent and entertain their older customers.

Theme

1



Tesco Delivering Christmas



Hovis Boy on the Bike 2019

Theme 1: Power up your ads with cultural references.

We know from work done by Orlando Wood in his books *Lemon* and *Look out* that cultural references can be the secret sauce of effective advertising. They intrigue viewers, capture attention and reward experience. For older viewers, cultural references can be even more powerful.

If younger generations are digital natives, older people are cultural natives – they experienced the iconic pop culture of the 20th century first hand. From Netflix' *Stranger Things* to Marvel Comics to the Elvis movie, 20th century pop culture is a resource we can't stop mining. And to older viewers, this stuff isn't "nostalgia," these experiences were formative and are still vivid.

A great example of this is M&S' anniversary film starring Twiggy, which takes the viewer on a tour through decades of fashion and food culture. The tone isn't sentimental or nostalgic, it's proud and knowing. The ad connected very strongly with older viewers.

Cultural references work because they speak to one of the things older people prize most - their breadth of experience and knowledge. Because 20th century pop culture is so iconic, it can work for a wider audience too who get the general idea even when they haven't seen the source material. An ad like Warburton's "Pride and Breadjudice," starring Peter Kay in a costume drama parody, performed very well with older viewers and the general audience, who didn't need to get any specific reference to enjoy the overall good humour.

We also found ads that are more obviously nostalgic but whose appeal is timeless, like Hovis' remake of their 1973 classic "Boy on the Bike," which got a 4.9-Star response among the general public but hit 5.4-Stars with the custom older sample. "Boy on the Bike 2019" works because of its strong sense of place and time and the relationship between the boy and the older man - all things which have universal appeal.

"It is good to put some humour into adverts, made me laugh. Peter Kay is brilliant."

Participant, Warburton's "Pride and Breadjudice"

Theme 2



Tesco Sue's 'Dive In' Crispy Pork Noodles



Amazon Vicar & Imam

Theme 2: Make the most of friendship.

The lack of age representation among the people who make the ads can mean that portrayals of older people are stereotyped, focusing on the parts of ageing younger people fear, not the parts older people enjoy. One example of this is how loneliness and friendship among older people are handled. It's far more common to see older people portrayed as lonely or sad than it is to see older people in friendship groups or just having fun together.

This isn't to knock the many brands who have done amazing work raising awareness of loneliness as a real issue that does disproportionately affect the elderly. But it's only half the story. For many, old age is a time when friendships really bloom - in book clubs, swimming groups, social clubs and many more areas. Where brands do celebrate older friendship, our testing shows it's a proven winner.

The best example of this is Tesco's "Sue's 'Dive In' Crispy Pork Noodles" in its long-running Food Love Stories campaign, celebrating a real-life group of women who swim together (see "Star Performers" for more on this ad and the campaign). An Etsy Christmas ad had a similar theme and did well among the general public.

Gender does play a part here - ads that celebrate older friendship often star women, and ads which spotlight loneliness often feature men. Sadly this does reflect a genuine divide, with older men finding it harder to keep friends and find new ones (source: Movember Foundation). However there are some ads which do spotlight friendship between older men - Amazon's classic "Vicar and Imam" still scores well not just for its message of tolerance between faiths but for how it shows older guys enjoying each other's company.

Older friendship is a relatively untapped area for brands and advertisers but it makes perfect sense for a theme to explore. It avoids one of the main risks brands run into when addressing loneliness - falling into the "sadness trap" of telling a story which doesn't resolve its negative emotion effectively.

"The ad we developed for Amazon is about thoughtfulness, connection and friendship. You don't normally see stories of people this age as well as interfaith friendships or men being thoughtful to each other. The characters' age isn't the thing upon which the ad is built - it's just an additional detail that gives it a bit of nuance."

Lori Meakin, Co-founder, Joint

"It showed friendship - thoughtfulness and caring."

Participant, Amazon's "Vicar and Imam"

Theme

3



Hovis Farmer's Race



Tic Tac Slingshot

Theme 3: Remember they weren't born yesterday.

Too often we see older people in ads as objects of pity or slightly bewildered by the modern world. The granny baffled by an iPhone is a stereotype, and like most stereotypes, you can get more creative mileage and humour out of inverting it than simply going along with it.

Brands and creatives need to remember that older generations weren't born yesterday. Ads which show older people as smart, wily and coming out on top can hit emotional highs. In Hovis' 2011 "Farmers' Race," for instance, a group of mostly older farmers enjoy a full-tilt, slapstick race across the English countryside with plenty of twists, turns and visual comedy to enjoy. It's a broad, comic ad and not intended as realistic but it still drove positive response among both older viewers and the general public.

These ads can work especially well if the older people are seen as coming out on top against younger characters. Why? We know from analysis of the System1 Test Your Ad database that one of the most effective types of happiness is schadenfreude - pleasure at the misfortune of others. Schadenfreude in an ad is like chili in a sauce - it packs a real punch but too much of it can ruin the overall flavour. So, one way of using it well is to show people on the losing side who you'd normally expect to be winning - that way the pleasure of schadenfreude doesn't come off as unfair.

A great example of this is What3words' "Neighbours," where a young man gets bamboozled by an elderly couple - see the "Star Performers" section for more. Another is Tic Tac's surreal "Slingshot," with a pair of older women enjoying themselves to the complete bafflement of two young hipsters.

These ads aren't cruel, but they poke gentle fun at the young and show older people defying stereotypes - and the older viewers in our custom sample were very happy to see it.

"It was light-hearted, amusing and the women came out on top!"

Participant, Tic Tac's "Slingshot"

Theme 4



International Olympic Committee What Agnes Saw



Magnum Get Old or Get Classic

Theme 4: Experience is priceless.

Some of the most famous adverts in UK history star older people and treat them with reverence and love - think the Yellow Pages' classic "Fly Fishing By JR Hartley" ad for instance, so successful it prompted a publisher to actually create the (fictitious) book from the ad!

It's hard now to find ads which give older people, their experiences and achievements that kind of respect. But when brands do this, they can strike a chord with both older consumers and the wider public. This theme is related to older people's depth of cultural experiences (see theme #1 above) but it's more active, emphasising how they've used, and use, that experience to still do remarkable things.

An ad like the International Olympic Committee's "What Agnes Saw" is a fine example of this - one of the few ads which saw an uplift in performance when tested with older viewers, it also performed strongly among the general public. It focuses on the oldest living Olympian and the changes in sport she's seen in her lifetime which have led to greater opportunities for women and girls today. But the ad never takes its focus off Agnes herself and her own achievements.

Not all ads that celebrate experience are so serious-minded. Magnum's "Get Old Or Get Classic" imagines the world's coolest resort for older people, having fun with redefining "old" and "classic." It's a shift in perception British advertising needs more widely. After all, in many world cultures, elders in society are treated with more respect than in the UK. Brands can help shift perceptions in a more positive direction by celebrating the experiences and strength of older people.

"To get age representation right, the fundamental thing is to really see older people - they exist, they are important, and they are part of your customer base. Portray them, represent them, and celebrate their life. The beautifully shot Magnum commercial features all older people just enjoying themselves in a sophisticated and stylish way."

Jeremy Hine, CEO, MullenLowe Group UK

Theme

5



Cadbury Fence



Amazon Sharing is Caring

Theme 5: Part of a greater whole.

