

THE LONG & THE SHORT *(FORM)* OF IT

How Short-form Entertainment
Builds Brand *and* Converts



System1

 TikTok

FOREWORD

In 2013, Les Binet and Peter Field published *The Long And The Short of It*, setting out the case for restoring a balance between long-term and short-term approaches in marketing. It laid the foundation for a fundamental reset in thinking about how brand-building and performance marketing work together.

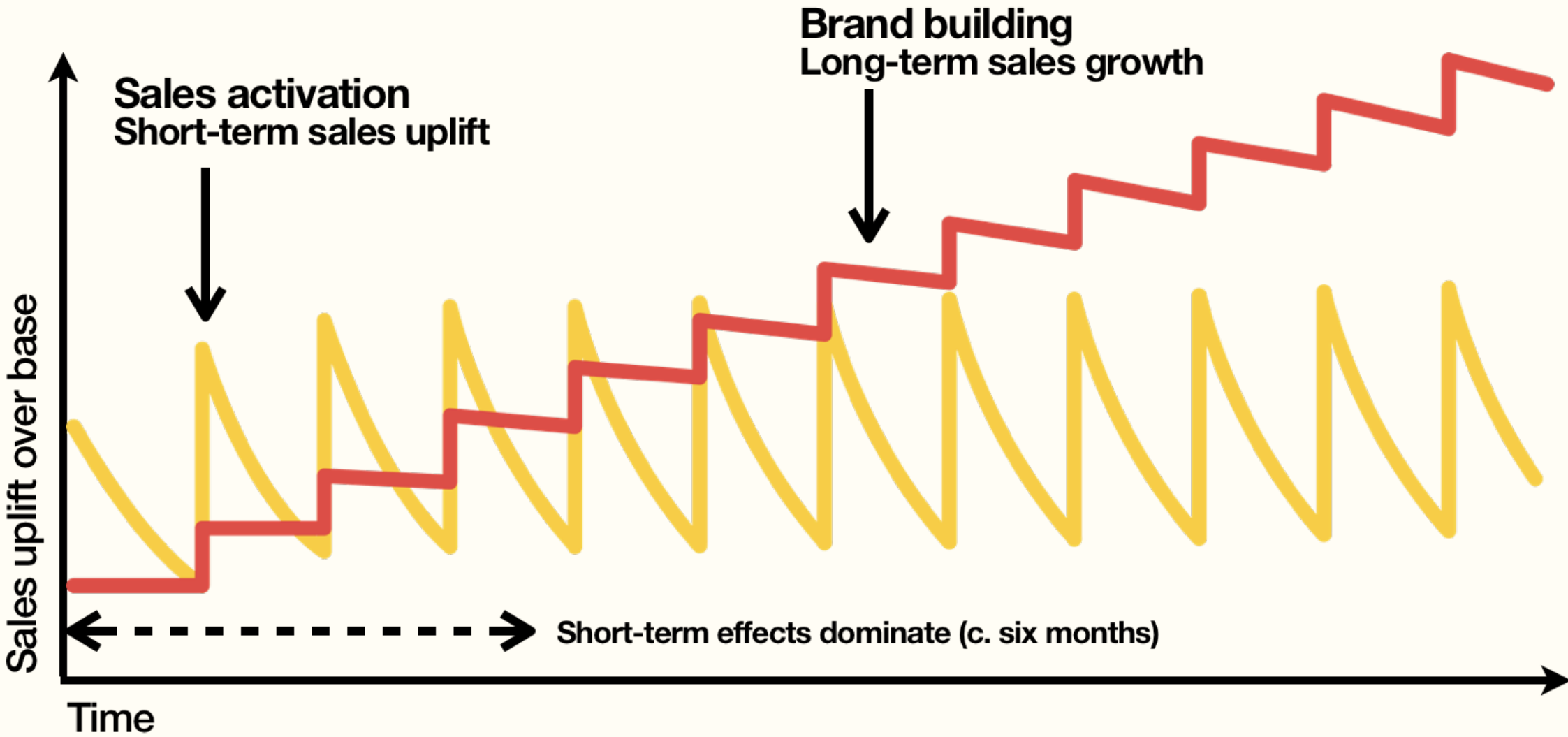
More than a decade on, thanks in large part to Binet and Field’s seminal paper, marketers know they must balance the Long and the Short, but what about the Form of it all? Marketers are aware of the what and the why of long- and short-term marketing goals, but the media landscape has changed with some brands now relying heavily on short-form video. Even the way we produce ads has changed, creators have stepped up to deliver campaigns for brands. This leaves us with a big question: **how do we convert and build brands effectively with short-form video?**

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This is an industry-changing opportunity. With large parts of today’s media landscape being skippable, ads that stop the scroll can deliver enormous effectiveness dividends. Creativity has never mattered more.

Rooted in the thinking Binet and Field established, this publication demonstrates how brands can grow with short-form video, with System1 and TikTok combining deep creative analysis with in-market results for the very first time. We used System1’s Test Your Ad Social platform to analyze the creative response to 887 short-form video ads across 8 key global markets from 92,000+ TikTok users. We connected these to 350+ separate in-market result studies to reveal the real impact of short-form creative quality on brand-building and conversion. We’ve also explored the impact of high ad frequency to understand the real dynamics of creative fatigue and how to combat it.

#THELONG&THESHORTOFIT



Source: The Long and the Short of It: Balancing Short- and Long-Term Marketing Strategies by Les Binet and Peter Field, 2013

This research builds on the work System1 has done in proving how the emotional response to advertising, through creative choices in “traditional” media, can explain and predict market share gain. We offer powerful new findings on how marketers can maximize creative effectiveness in a short-form video led digital landscape.

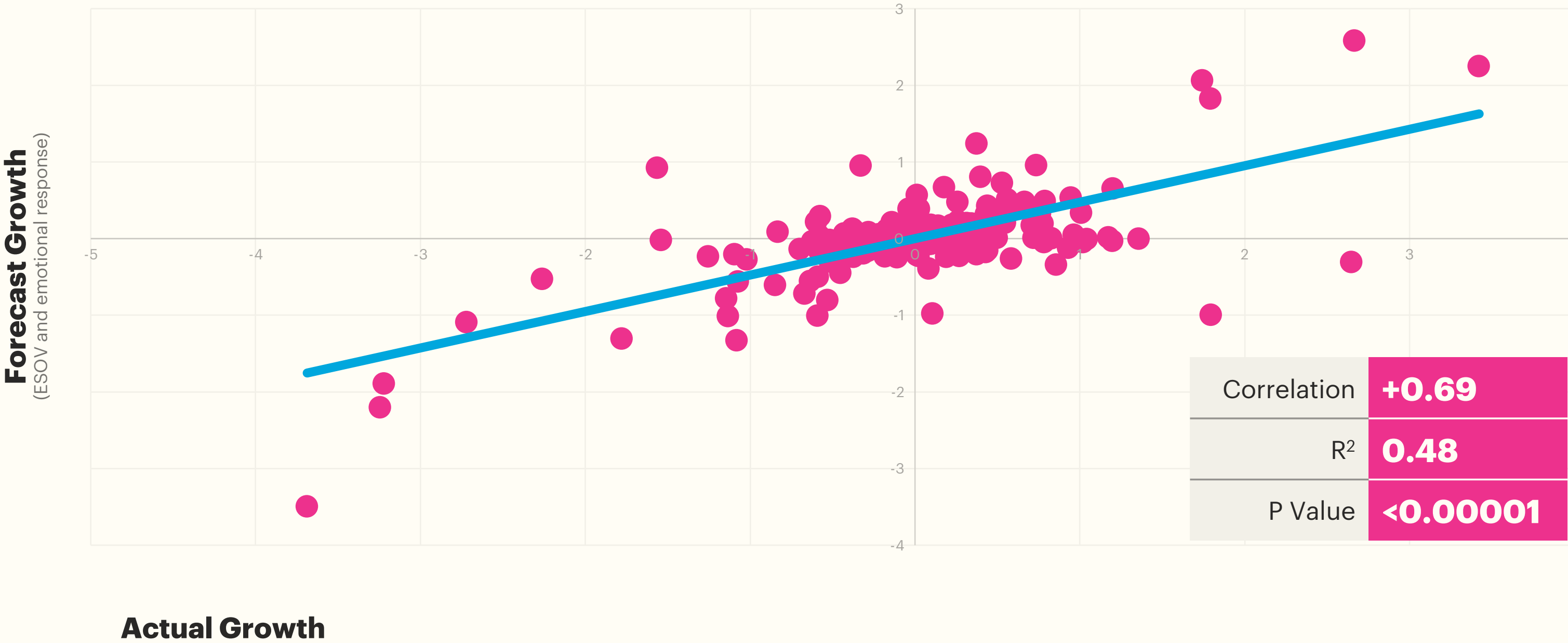
The findings in this paper challenge outdated assumptions, go beyond theory and unpack the precise ingredients that make creative effective across the funnel and resilient to fatigue. It unpacks how brands of all sizes - from global powerhouses to nimble challengers and contenders - can optimize their impact across creative styles, and why entertainment isn’t just a vehicle for attention but a strategic imperative. One which empowers brands, especially challengers and contenders, to convert demand effectively without sacrificing long-term brand building.

This publication has taken a team of people two years to create, utilizing extensive creative and in-market data. No myths or opinions. It’s a robust POV on creativity in short-form video that allows creatives, creators, and marketers to put every dollar of media spend to work.

WE’VE SPENT 25 YEARS SHOWING THE MORE PEOPLE FEEL, THE MORE THEY BUY. NOW, WE’VE PROVED IT WITH SHORT-FORM VIDEO.

QUALITY X QUANTITY OF TV ADVERTISING MATTERS

Combining ESOV with ad Star Ratings (ad sentiment) is powerfully predictive of subsequent market share growth



Annual market share predictions for US and UK brands spanning 264 brands. The analysis is based on over 4000 ads in the US and the UK, representing over \$10billion in media spend. Emotional testing source: System1’s Test Your Ad database of over 50,000 TV ads, with spend data provided by Nielsen and Numerator

FROM THE AUTHORS

“In skippable media, creativity has become more important. This research clearly shows how short-form ads can stop the scroll and make viewers feel something to create lasting effects for modern brands.”



ANDREW TINDALL
SVP | GLOBAL PARTNERSHIPS
SYSTEM1

“There is no one-size-fits-all strategy for creative effectiveness. What works depends on who you are and how you show up. This paper reflects that nuance, unpacking how brands of various sizes can gain an edge, along with the pitfalls and powerful potential of creator-led ads.”



JOSH FRUTTIGER
VP STRATEGY | GLOBAL PARTNERSHIPS
SYSTEM1

“On TikTok, successful advertising is content that people want to see. It entertains, uplifts and converts. For both brand and performance, entertaining ads don’t interrupt the experience – they are the experience!”