As we said above, there's a stereotype of older people as being lonely or feeling forgotten - and while there's a lot more to their experience than this, there's also a real vein of truth in the cliché. So one area where brands and advertisers already do excellent work in appealing to older people is in showing and celebrating their connections to wider society.

In fact, when we looked at the ads which performed well with older people, more of them fit this theme than any other. Not surprisingly, many of them focused on family - P&O's "The Big Kid" showed a middle-aged man enjoying an exotic holiday with his daughter and her family, and Amazon's "Sharing is Caring" has a grandfather quickly pick up on the potential of his Alexa unit.

"Sharing is Caring" also touches on one of the other themes we've talked about - showing older people as smart as, if not smarter than, the young. Coke's "Grandpa" picks up on yet another theme, the idea that older people's lives and experiences are valid and worth celebrating, or in this case actively learning from them, as their lifestyles were in many ways healthier than modern ones.

But not every ad needs to centre family - Cadbury's "Fence," a top performer among the general public and the custom sample, shows an elderly neighbour and the kids who live next door and while there's sadness in the ad it's resolved by the end. Neighbourhoods and wider communities should be celebrated too, and have rich potential for powerful emotional storytelling.

"At Joint, we identify universal stories that will connect with a broad audience but then often tell them in a way that authentically represents people who don't typically get seen in ads. So with this Amazon campaign, we centred on the universal topic of loneliness as well as technology connecting people rather than getting in the way of human interaction. It's a story of how music can bring together two men of different ages with different lived experiences."

Lori Meakin, Co-founder, Joint

"Amusing ad, caring family"

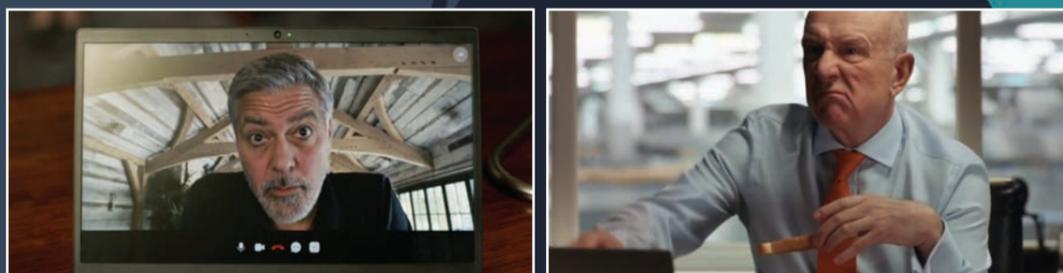
Participant, Amazon's "Sharing is Caring"

Theme

6



Yorkshire Tea Where Everything's Done Proper: Sean Bean



Warburtons It Can Wait

Theme 6: Stars have potential.

When we do see older people on screen it's often because they're already famous. Advertisers and brands are happy to cast celebrities as older protagonists, and older viewers - like most people - enjoy seeing the stars, but only if they entertain.

Of the seven ads we tested which scored 4-Stars or higher among the custom older sample, four of them starred a celebrity. So, is celebrity the key to keeping older viewers happy with ads? It's not quite that simple. Almost always, what's appealing to older viewers isn't that the celebrity is appearing in the ad, it's that they aren't taking themselves too seriously.

For instance, take Yorkshire Tea's "Where Everything's Done Proper" campaign. Both the "Where Everything's Done Proper: Sean Bean" ad starring Sean Bean, and the "Tina's Leaving Do" ad starring Sir Patrick Stewart got a positive response from older viewers, with the Sean Bean ad breaking the 4-Star barrier. These ads are very tongue in cheek, with a strong contrast between the bombastic celebrities and the very down to earth workplace roles they're acting in. It's exactly the kind of self-knowledge that our older custom samples want to see from celebrities. Cast a star, for sure - but have the star act like an ordinary person to really get older viewers on-side.

"I love Sean Bean and Yorkshire Tea."

Participant, Yorkshire Tea's "Where Everything's Done Proper: Sean Bean"

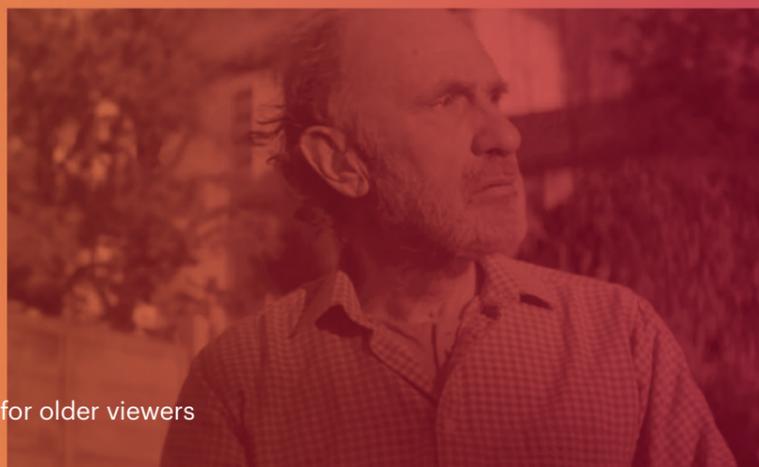
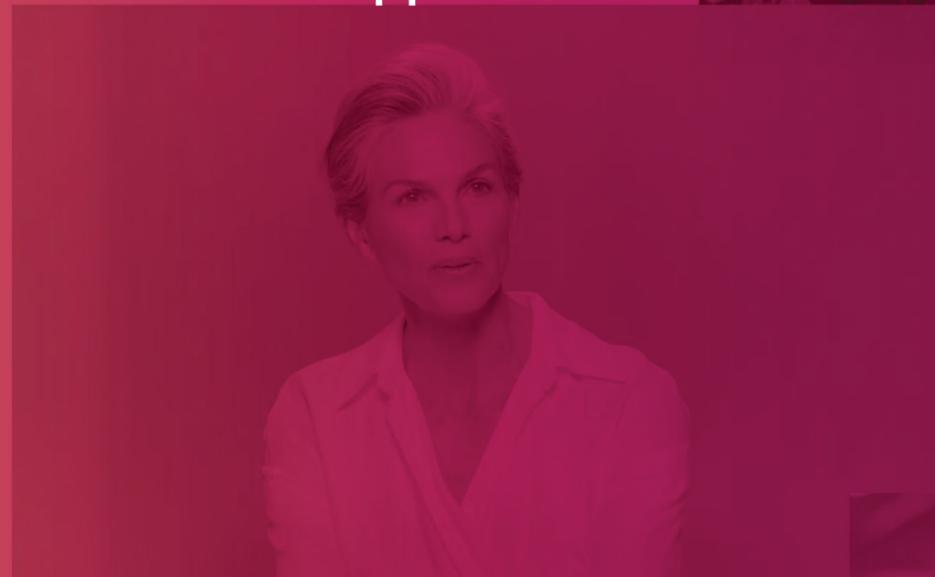
"Evoking that British sense of humour and using celebrities, particularly the older national treasure celebrities who are respected and widely recognised for being good at a certain thing, has enabled us to appeal to a broad group of people. The ads feel classic and I think if you get it right, it can work for the older audiences and the new."

Dom Dwight, Marketing Director, Bettys & Taylors of Harrogate

Star Performers



We've picked nine of the ads to look at in more detail, as we felt they provided particularly effective lessons in how these themes interact to appeal to older audiences.



Hovis

Boy on the Bike 2019

(Ridley Scott Associates)



Nat Rep



65+

Hovis' original "Boy on the Bike" ad dates from 1973, but in recent years it's been given a second life. After decades of the commercial coming at or near the top of every Britain's favourite ads countdown, the bread brand chose to release a remastered version. New shots reflect changes in packaging and branding but otherwise the ad is very much the same as it was in the 1970s.

"Boy on the Bike" was already an ad set in a very specific time and place - it takes place in an idealised Edwardian Yorkshire, existing mainly in the memories of 1970s older people. So what people are seeing now is a double reference - for a time and place almost nobody truly remembers but also for the era when the ads were first shown.

What's astonishing is that this ad, so steeped in a bygone era, still performs brilliantly among the general public as well as among people old enough to have seen it the first time around. It gets a 4.9-Star score with the nat rep sample which then rises to an exceptional 5.4-Stars among 65+ viewers.

Does that 5-Star rating with older viewers suggest more brands should simply revive and rerun classic ads? It's certainly an option more should consider. Perhaps because older people are so rare in agencies, advertising is a creative form that has little time for its own past. While some older ads will have lost their appeal, others will still feel fresh and relevant, and may especially attract an audience who saw them when younger.

That said, not every old ad is as great as "Boy on the Bike"! It's noticeable how Hovis' ad isn't just straightforward nostalgia - in fact it touches on two of the big themes we've said older viewers want more of. First the ad celebrates the experience and life of an older person - the unseen narrator. But it also features an older character onscreen in the form of the baker, a crucial part of their community and treated with respect and reverence. Without that, it's questionable whether we'd see such an uplift among the older audience.

"It's gently reassuring and makes me smile."

Participant



"WOW. That takes me back a few years."

Participant

[View Test Your Ad Report](#)

Tesco Sue's 'Dive In' Crispy Pork Noodles

(BBH London)



2.9

Nat Rep



3.3

55+ Women

Tesco's Food Love Stories is one of the most successful campaigns of the last decade in the UK, reinventing the idea of how a mass audience campaign works by making sure its ads resonate strongly with somebody rather than trying to appeal to everybody. Tesco do this by making a lot of Food Love Stories executions, each of which are designed to represent the authentic lives and experiences of the people they feature. If one doesn't resonate with you, that's fine - there are so many different stories that one of them is sure to.

This approach makes Food Love Stories one of the biggest diversity success stories out there, and it's no surprise one of their ads was among the few to score better among an older custom sample (55+ women) than the general public. "Sue's 'Dive In' Crispy Pork Noodles" showcases that recipe but it's also based on a real life sea swimming group for older women, the Blue Tits. So the ad's as much a celebration of older friendship as it is of tasty food.

What's striking about our test results isn't just that the ad broke the 3-Star barrier among older women. They also had a very different kind of response. While the general public sample mostly commented on the brand and the food, and hardly talked about Sue and her swimmer friends, the 55+ women took a lot of surprise and joy from seeing older female friendship so well represented on screen. Thirty-nine percent of them listed friendship as one of the ad's top associations, as opposed to only 27% of the nat rep sample.

What this suggests is that while overall it's hard to get a "diversity dividend" among the older demographic, within more specific populations and with the right approach there's a real hunger for ads which do reflect the lives and pleasures of older people, and friendship is one of the most powerful ways to leverage that.

"[The ad shows the] friends are happy and sharing delicious looking food."

Participant



"Research tells us that the older demographic can be more distrusting of advertising and therefore more difficult to engage. It's why we focus on resonance rather than reach. Individual stories that are universally relatable – those featuring authentic, vibrant characters and strong connections – make an impact with older viewers."

George Rivers, Head of Campaigns, Tesco

[View Test Your Ad Report](#)

What3words Neighbours

(Neverland)



Nat Rep



55+

Storytelling and humour are valuable tools for any brand, and they can be especially useful for a tech start-up looking to show people what they're all about and win their technology a hearing. Location and mapping app what3words is new enough that Brand Fluency scores for this ad were poor, but only time and usage can solve that problem, and meanwhile the ad scored 3.8-Stars - very good for a tech ad and an unfamiliar brand.

For the purposes of Wise Up!, though, it's an almost as strong performance among older viewers (3.4-Stars) that's impressive. What3words' ad is a great example of one of our major themes - show older people as smart, not at sea in the modern world. That's particularly important in the case of tech ads and brands, which can condescend to older viewers or ignore them entirely.

In the ad, a young man has had his parcel deliveries go missing and has tracked them to the door of an elderly couple that live nearby. One of them sweetly informs him that no, she hasn't seen any parcels... while in the background her husband walks past wearing the designer headphones the baffled lad was looking for. (The point being this wouldn't have happened if he'd been using what3words to fix his location.)

It's an example of an ad which uses older people in a very amusing way but without making them the butt of the joke. Because they're the ones getting the upper hand, and because they're so charming you can't help but feel on the elderly thieves' side, the ad works both for the general public and for older viewers too.



"Great advert. Funny but gets the point across."

Participant

[View Test Your Ad Report](#)

Pantene Pro-V Power of Grey

(Grey London)



Nat Rep



55+ Women

If one single ad sums up the challenges and contradictions of the Wise Up! report it might be “Power of Grey,” which features grey- and silver-haired women of all ages celebrating their natural hair colour (and promoting a special silver hair shampoo from Pantene).

The ad is explicitly about celebrating one of the most widespread cultural signs of age, but it does this by decoupling it from ageing - people see grey hair as solely about being older but to the participants it’s a sign of acceptance, of their personal style as an individual woman and of experience. So it’s an ad about rejecting the ageist idea that “grey” means “older” which still appeals very strongly indeed to older people. The “diversity dividend” uplift it received among 55+ women was the largest in the whole study, taking the ad from a good 3.8-Star performance to the cusp of a 5-Star score.

While even in the custom sample some criticised the range of women as unrealistic, in general the ad got extremely positive comments and associations with confidence and beauty. It’s a great lesson in how to engage with people who are older and might well look older but don’t feel older, and who want to feel confident and like their beauty and lifestyle choices are worth celebrating.

It’s also a good example of how a brand can address wider social issues - in this case ageism and the phenomenon of older women’s invisibility - while also staying well within its lane. Who better to have a point of view on grey hair and its perception than a shampoo company? One of the constant issues in our reports on diversity and visibility has been this tension between a brand wanting to show purpose and do good but at the same time straying into areas where it has very limited credibility. Pantene do not make this mistake.



“Long overdue conversation about accepting the beauty of grey [hair].”

Participant

[View Test Your Ad Report](#)

Cadbury Fence

(VCCP)



The last few years of Cadbury ads have stuck to a distinctive and highly effective aesthetic - simple, story-driven vignettes of everyday life, shot and acted naturalistically with no music, so it feels like your ad break is being interrupted by a heart-warming slice of ordinary life. It's a style that's entirely at odds with the ultra-busy, in-your-face approach most confectionery brands adopt and audiences really respond to it.

"Fence," Cadbury's 2019 ad for Dairy Milk, is one of the very best examples. In its year of release it topped System1's rankings of the year's most effective ads, and it still lands as a 5-Star ad with the general public. Impressively, it also manages to hold on to almost all that positive feeling with the over-55s, ending up a 4.9-Star ad for them.

This is some achievement - not just because it's rare for ads to do this well with the older audience but because it's an ad which takes a big risk, showing an old man, living on his own and not shying away from negative emotions as he finds himself at loggerheads with the kids next door who keep kicking their football into his garden.