ESTEBAN RIBERO
GLOBAL RESEARCH LEADER MARKETING SCIENCE
TIKTOK

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CHAPTER 1

#SETTINGTHESTAGE

THE ROLE OF SHORT-FORM VIDEO

Short-form video has reshaped how people consume content and with it presents a **powerful opportunity for marketers**. To understand what drives creative effectiveness in this new landscape System1 and TikTok have conducted two large scale studies, analyzing 887 TikTok ads across creative styles, brand sizes and markets. Tested with 92,000+ users and matched to 350+ brand and conversion lift studies, **the findings reveal what makes short-form creative work and how it holds up under fatigue**.

CHAPTER 2

#THELONG

HOW ENTERTAINMENT BUILDS BRAND

Despite its proven power, entertaining advertising has been in steady decline. But short-form offers marketers a chance to embrace it once again and build their brands in the process. **Entertainment fuels attention and positive sentiment, delivering stronger brand outcomes while combatting creative fatigue**. Early and distinctive branding enhances effectiveness without harming attention, even at high frequency. And when brands refresh the same creative idea with entertaining variety, they sustain impact and keep content feeling fresh.

CHAPTER 3

#THESHORT

HOW SALESMANSHIP CONVERTS

While entertainment builds brands, **salesmanship takes that equity and converts it**. Creative features like someone talking directly to the viewer, lots of fast-cut scenes, or a product focus prompt immediate decisions and drive consumers to take action. But to perform, ads must make their impact early. **The first impression is make or break**; frequency can reinforce but won't rescue a weak start. And when it comes to short-term outcomes, **the real enemy isn't dislike, it's indifference**.

CHAPTER 4

#THELONG&THESHORT

THE RETURN ON ENTERTAINMENT

Advertisers no longer have to choose between entertaining their audiences or selling to them, **the most entertaining short-form ads build brand and they convert**. Salesmanship sells, but often at the expense of brand. Entertainment, by contrast, delivers on both fronts. It's not a trade-off, it's a strategic imperative for marketers looking to drive the long and the short.

CHAPTER 5

#HOWTOWIN

(BRAND) SIZE MATTERS

Creative strategy isn't one-size-fits-all. Brand size shapes what creative needs to do. Category leaders can (but shouldn't) rely on superior equity to carry less distinctive or less entertaining creative, while challenger and contender brands can't afford to and must make every second count. Without the tailwind of equity, challenger brands need creative that entertains, driving attention and sentiment, with strong early branding clear from the start. When they do, they can punch above their weight - especially on conversion.

CHAPTER 1

#SETTINGTHESTAGE

THE ROLE OF SHORT-FORM VIDEO

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THE LONG AND SHORT OF IT

The lines between “paid” and “owned” have blurred. Short-form video platforms have all the qualities of a media channel that can build brands (mass reach, active attention, video formats) while also being capable of driving conversion (targeting with buying signals).

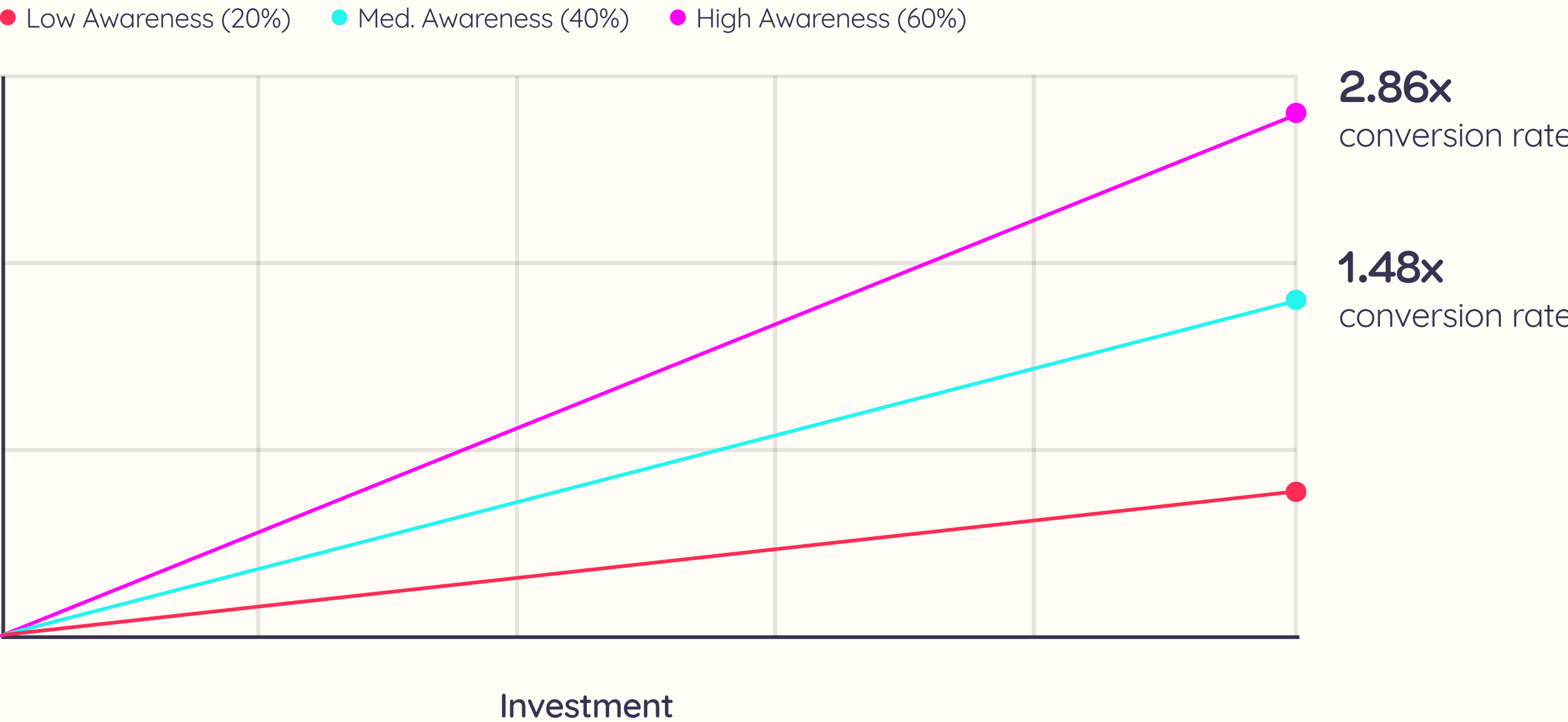
Respecting viewers in these environments with entertaining assets across paid and owned that stop the scroll is a unique opportunity for modern full-funnel advertising. They can do **the long** and **the short**.

TikTok is no exception. With more than 1 billion monthly active users¹ worldwide, their users are 1.2x more likely to focus solely on TikTok content (vs other platforms)². It’s no wonder that 15% of all product discovery across all media, email and word of mouth happens on their platform³.

By using System1’s Test Your Social creative measurement, and linking assets to TikTok’s separate brand and conversion lift data, we’ve been able to measure brand-building through an increased lift in **Memory Structures, Brand Awareness** and **Brand Image** (measured via Ad Recall, Brand Awareness and Brand Association). And measure conversion through conversion lift (tracked consumer behavior).

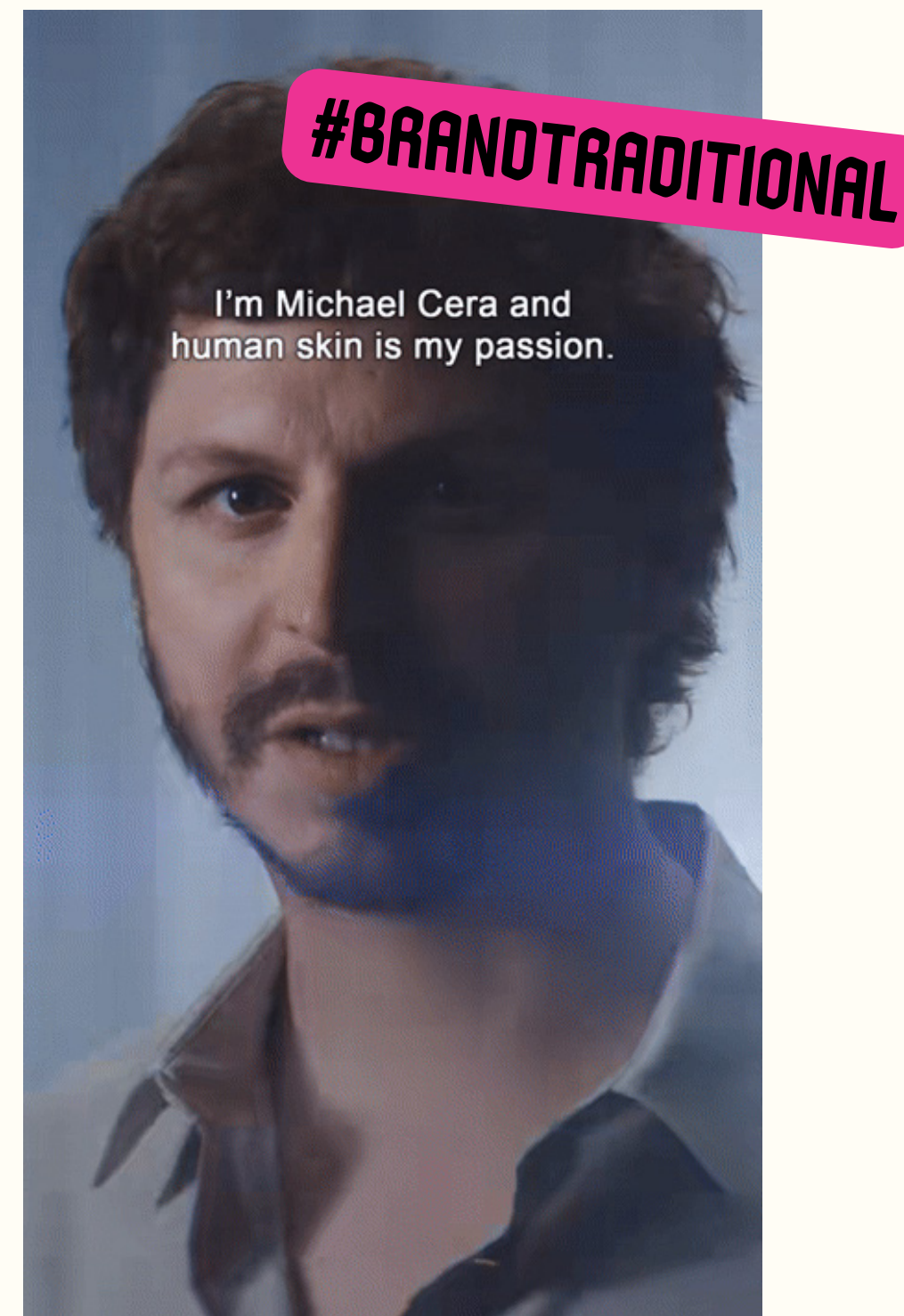
BRANDS MUST BUILD WHILE CONVERTING.
STRONGER BRANDS CONVERT MORE.