Of course, there's a happy ending to the story as the kids give the man a chocolate bar to make up for the accidental hassle. But even so, we often see images of lonely older people score poorly with viewers as the ads raise the spectre of wider problems a happy ending can't fully resolve. For instance, John Lewis, kings of sentimental storytelling, featured a lonely old man in their "Man In The Moon" ad in 2015 and ended up with their lowest ever Star Rating.

So what do Cadbury get so right? It's all down to that executional style - they keep it simple and let the positives and negatives in the story feel natural. It never feels like "Fence" is making a bigger point or over-reaching itself - it's just telling a story and it takes all its characters seriously. It ends up making a very positive point - older people are part of the wider community and you can help them feel that way. But it does so with an ad that feels story-driven, warm, human and never preachy.

**"[There's] understanding between young and old.
Nice and warm world."**

Participant



"We always try to show the world as it really is rather than romanticizing or idealizing it. While there was no mandate that we had to have an elderly person in the ad, we were looking for a story of human generosity, which is what Cadbury Dairy Milk is all about. It just so happened that this tale of an older man and the children next door felt the most emotional and powerful. In telling that story, Fence speaks to the genuine day-to-day experiences of an older man living on his own, which is probably one of the reasons why it resonated with older people."

Hannah Martin, **Planning Director, VCCP**

Warburtons It Can Wait

(ENGINE; Freuds)



4.4

Nat Rep



4.7

55+

Warburtons have an advertising strategy that's unique - though it probably shouldn't be, as it works so well for them. Rather than constantly release new ads, the bread brand does one every year or two and makes it a true blockbuster designed to be talked about, with top drawer celebrities like Robert De Niro and The Muppets. Each of them starts with the same scenario - boss Jonathan Warburton in his office, taking a call or visit from a megastar.

It's that scenario which Warburtons play on and subvert for "It Can Wait," in which the celebrity on the line is none other than George Clooney. But Warburton keeps possibly the most famous man in Hollywood on hold - because it's time for his morning toast.

At 61, Clooney is well-placed to appeal to the 55+ age group. And indeed they love the ad, giving it a Star Rating of 4.7 - a little higher than the general public's 4.4-Stars. But they don't love it just because it's someone their age on screen - a white male Hollywood star isn't doing the work of representation here. No, they love the ad because of its cheek, and its insistence on treating a celebrity just like a normal person. Yes, older viewers love to see stars. But they love it more when those stars come down to earth a little.

"Love white bread toasted and George Clooney!"

Participant



[View Test Your Ad Report](#)

M&S

Celebrating 125 Years

(RKCR/Y&R)



Nat Rep



55+ Women

Anniversary ads are often an excuse for brand self-indulgence - does anyone really care how old their bank, supermarket or washing powder is? But used well they can also be an excellent way of engaging older viewers. The chance to look back over a brand's history is also a chance to look back over its customers' history - and that's the approach M&S took in this ad.

Brand ambassador Twiggy fronts the ad, which is a tour through 125 years of M&S history starting from its humble origins as a "penny market" selling cheap, good quality groceries. Sensibly, though, the ad quickly jumps to the 1960s and Twiggy's own heyday, moving into territory its audience has living memories of. The ad pokes fun at some parts of the past but is always proud of the brand and, crucially, of its customers, presenting their concerns (from 1970s women's lib to 21st century environmental issues) as its concerns too.

The result is an ad which works well for the general public - scoring 3.2-Stars - but really excels with the custom sample of 55+ women, who both like to see Twiggy and enjoy the historical overview. It's a great example of recognising that older people are "cultural natives" - participants in the bits of cultural history which are still common currency for later generations. M&S does that while celebrating its own legacy and emphasising how it plans to keep on playing that role in the future.

"Twiggy and M&S are so quintessentially British. Good representation of the brand."

Participant



[View Test Your Ad Report](#)

International Olympic Committee

What Agnes Saw

(Dirty Robber)



4.9

Nat Rep



4.3

65+

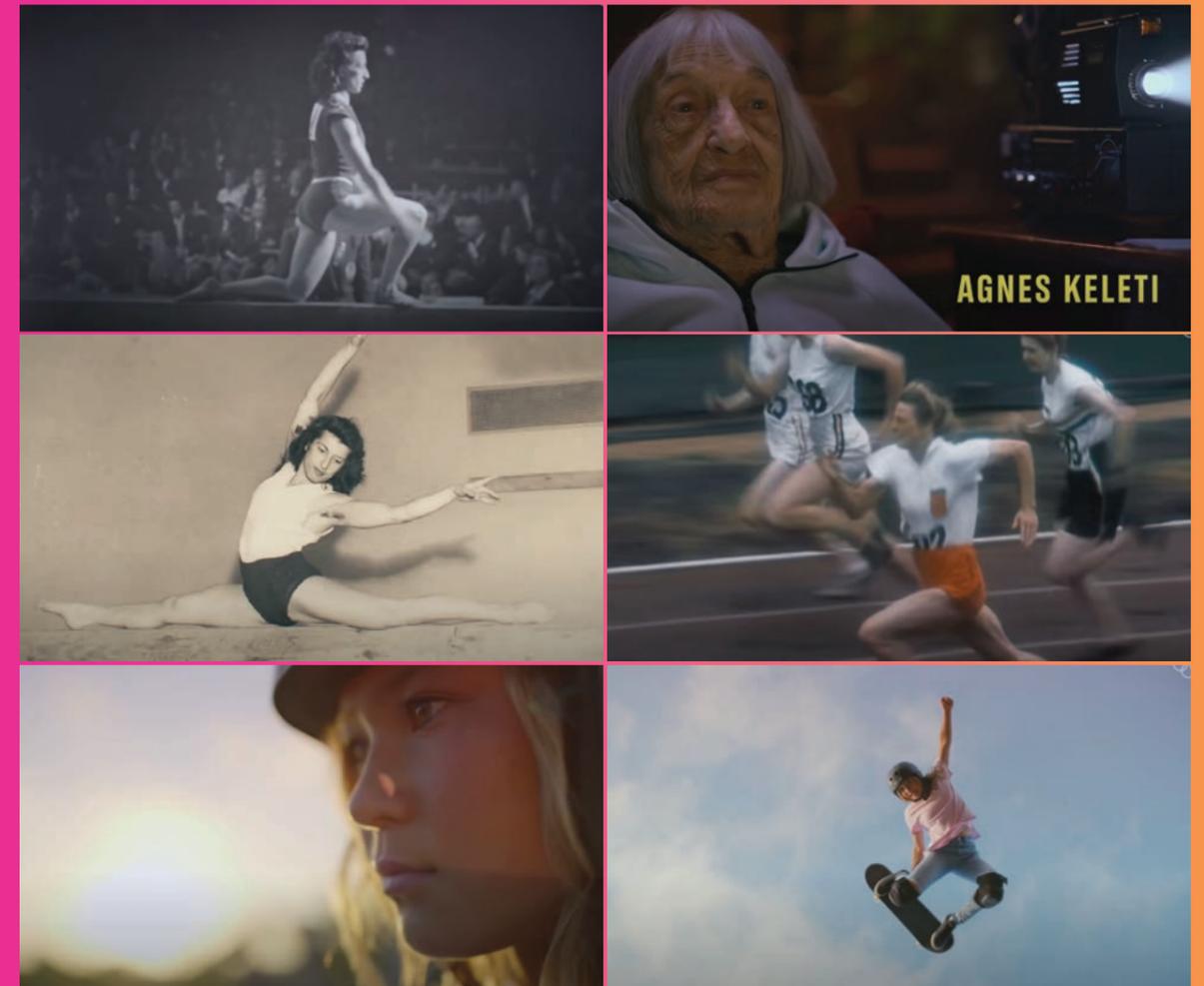
Agnes Keleti, the world's oldest living Olympic Champion, turned 100 in 2021, and the IOC marked the occasion by making her the focus of this ad promoting the postponed 2020 Games. The ad celebrates the achievements of a century of Olympic sport, praises the resilience of sport during the Covid-19 pandemic, and links the generations by moving from Keleti's story to that of teenage skateboarder Sky Brown. Stylistically the IOC borrows Nike's highly successful formula of a montage of extraordinary sporting moments overlaid with an inspirational voiceover.

The ad made a big impression on the general public, landing at 4.9-Stars with our nat rep sample. But it also did well with the custom sample of 65+ people, who gave it 4.3-Stars, a slight dip but still a very strong score. The emphasis on history and achievement, and the choice of a little-known centaguenarian to frame the ad, landed well with the older audience.

It's an example both of how positive, inspirational ads have near-universal appeal and also of some of the themes we've touched on in this Wise Up! report. There's the reminder that the older generation were eye-witnesses and participants in history with the examples of indelible sporting achievements and breakthroughs in women's inclusion in sport. There's also the sense that Agnes - and through her other older athletes - is still part of a broader community and continuity of sporting achievement. The ad is a reminder of the achievements older people have made, and also a reminder not to forget them.

"Lived a full life and seen a great deal."

Participant



[View Test Your Ad Report](#)

Amazon Sharing Is Caring

(Joint)



Nat Rep



65+

Amazon have a consistent record of representing older people well in their ads. As well as “Sharing Is Caring,” their cheeky ad for Alexa and the Amazon Echo, they won awards for “Vicar And Imam,” a 2016 Christmas spot for Amazon Prime, in which an elderly priest and imam are firm friends, united partly by knee pain and the ability of Amazon to get them a remedy for it quickly. Both ads landed in 3-Star territory with the 65+ age group, with “Sharing Is Caring” scoring a little higher with the custom sample at 3.3-Stars, but “Vicar And Imam” being stronger with the nat rep sample (4.2-Stars).

What makes these ads work well for older viewers as well as the general public? They treat older people with respect, as intelligent and resourceful. “Sharing Is Caring” is particularly strong on this. The ad opens with a grandson helping his grandpa around the house. He does the washing up and installs his new Alexa software, programming it with reminders about meals. The overall tone is loving but a little stereotypical, seeming to show a helpless old man who needs his relative’s assistance with the modern world.

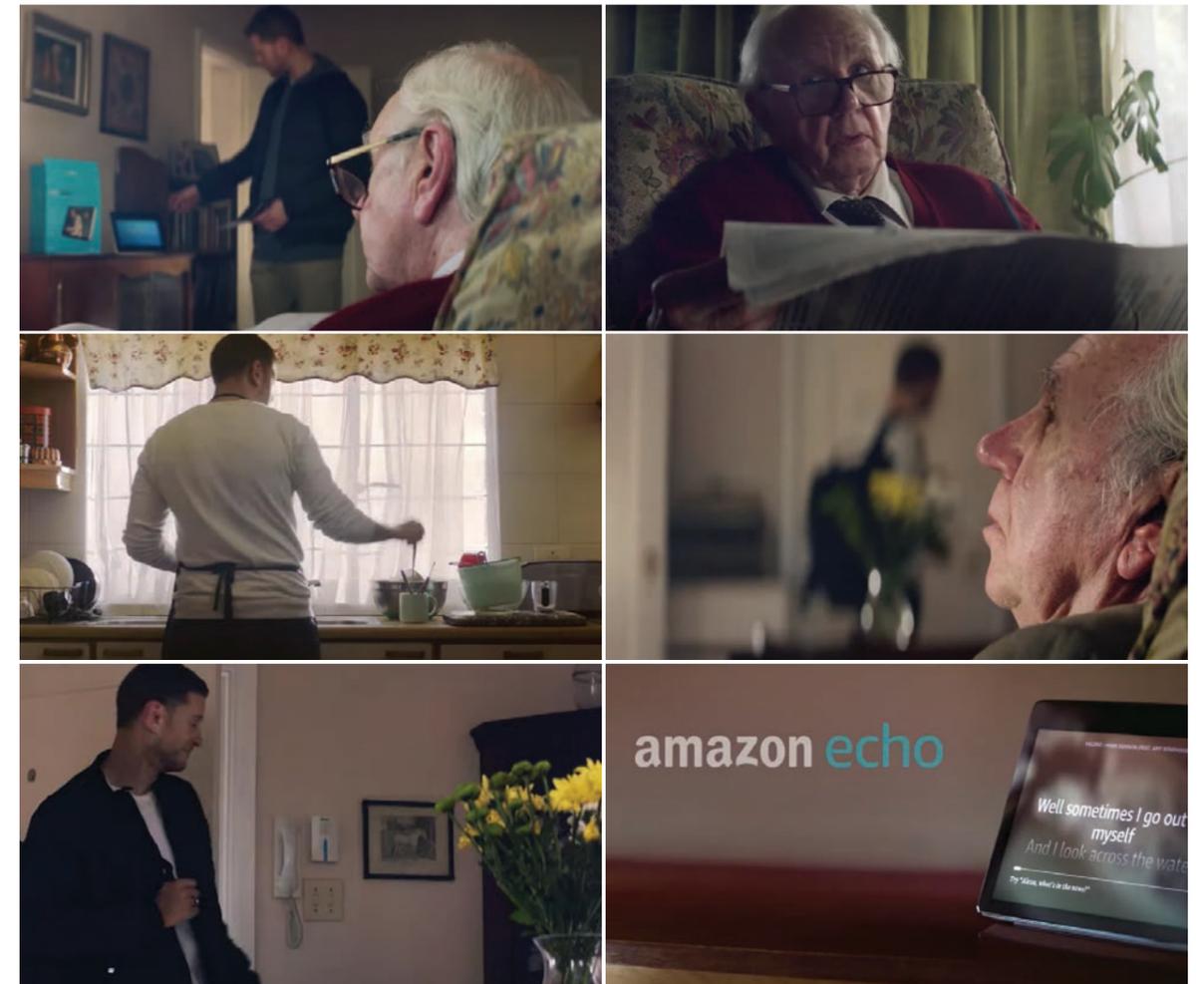
But then the grandson leaves and grandpa gets up from his chair, checks he’s gone and happily tells Alexa to play the song his grandson was humming as he did the chores. So grandson comes back in to find the older man bopping to Amy Winehouse’s “Valerie.” He’s sharper - and hipper - than he’s been given credit for, and the two men can bond over the music they share.

The ad successfully hits two of our big themes for making ads which appeal to older viewers. One is showing older people as resourceful and smart, the other is showing them as part of a family or community, not as lonely individuals. “Vicar And Imam” meanwhile celebrates older friendship, a third of our major themes.

What the two ads have in common is a willingness to look beyond stereotypes in their portrayal of older people. We might not think of older men of different faiths as having much in common, and we might not consider Amy Winehouse when making grandpa a mixtape. But real life is less predictable, and richer, than our stereotypes encompass, and that’s a good message to bear in mind when making ads for older viewers too.

“It’s a funny ad and lovely that the grandson helps his grandpa.”

Participant



[View Test Your Ad Report](#)



Dumb Down!