Advertising Performance Efficiency⁴



¹TikTok Internal Data, 2021. ²TikTok Marketing Science Global Entertaining Ads Study conducted by Marketcast, 2022. ³TikTok Marketing Science Post-Purchase Analysis conducted by Fairing, 2022. ⁴The Awareness Advantage by TikTok Marketing Science AUNZ x Tracksuit, 2024.

THE FORM: NEW CREATIVE STYLES



If the long and the short define what advertising should achieve, then the form defines how.

Advertising is how your consumers interact with your brand. Today's modern creative vehicles offer three distinct ways to drive effectiveness. These assets are created in very different ways, and as this publication shows, each plays a unique role.

CREATOR LED

Ads made by a creator for a brand.

BRAND NATIVE

Ads made by brands built natively for the platform.

BRAND TRADITIONAL

Ads developed by brands for traditional channels (e.g. TV), repurposed for the platform.

THE METHODOLOGY

At the core of this paper are two large scale, global research studies conducted by System1 and TikTok, spanning advertisers of different sizes and verticals.



THE CREATIVE
EFFECTIVENESS PLATFORM

System1



TIKTOK MARKETING SCIENCE: “GLOBAL IMPACTFUL ENTERTAINMENT 2025”, CONDUCTED BY SYSTEM1

This study explored the effectiveness of different creative features at driving brand and business outcomes.

We used System1’s Test Your Ad Social to test 847 TikTok ads from eight key verticals (CPG, Retail, Tech, Telco, Travel, FinServe, Auto and QSR) in eight major markets (US, UK, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Brazil and Mexico). The study involved 84,788 TikTok users, resulting in a vast creative data set. We then matched those ad level creative findings with Brand and Conversion Lift Data from 239 Brand Lift Studies and 119 Conversion Lift studies, as well as platform metrics such as view-through rate.

This helped us build a comprehensive understanding of:

- **Which** creative features most effectively deliver brand and business outcomes
- **Why** they’re driving these outcomes in the current media context
- **How** advertisers can implement these findings to build even more effective ads

TIKTOK MARKETING SCIENCE EUI+US: “UNDERSTANDING CREATIVE FATIGUE 2025”, CONDUCTED BY SYSTEM1

In this experiment we deliberately induced creative fatigue within a controlled environment. The study engaged 8,000 TikTok users across six markets (US, UK, Germany, France, Italy, and Spain) and tested 40 ads from a range of verticals including E-commerce, Fashion, Food/Snacks and Health & Beauty.

Participants were exposed to 10 ads in a single session, including multiple repeat exposures to the same ad. This “exaggerated exposure environment” simulated a range of frequencies, categorized as follows:

- **1st exposure** – the user’s first time seeing an ad
- **Light exposure** – 2 views of the same ad
- **Medium exposure** – 3–4 views
- **Heavy exposure** – 5 views

(Please note, these numbers should not be taken as a general frequency recommendation for TikTok across a longer period of time, they are bespoke to this experimental environment, where we deliberately induced fatigue in a single session to understand its dynamics and measure the solutions to solve it.)

We measured how both short-term and long-term effectiveness varied by level of exposure. The metrics we looked at were System1’s **Star Rating** (long-term) and **Spike Rating** (short-term) as well as Short-Term Advertising Strength measure (referred to in this paper as **Brand Choice**).


UNDERSTANDING AND PREDICTING HOW SOCIAL ADS GROW BRANDS AND CONVERT DEMAND

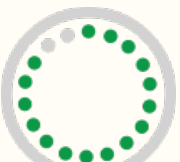
We used **System1’s Test Your Ad Social** to analyze each short-form ad, a research tool built on 25 years of experience linking creativity to in-market outcomes, as we’ve done in this research.

Test Your Ad Social measures how 150 social platform users feel after viewing a short-form ad in a skippable environment, how much attention each ad holds, and whether they can correctly recall the brand the ad is for (and how quickly).

You’ll see its key metrics used throughout this paper:

 **Star Rating** The overall sentiment felt, predicting an ad’s long-term impact.

 **Spike Rating** Whether an ad brands early enough and how engaging it is, predicting short-term impact.

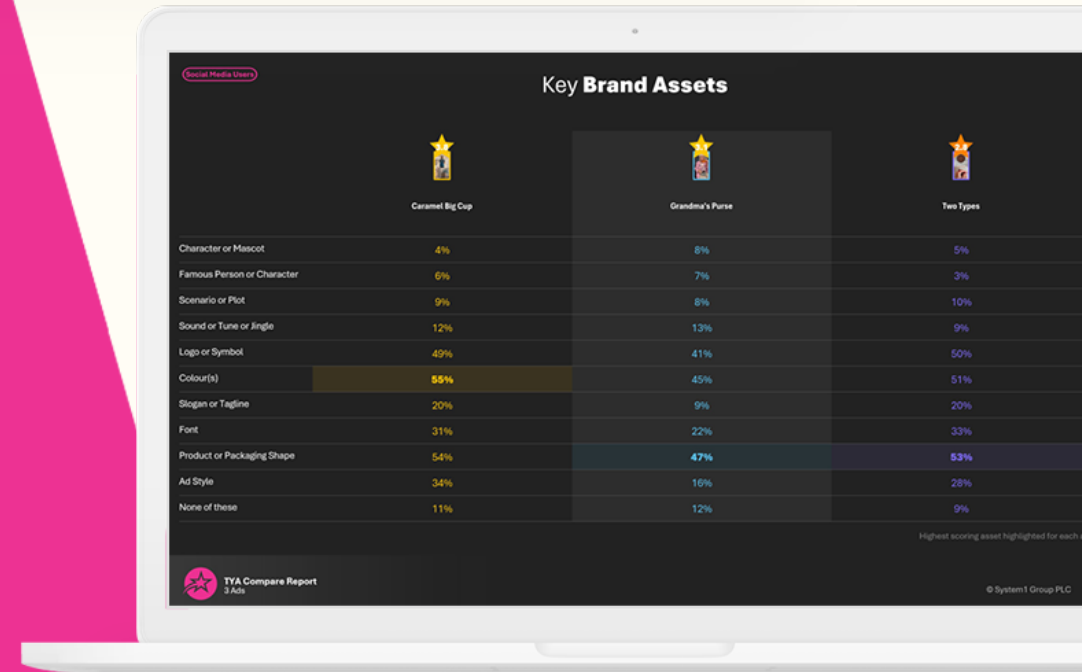
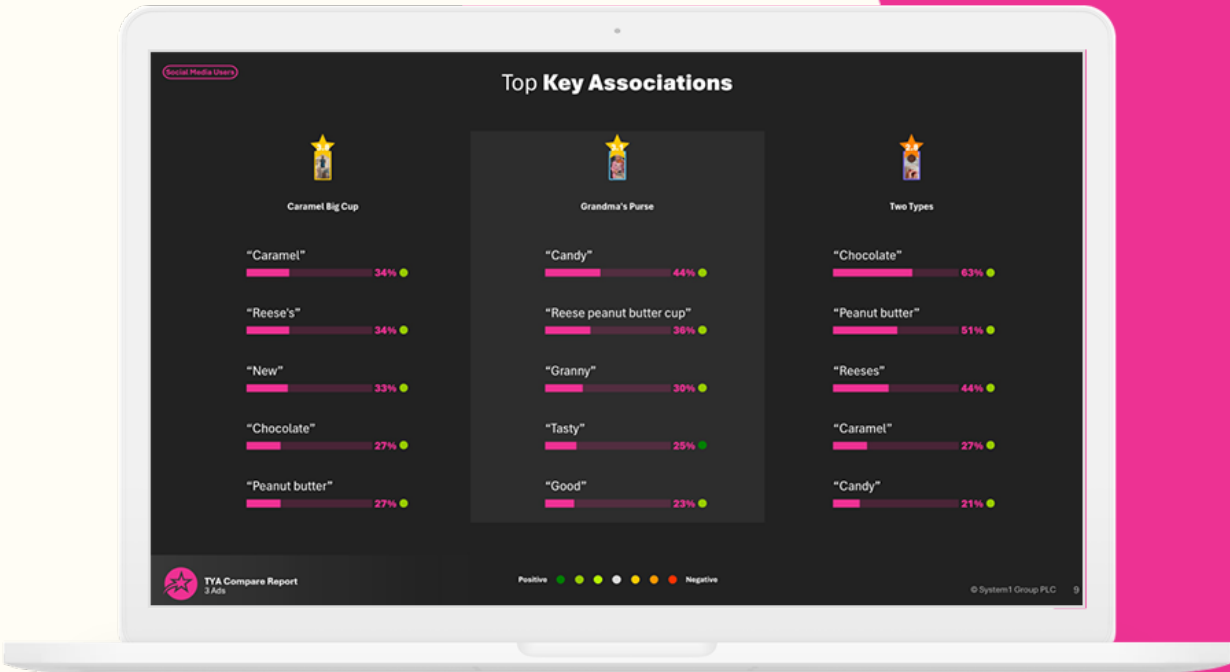
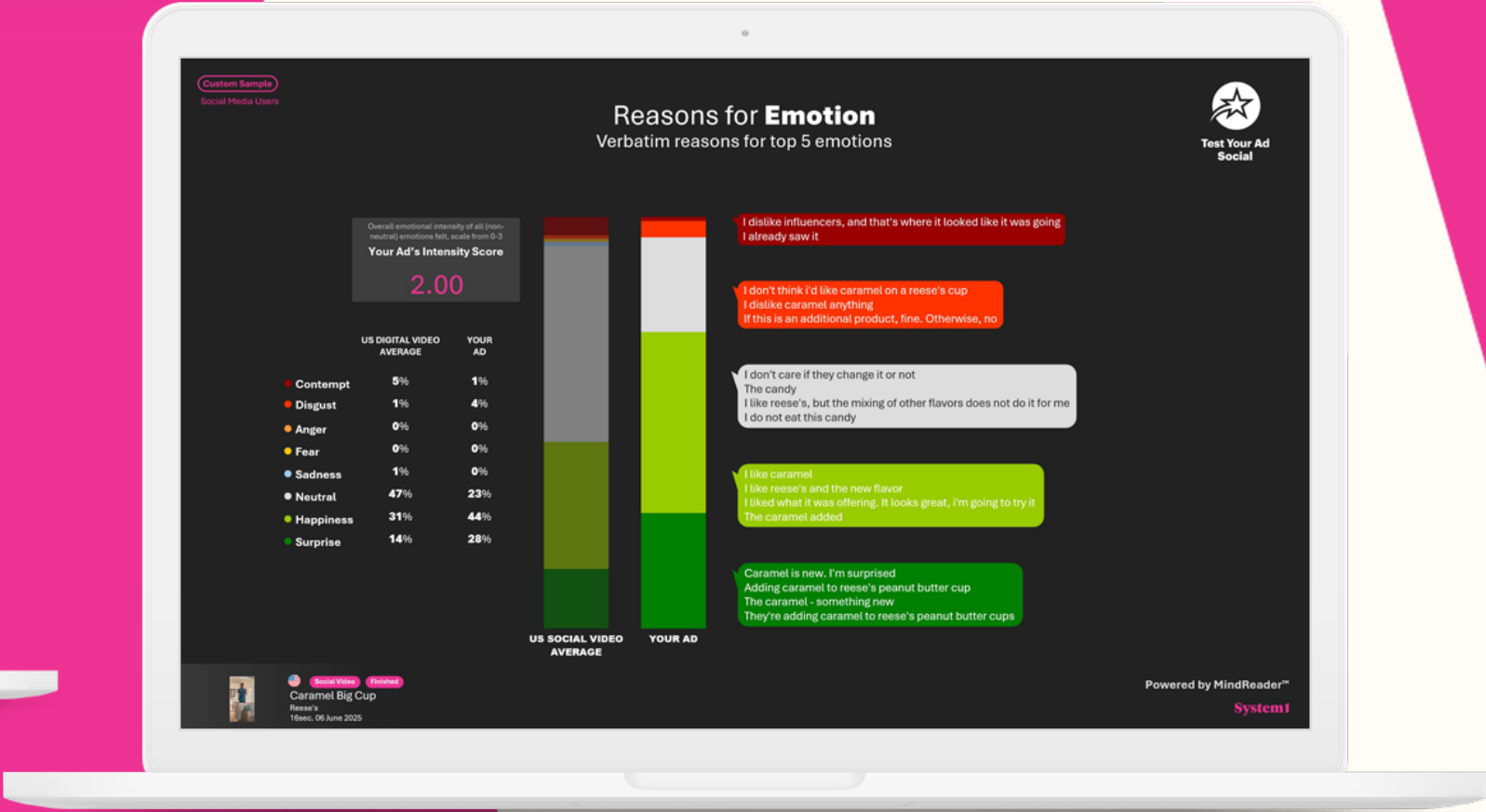
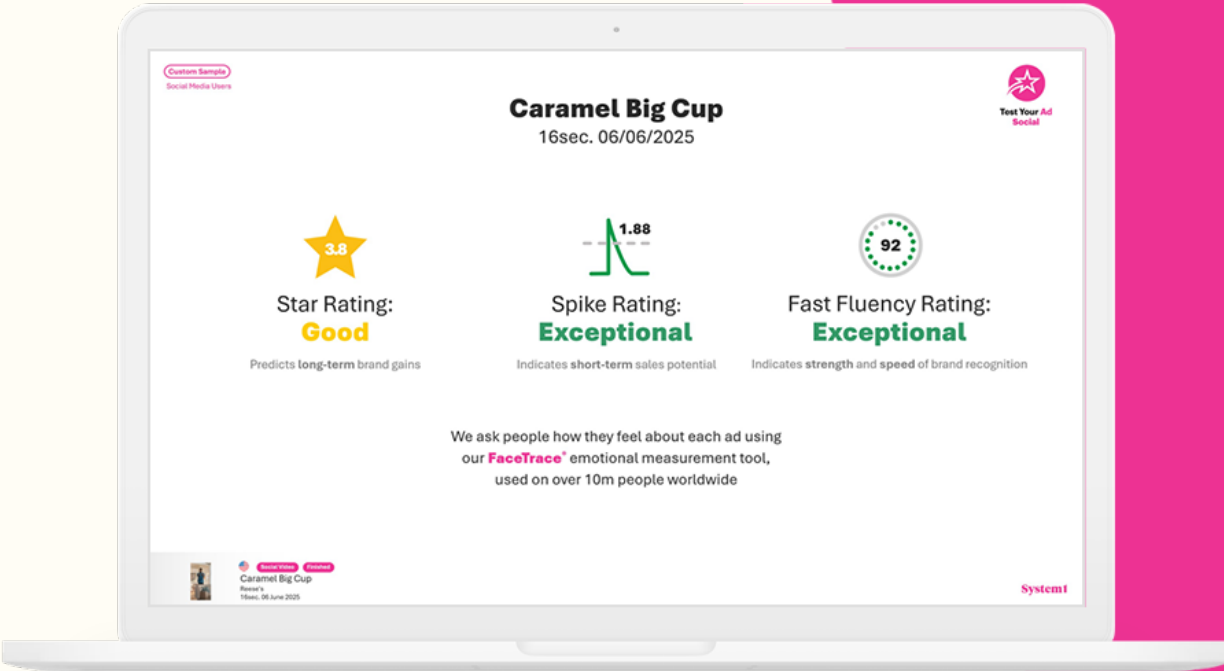
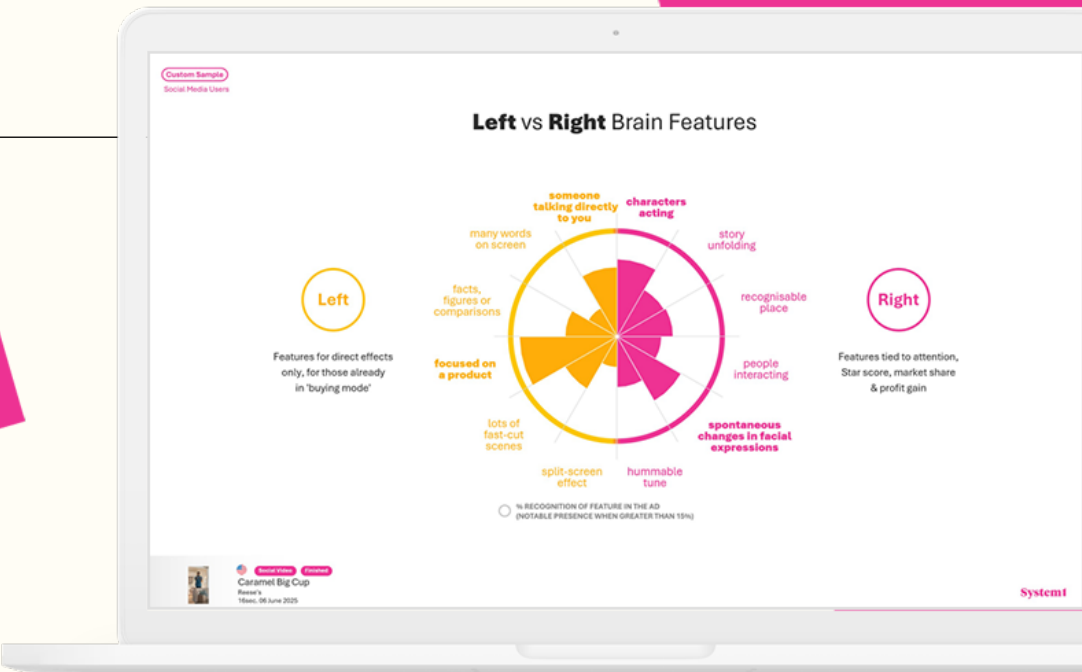
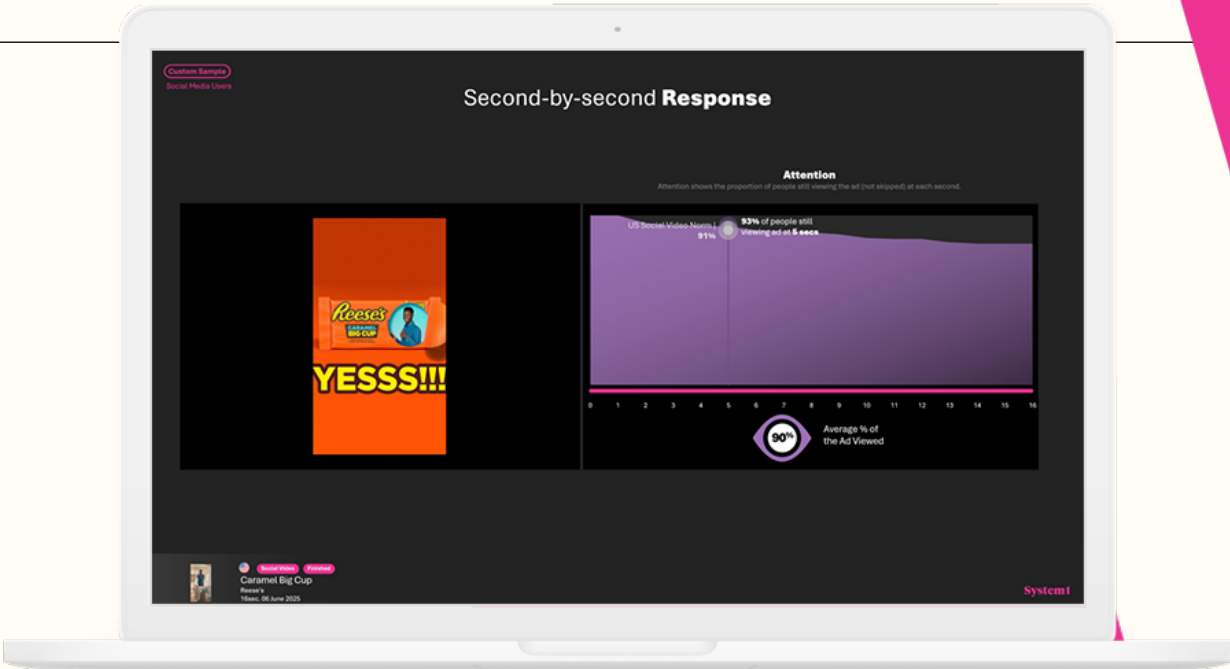
 **Fluency Rating** Correct brand attribution after watching for 2 seconds and after skipping.

Each test also collects diagnostic data that you’ll see in this research, including which **Showmanship and Salesmanship Creative Features** and **Brand Assets** were recognized, as well as **Spontaneous Associations** and the **Reasons Why** users felt the way they did.



Test Your Ad
Social

If you’d like to test your short-form video ads, please contact **System1**.



CHAPTER 2

#THELONG

HOW ENTERTAINMENT BUILDS BRAND



What is the Form that effective brand building takes in short-form video? The results of the study make that clear: entertainment. In this chapter, you'll find strong evidence that the more entertaining an asset is, the more it builds brands and protects a campaign against fatigue.

In his influential books, *Lemon* (2019) and *Look out* (2021), System1's Chief Innovation Officer Orlando Wood identifies creative features most strongly associated with long-term brand building. He calls these features "Showmanship", from the idea that an ad has to 'put on a show'. An ad should reward its audience for the gift of their attention with entertainment rather than simply try and sell to them.

In this study we've defined the 9 most common Showmanship features used in short-form video.

By themselves, one of these features does not make an ad entertaining. Instead, they work in tandem to provide entertainment. For this study we coded all the ads for the presence of these entertaining features, to find a set of most entertaining and least entertaining ads.