A niche segment

Nostalgic

Lonely

Easily confused

In decline

Invisible

**Patronising celebrity
spokespeople**



Wise Up!

Big and high-income

Culturally rich

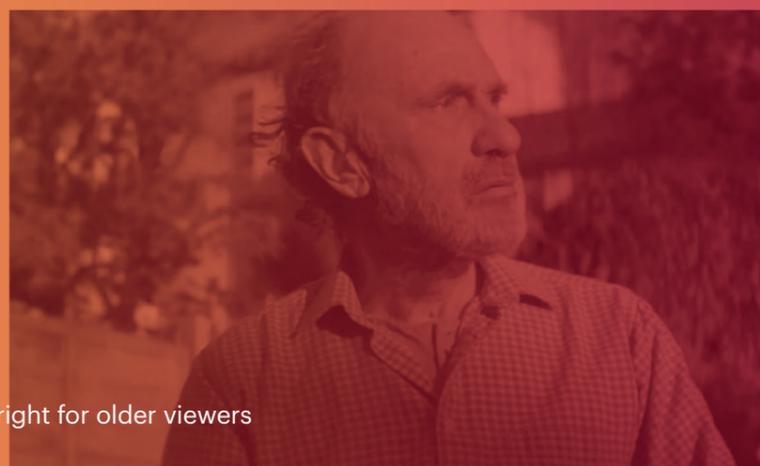
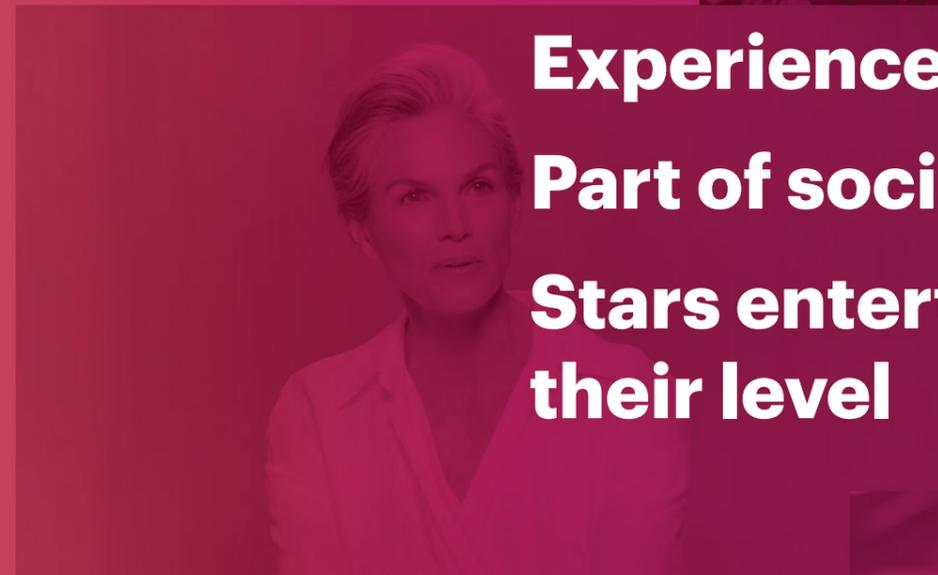
Firm friendships

Smart and savvy

Experienced and strong

Part of society

**Stars entertaining at
their level**





Conclusion

123456

When talking about specific target audiences, it's common to hear advertisers complain how hard they are to reach. Older people present an opposite problem. They're easy to reach - a large segment of the population who represent the majority of impressions on TV, the widest-reach advertising platform. But they're hard to please - ad-weary, critical, knowledgeable and heartily sick of being patronised.

How do you engage older audiences? The six themes in this report offer a way.

1

Power up your ads with cultural references.

Older people are cultural natives with first-hand experience of the most iconic pop culture moments of the 20th century. Lean into the excitement, energy and timeless cool of the moments they were there for.

2

Make the most of friendship.

Friendships often grow stronger as we age and are a huge source of joy and entertainment. Celebrating friendship among older people – rather than focusing only on loneliness – is a winning path for advertisers.

3

Remember they weren't born yesterday.

Ditch the misconception that older people can't navigate the modern world. Ads showcasing older people as intelligent, quick-witted and successful can hit emotional highs.

4

Experience is priceless.

To older people, their experiences are often their greatest strength. Don't see older people as an "other" or a part of history - recognise older means wiser and celebrate those experiences.

5

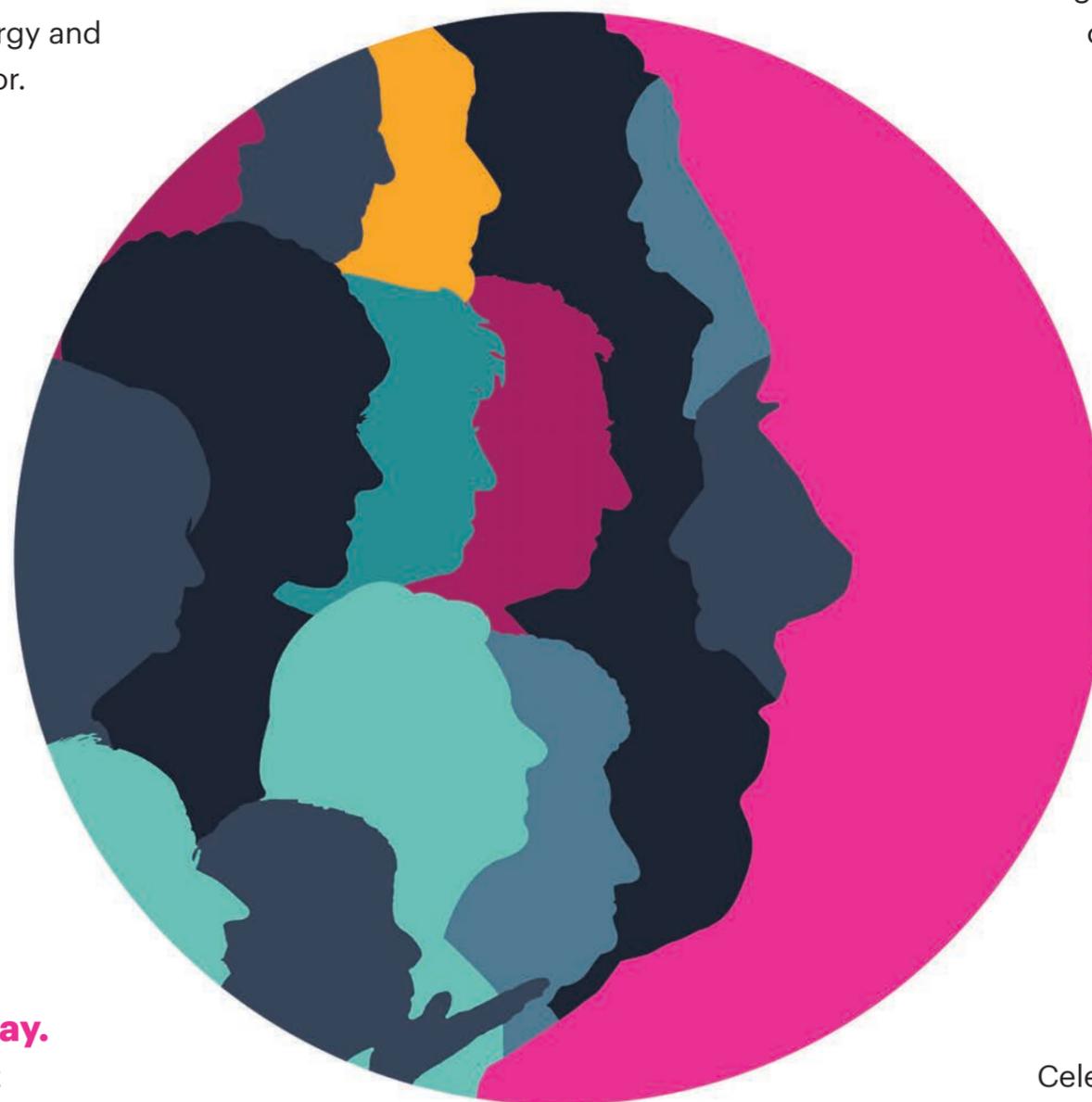
Part of a greater whole.

Some of the most successful ads starring older people emphasise their ties to the wider society they live in. That can mean family, but also friends, neighbours and whole communities. Showing these ties wins among older viewers and the general public alike.

6

Stars have potential.

Celebrities are a welcome sight for older people but they have to earn their place, and that means entertaining not just showing up. Include stars who make ads funnier, especially if it involves a bit of gentle self-mockery.



Word to the Wise

Not everyone is lucky enough to get old, but most of us will, and most 55-year-olds still have decades of activity ahead of them. You wouldn't always know that from advertising, as older people - and especially older women - remain a rare sight in ads compared to their share of the UK population. Representation on its own won't fix the problem, though - ads have to entertain and older viewers are one of the toughest, most media-savvy crowds around.

It's crucial to show older people how they want to be seen - smart, strong, friendly, funny and full of experience. When brands wise up and get it right, the benefits are enormous.

What Next...

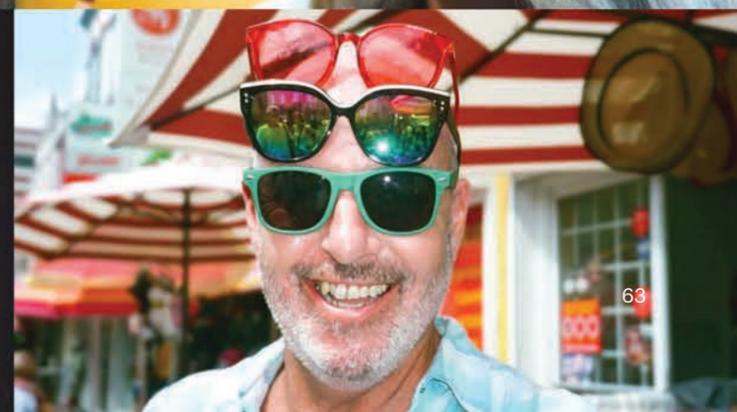
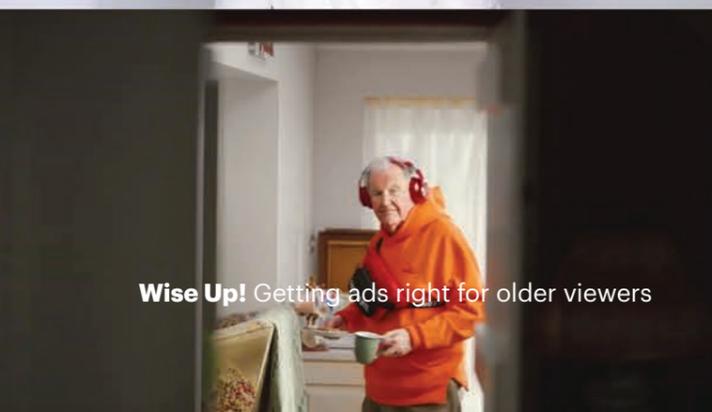
ITV is the nation's biggest commercial broadcaster. We are proud of our ability to reach and engage huge audiences through our programming and passionate about helping our advertisers to do the same. Our partnership with System1 is part of our ongoing commitment to build an evidence base for creative effectiveness. Contact your ITV rep to find out more about how we can help you connect more effectively with our viewers.

System1 is the world's leading marketing decision platform. We use the power of emotion to predict how effective advertising will be in the short and long term. Using Test Your Ad we can measure the potential of any ad with a custom diverse audience and offer guidance on ways to improve it so you get the maximum return on your investment.

Learn more at [system1group.com](https://www.system1group.com)



Wise Up!



System1

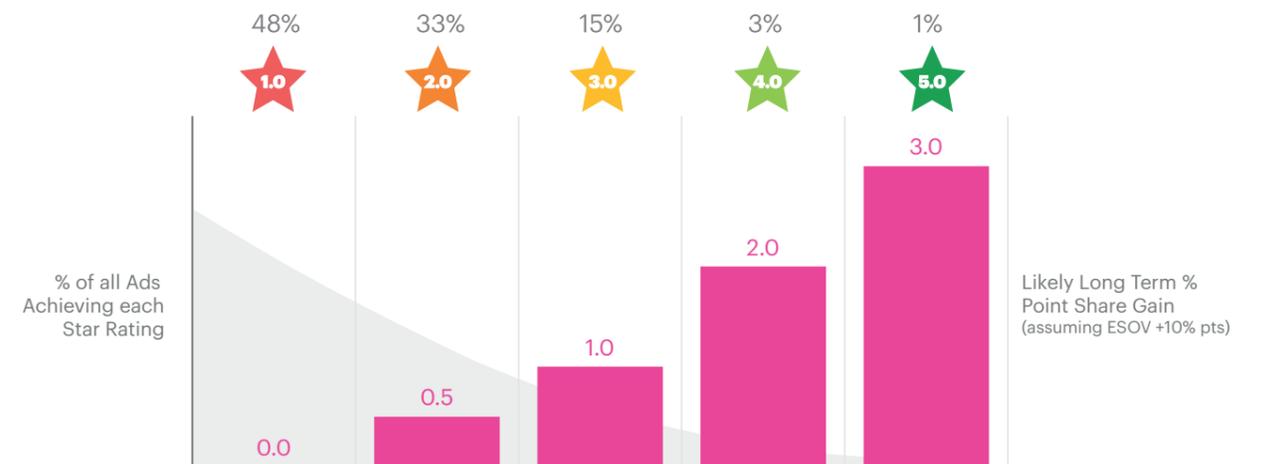
Methodology Summary

Star Rating



The **Star Rating**, from 1 to 5. This predicts the potential for the creative quality of an ad to contribute to long-term brand growth. The higher the **Star Rating**, the more brands should invest in and build campaigns around the ad. Around half the ads in System1's database score only 1-Star, and only around 1 in 100 ads gets the top, 5-Star rating.

The **Star Rating** is based on how positively viewers respond to the ad.



Note: Share is used to account for changes in the size of the category. Gain is an average and other factors will impact on performance (such as price, promotion, availability, competitor advertising quality, ESOV etc)
Based on System1 Test Your Ad database as of Dec 2021

Spike Rating



The **Spike Rating**, an index where the baseline is 1. The **Spike Rating** predicts the potential for an ad to drive short-term activity - sales, donations or other calls to action. Spike scores below 1 suggest limited or no short-term impact - Spike scores of 1.3 and above predict strong or exceptional activity.

The **Spike Rating** is based on how intensely viewers respond to the ad and how quickly they connect the ad to the brand. The response doesn't have to be positive - for short-term impact, feeling anything is better than feeling nothing.