SHOWMANSHIP CREATIVE FEATURES

Defined for short-form video

#ENTERTAININGFEATURES

CHARACTERS ACTING
A STORY UNFOLDING
ENTERTAINING LANGUAGE
SPONTANEOUS CHANGES IN FACIAL EXPRESSIONS
A RECOGNIZABLE PLACE
A HUMMIABLE TUNE
PEOPLE INTERACTING
A PAUSE OR A SOFT, HUSHED VOICE
SOMETHING OUT OF THE ORDINARY



THE FALL OF SHOWMANSHIP

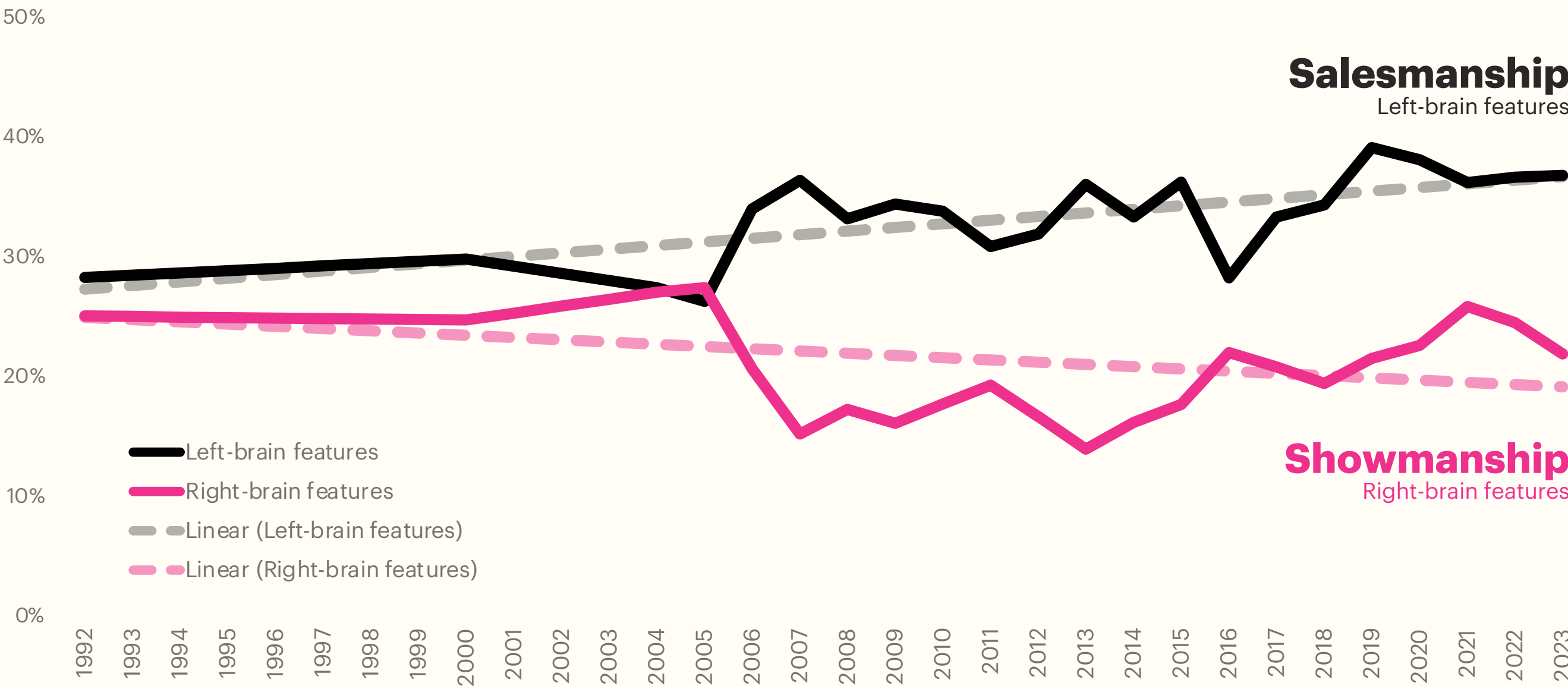
Generally, advertising has become less entertaining over the past decades. There’s been a rise in Salesmanship features and a decline in advertising that tries to entertain. Wood argues in *Look out* that this will globally reduce the long-term effectiveness of advertising.

However, there is hope for effectiveness. Short-form video presents an exceptional opportunity to once more embrace entertaining advertising. In a digital world where many ads are skippable and must increasingly earn their place in the hearts and minds of consumers, **entertaining ads do exactly that**. Brand Lift Study data shows they are more memorable, drive greater Brand Awareness and improve Brand Image.

#SHOWMANSHIP **SALESMANSHIP**

SHOWMANSHIP FEATURES HAVE DECLINED; SALESMANSHIP FEATURES NOW DOMINATE

Average proportion of left- and right-brain features present across ads in ad breaks from each year



Analysis of 1009 ads appearing in Coronation Street ad breaks from week 40 2004-2023 from Nielsen, plus 29 ads from 1989, 1990, 1995 breaks (shown as 1992) and 38 ads from 1996, 1997, 1999 and 2003 breaks (shown as 2000) from YouTube ad breaks. 15 left-brain and 15-right brain features identified in *Look out* (IPA, 2021) by Orlando Wood.

MORE ENTERTAINING SHORT-FORM ADS CREATE MORE LASTING BRAND GROWTH

The Most Entertaining ads drive

+39% MEMORY LIFT
2X BRAND AWARENESS LIFT
2.8X BRAND IMAGE LIFT

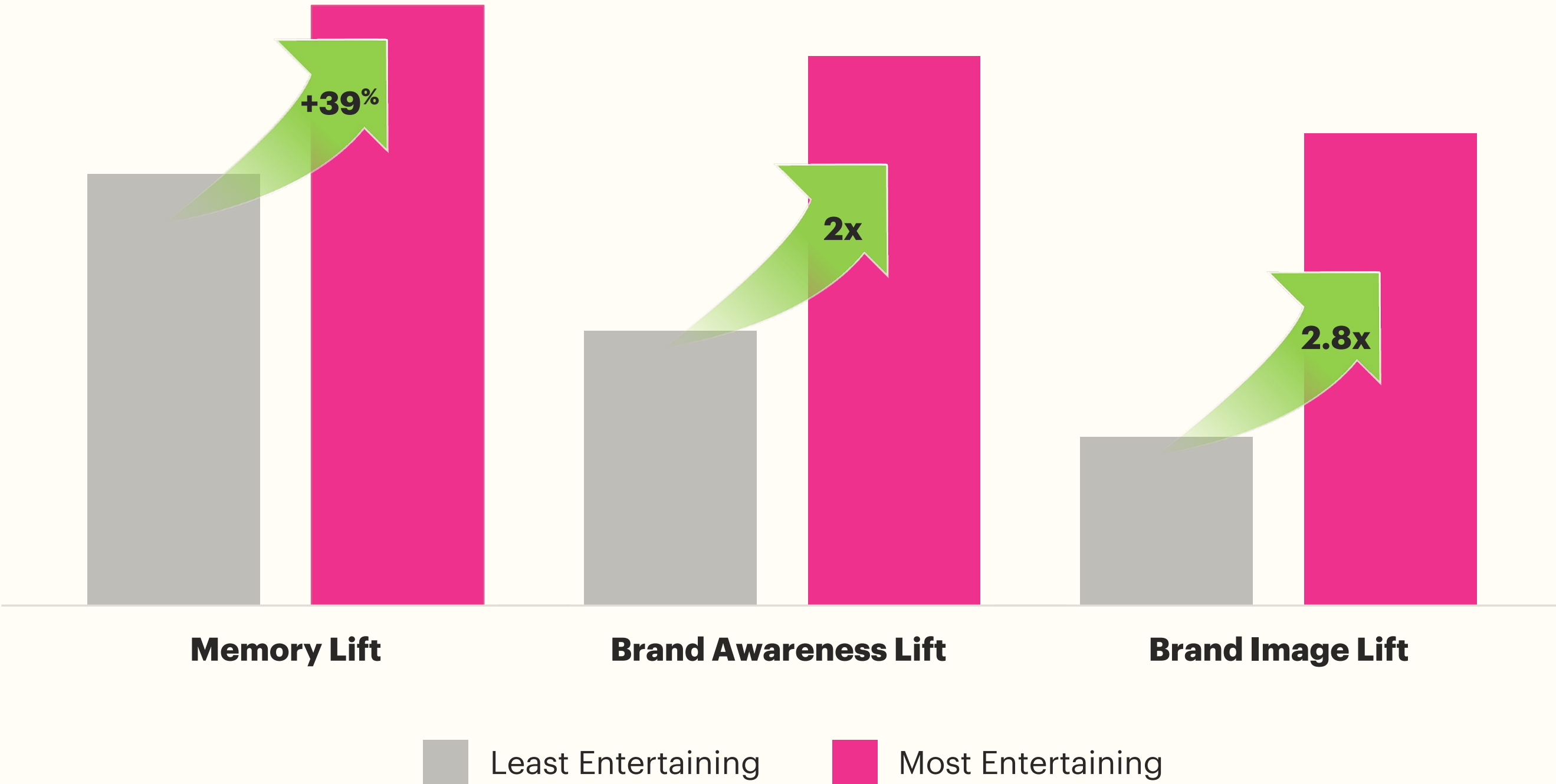
These ads work so well because entertainment drives more attention and positive sentiment among consumers.

We saw a significant positive relationship between the number of Showmanship features used in short-form assets and the brand lift achieved by campaigns.

Creative features like Story, Character, a Sense of Place and People Interacting don’t assume the viewer is interested in the category or brand. They attract the broad attention of all future buyers and leave them feeling great. We clearly see this impact on the formation of more branded memories crucial for long-term effectiveness.

BRAND LIFT

by Showmanship Features,
top vs bottom quartile



Comparison of Top 25% vs. Bottom 25% of ads ranked by prevalence of Showmanship Features. Analysis conducted via System1’s Test Your Ad: Social with 84,788 respondents (TikTok users) across eight markets (US, UK, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Brazil, and Mexico), matched with 239 locally run TikTok Brand Lift studies.

ENTERTAINING SHORT-FORM BUILDS MORE SENTIMENT AND ATTENTION. SENTIMENT AND ATTENTION BUILDS MORE BRAND.

Creating short-form assets with more Showmanship features makes them entertaining but this is the how. The why is also clear. The Most Entertaining ads saw significant lifts in Attention and Positive Sentiment.