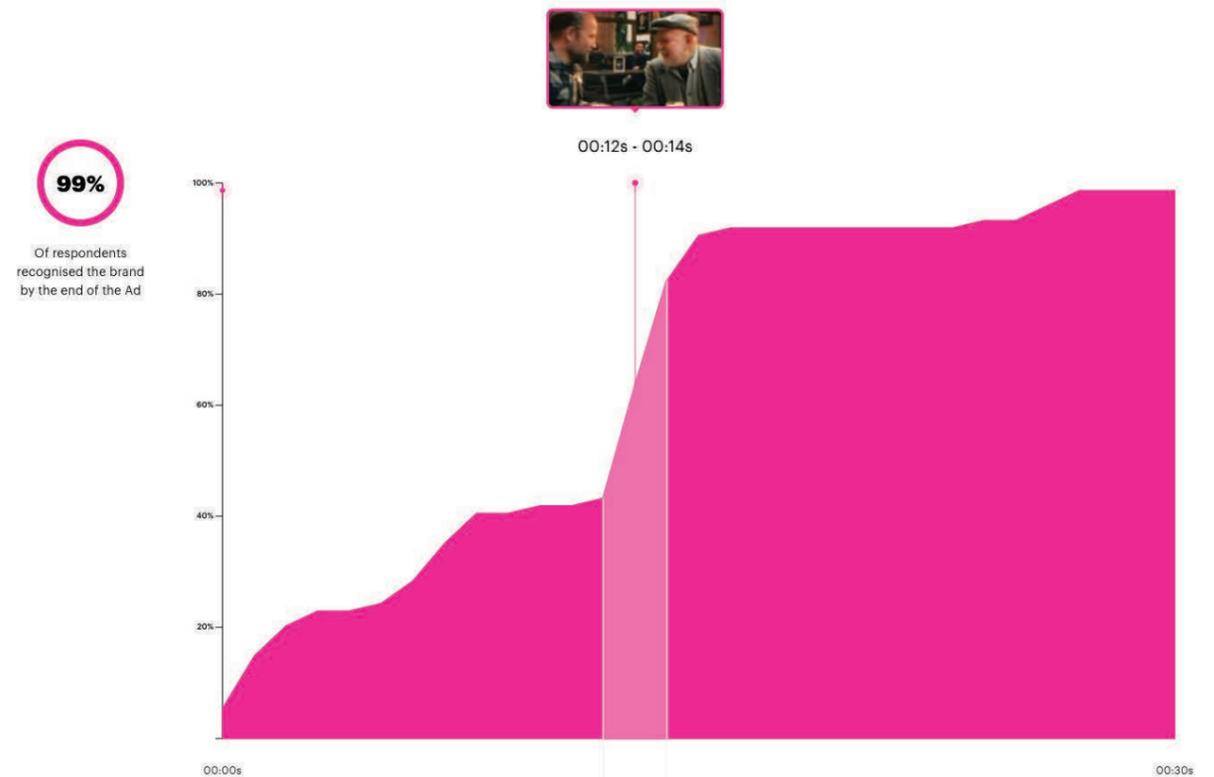
Brand Fluency



Brand Fluency, which is expressed as a 1-100 score. The higher the Fluency, the more recognisable the brand is within the ad. New brands will not usually hit over 50 at first: established brands will score much higher. Fluency is a warning light - if Fluency is low then the ad may be emotional but isn't making proper use of brand assets.

Brand Fluency is based on how many viewers recognise the brand by different points in the duration of the ad.

The moment in your ad where **Fluency** increased the most



Credits

Aldi

Tea

Matthew Barnes
Neil Lancaster
Dave Price

Joint Group Managing Director
Creative Director
Creative Director

Aldi
McCann UK
McCann UK

Amazon

Vicar & Imam

Doug Gurr
Damon Collins

Country Manager - UK
Founder

Amazon
Joint

Amazon

Sharing is Caring

Doug Gurr
Damon Collins

Country Manager - UK
Founder

Amazon
Joint

Anchor

The Café

Hanne Sondergaard
Paul Jordan

CMO and EVP
Creative Director

Anchor
ENGINE

Cadbury

Fence

Martin Renaud
Darren Bailes
Chris Birch
Jonny Parker

Global Chief Marketing Officer
Executive Creative Director
Creative Director
Creative Director

Mondelēz International
VCCP
VCCP
VCCP

Carte D'Or

M'or

Conny Braams
Laura Rogers

Chief Digital and Marketing Officer
Global Creative Director

Unilever
adam&eveDDB

Coca-Cola

Grandpa

Joe Tripodi

EVP, Chief Marketing &
Commercial Officer

Coca-Cola

Joaquin Cubria
Luciano Calio

Executive Creative Director
Creative Director

DAVID The Agency
DAVID The Agency

The Guide Dogs for the Blind Association

Dear Bolt | Sponsor a Puppy

Emma Foulds

Chief Marketing and Strategy Officer

The Guide Dogs for the Blind
Association
Proximity London

John Treacy

Executive Creative Director

Hovis

Boy on the Bike 2019

Jeremy Gibson
Ridley Scott

Marketing Director
Director

Hovis
Ridley Scott Associates

Credits

Hovis

Farmers' Race

Matt Hunt
Danny Brooke-Taylor

Head of Marketing
Executive Creative Director

Hovis
Dare

International Olympic Committee

What Agnes Saw

Christopher Carroll

Digital Engagement &
Marketing Director
Creative Director/Director
Creative Director/Director

International Olympic Committee

Martin Desmond Roe
Travon Free

Dirty Robber
Dirty Robber

Magnum

Get Old or Get Classic

Conny Braams
Tomás Ostiglia

Chief Digital and Marketing Officer
Executive Creative Director

Unilever
LOLA MullenLowe

Marks & Spencer

Celebrating 125 Years

Steve Sharp
Pip Bishop
Chris Hodgkiss

Executive Director
Creative Director
Creative Director

Marks & Spencer
RKCR/Y&R
RKCR/Y&R

Marks & Spencer

Percy's First Christmas

Sharry Cramond
John Gibson

Marketing Director
Creative Director

M&S Food
Grey London

Nintendo

Family Moments

Nick Chavez

SVP, Sales, Marketing
& Communications
CEO/Producer

Nintendo

Laurent Buquet

We Are the Jack's

Pantene

Power of Grey

Katharine Joy Newby Grant

Marketing Director
& Hair Care Commercial Director
Creative Director

Procter & Gamble

Ilana Einfeld

Grey London

P&O Cruises

The Big Kid

Robert Scott
Liam Wilson

Vice President Sales & Marketing
Creative Director

P&O Cruises
Snap LDN

Royal Caribbean

Rise to the Vacation | More Is Out There

Kara Wallace
Ben Salsky
Myles Allpress

Chief Marketing Officer
Creative Director
Creative Director

Royal Caribbean
MullenLowe Boston
MullenLowe Boston

Special Thanks

Bettys & Taylors of Harrogate

Dom Dwight Marketing Director

Joint

Lori Meakin Co-founder

McCann

Dave Price Executive Creative Director
Jamie Peate Global Head of Retail Strategy/Head of Effectiveness
Neil Lancaster Creative Director

MullenLowe Group UK

Jeremy Hine CEO

Tesco

George Rivers Head of Campaigns

VCCP

Hannah Martin Planning Director



www.itvmedia.co.uk



www.system1group.com

Thank you to all the brands, advertisers, creatives and other people who took part in this study. For not taking older consumers for granted. For making them feel seen and valued through inclusive advertising that follows creative effectiveness best practices.