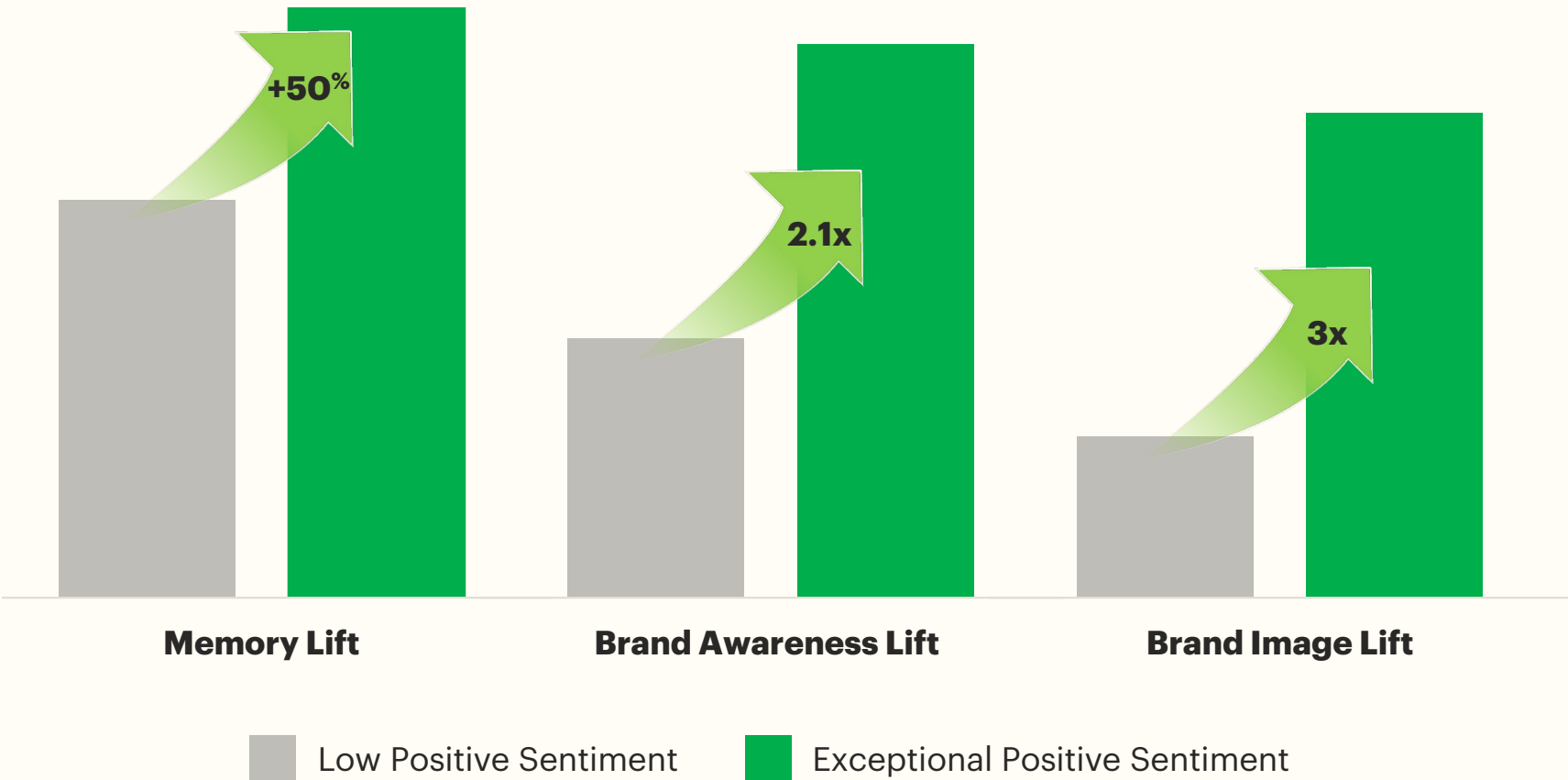
The Most Entertaining ads drive

★ **+40% STAR RATING**
👁️ **+54% ATTENTION**



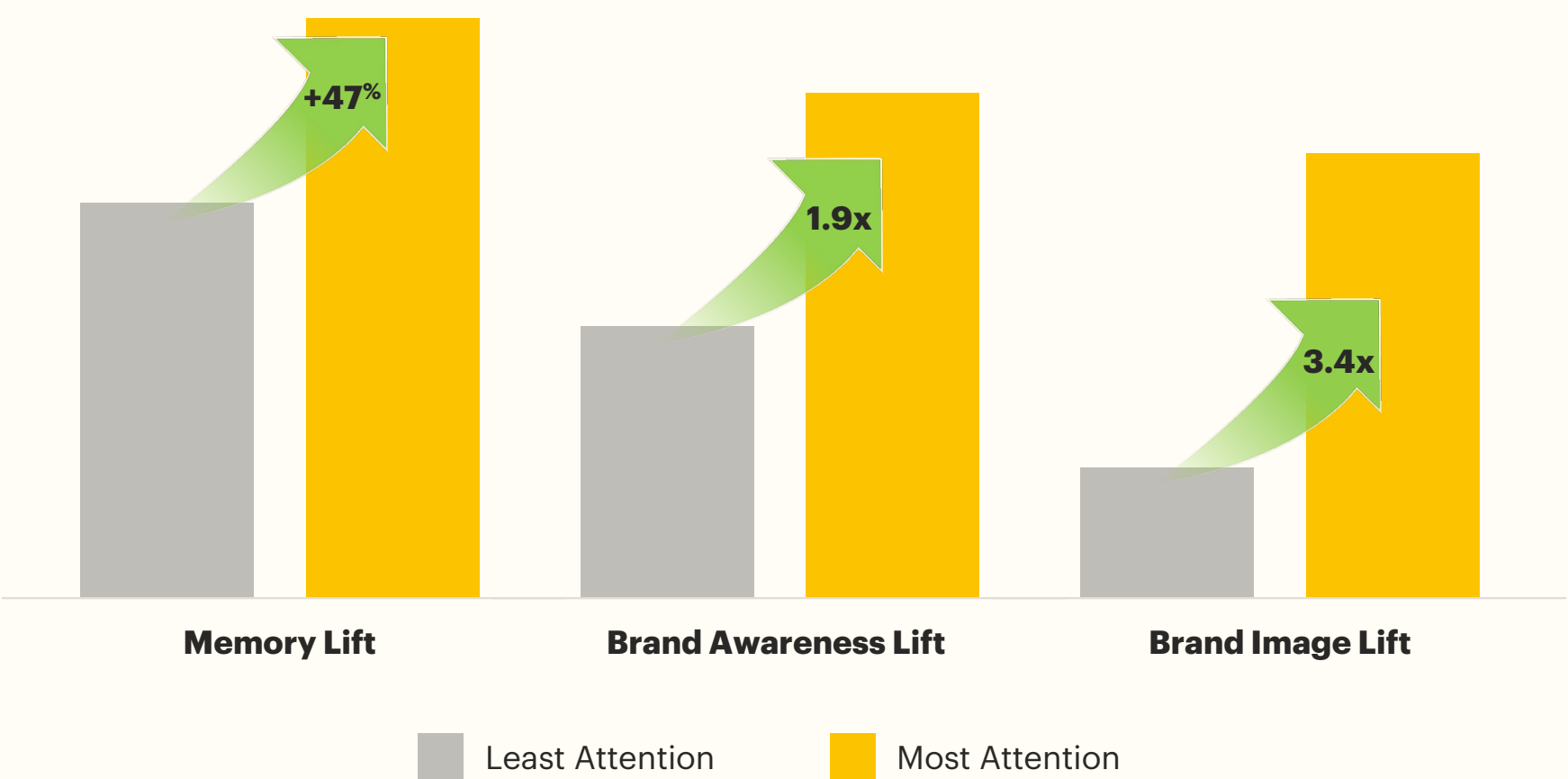
System1

BRAND LIFT
by Star Rating



★
Split by Star Rating
System1’s Ad Sentiment Metric, Top vs Bottom Quartile

BRAND LIFT
by Attention



👁️
Split by Attention
Whether an asset gets more 6sec view through, Top vs Bottom Quartile

Analysis conducted via System1’s Test Your Ad: Social with 84,788 respondents (TikTok users) across eight markets (US, UK, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Brazil, and Mexico), matched with 239 locally run TikTok Brand Lift studies.

ENTERTAINING SHORT-FORM ADS WITHOUT SUCCESSFUL EARLY BRANDING ARE LIKE A JOKE WITHOUT THE PUNCHLINE.

Entertainment isn’t enough. Brands must ensure they create distinct ads that get their unique and famous brand assets attention as well.

In short-form skippable media there’s a brutal reality. To build more branded memories with as many people as possible, integrating brand assets within the first few seconds of an ad remains global creative best practice.

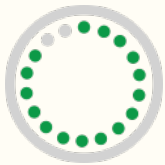
In Chapter 5 you’ll see this isn’t simply forcing a logo into your ad straight away.

Ads which deliver the highest levels of early brand recognition drive

+88% MEMORY LIFT
+92% BRAND AWARENESS LIFT
+85% BRAND IMAGE LIFT

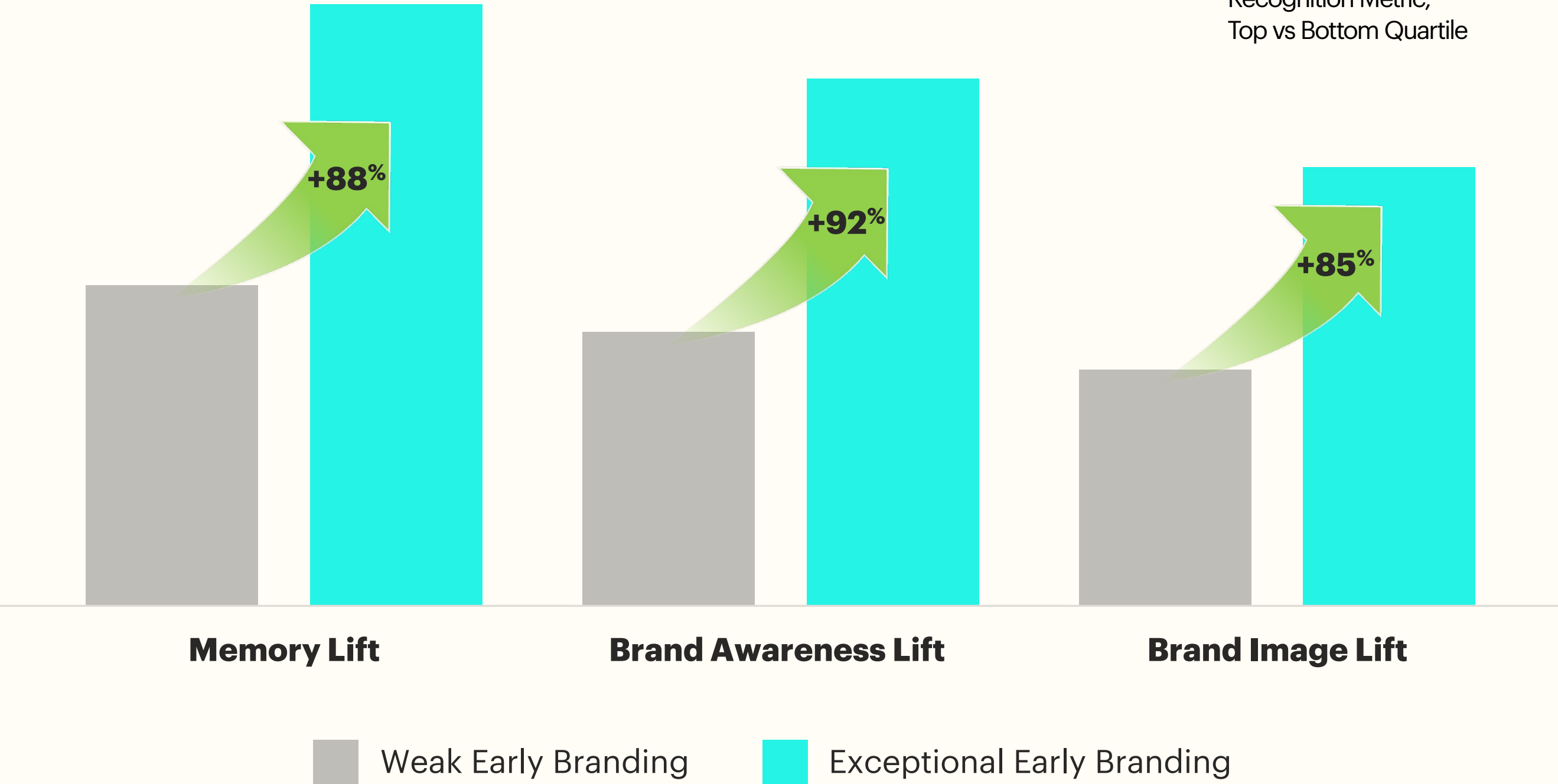
BRAND LIFT

by Fast Fluency



Split by Fast Fluency

System1’s 2sec Brand Recognition Metric, Top vs Bottom Quartile



Analysis conducted via System1’s Test Your Ad: Social with 84,788 respondents (TikTok users) across eight markets (US, UK, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Brazil, and Mexico), matched with 239 locally run TikTok Brand Lift studies.

But does that early branding come at a cost to attention? Contrary to popular belief, early branding on digital ads doesn't automatically lead to declines in attention. Consumers are savvier than ever and expect advertising to include branding as long as it feels **natural vs forced** (more on this in Chapter 5).

In fact, early branding helps reduce confusion and allows users to quickly grasp what they are watching. As a result, ads that successfully brand earlier generate greater levels of positive sentiment and attention, even at heavy frequency – helping to fight the effects of creative fatigue.

Just as early branding drives brand outcomes and fights creative fatigue, the same holds true for the rest of the creative features outlined in this chapter.

Ads that entertain reward viewers for their attention. As such we also found that the Most Entertaining ads are

2X AS EFFECTIVE

at holding initial positive sentiment at heavy exposure vs the Least Entertaining ads.

Comparison of sentiment levels at heavy exposure relative to first exposure, for ads with exceptional (top 25%) Entertainment Levels. Analysis conducted via System1's Test Your Ad: Social with 8,000 respondents (TikTok users) across 80,000+ exposures in six markets (US, UK, Germany, France, Italy, and Spain).



EARLY BRANDING DOESN'T REDUCE ATTENTION OR POSITIVE SENTIMENT. VIEWERS EXPECT ADS TO BE ADS.

Ads that achieve Exceptional Early Branding vs Low Early Branding benefit from

48%

less negative sentiment

57%

more happiness

19%

less attention decay

Comparison of sentiment and attention levels at heavy exposure, relative to first exposure, for ads with exceptional early branding (top 25%). Analysis conducted via System1's Test Your Ad: Social with 8,000 respondents (TikTok users) across 80,000+ exposures in six markets (US, UK, Germany, France, Italy, and Spain).

HIGH FREQUENCY DOESN'T SUBSTITUTE WEAK CREATIVE, BUT IT COMPOUNDS THE EFFECTS OF STRONG ADS.

Exploring how ads build sentiment over varying levels of frequency we can see the dramatic payback potential of ads that create positive sentiment and those that don't.

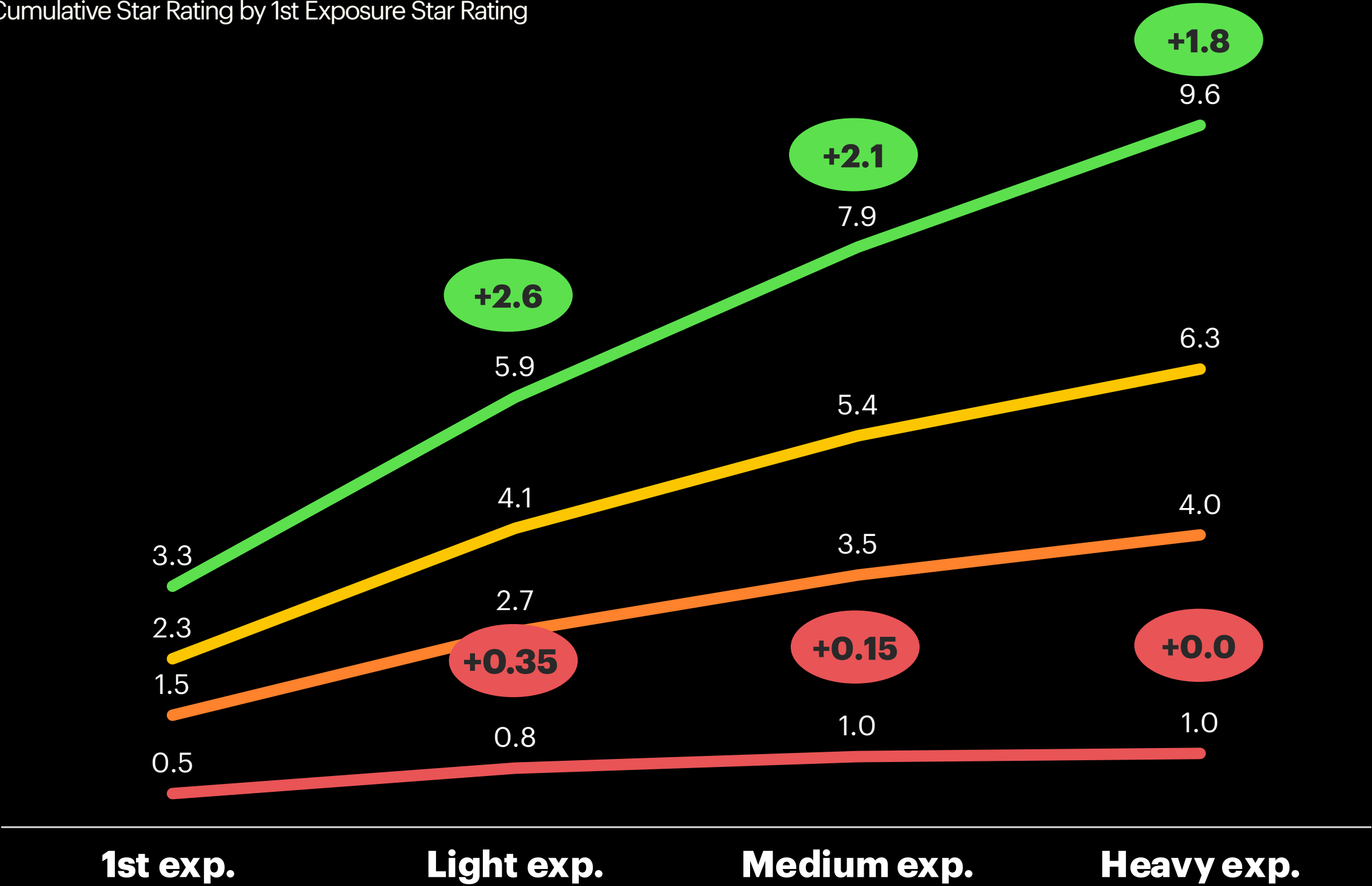
Entertaining creative that leaves viewers feeling great about a brand has a clear advantage after just one exposure. But as frequency builds, we see a compounding effect. These ads fatigue less, with their brand-building potential still working at heavy frequency.

This is dramatically different for weak creative (1 Star ads). They struggle to have an impact on their first exposure and their brand-building potential quickly fatigues. They begin to generate little to no useful positive sentiment.

This allows us to see how creativity is becoming more important across a modern media mix. With higher frequency, effective creative leaves weak creative in the dust.

CAMPAIGN EQUITY POTENTIAL

Cumulative Star Rating by 1st Exposure Star Rating



Grouped by 1st Exposure Star Rating

1 Star (Low) 2 Star (Moderate) 3 Star (Good) 4+Star (Strong+)

Comparison of cumulative Star Rating (ads creating positive sentiment), across varying levels of Star Rating (1Star, 2 Star, 3 Star, 4 Star and above) across exposure levels, relative to first exposure. Analysis conducted via System1's Test Your Ad: Social with 8,000 respondents (TikTok users) across 80,000+ exposures in six markets (US, UK, Germany, France, Italy, and Spain). Ads which score below 1.0 stars do not build brand equity or positive long term effects. Therefore, we begin tracking the cumulative star rating for every score above 1.0 Stars (in the case of the red line 1.5 is the average star rating at 1st exposure, hence why 0.5 of cumulative star rating is tracked here). The circled numbers represent star rating at each individual exposure, whereas the white numbers represent the cumulative star rating of all those individual exposures.

FLUENT CREATIVE VARIETY BOOSTS BRAND-BUILDING AT HIGHER FREQUENCIES.

To further fight fatigue, while still effectively building brand, refresh the same creative idea with entertaining variety. As laid out in System1’s [Compound Creativity](#) report, brands that stick with consistent creative ideas unlock compound business effects over time. When you iterate on that idea in fresh, entertaining ways each time, you get all the benefits of entertainment and consistency.

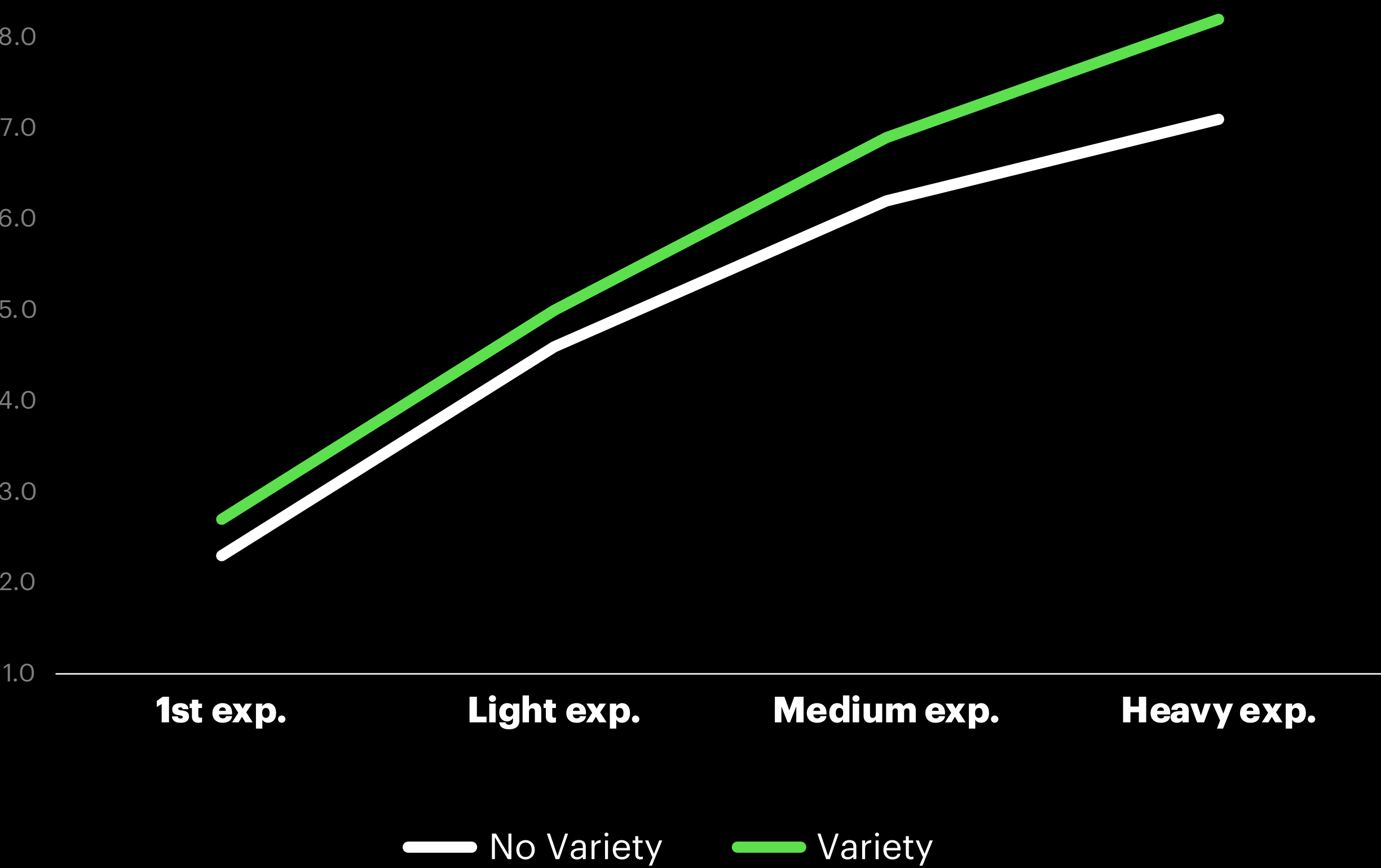
We looked at how campaigns with no variety performed against campaigns which created entertaining variations on the same idea. As the frequency of exposure increases, a gap in cumulative Star Rating opens up.

Thus, campaigns with variety perform better on long-term brand-building potential than those without variety, and this effect compounds over time.

#FIGHTFATIGUE

CAMPAIGN EQUITY POTENTIAL

Cumulative Star Rating by no variety vs variety



Cumulative Star Rating (positive sentiment) across increasing exposure levels, comparing ads with creative variety vs. no variety, relative to first exposure. Analysis conducted via System1’s Test Your Ad: Social with 750 respondents (TikTok users) across 7,500+ exposures in six markets (US, UK, Germany, France, Italy, and Spain).

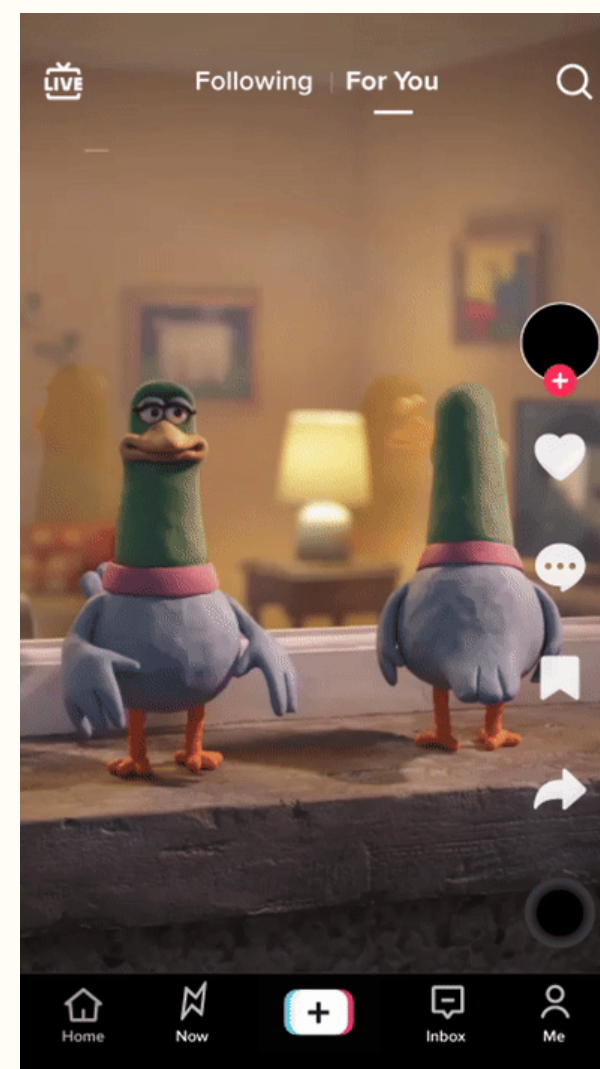
ENTERTAINING VARIETY IN ACTION

The below ads which leverage different characters from the Aardman universe, promoting the BBC's breadth of content, are a great example of this in action. They make clear use of entertaining Showmanship features while refreshing the same creative idea across multiple executions.

In short, entertaining ads don't just outperform in building brand memory, brand awareness, and image; they're also far more resilient to creative fatigue, holding attention and sentiment even at high frequency.

And the reverse is just as important: ads that lack entertainment face a kind of double jeopardy. They're not only less effective at building brand, they also wear out faster, losing attention and sentiment more quickly with each repeat exposure. In a skippable world, ads which don't entertain don't just underperform, they disappear.

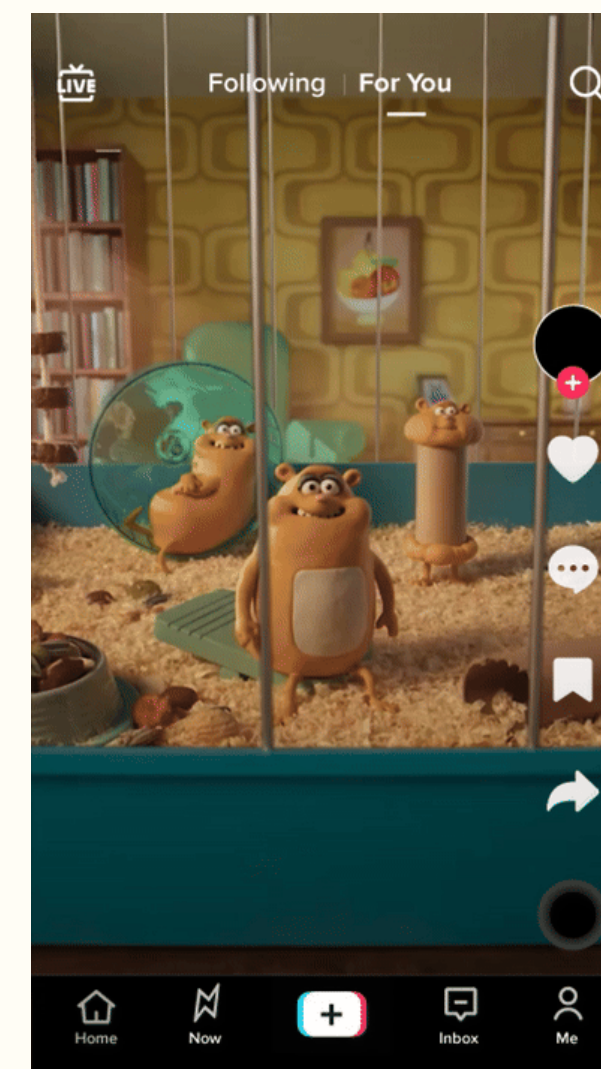
CHARACTER VARIATION



Pigeons
Show Variation Traitors



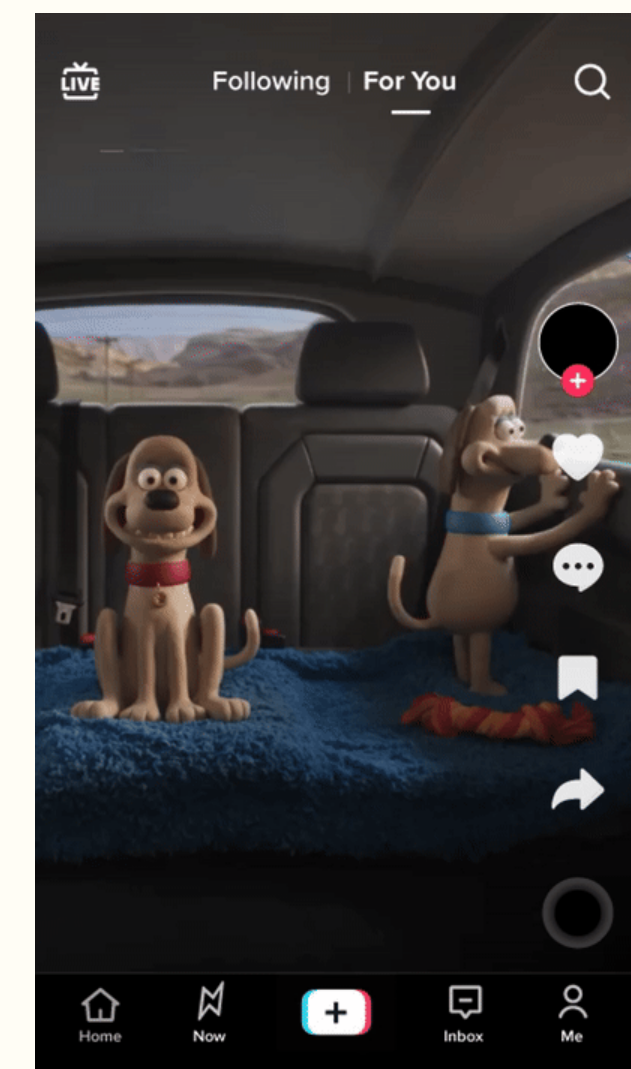
Mice
Show Variation David Attenborough



Hamsters
Show Variation Casualty



Dog in Handbag
Show Variation Match of the Day



Dogs in Car
Show Variation Race Across the World

CHAPTER 2 TAKEAWAYS

ENTERTAINMENT, AND THE ATTENTION AND SENTIMENT IT DRIVES, BUILDS BRANDS AND COMBATS CREATIVE FATIGUE

Entertaining ads, especially those that lean into showmanship features like characters acting, a story unfolding, or something out of the ordinary and are more likely to capture attention and generate positive sentiment. Which in turn delivers outsized brand outcomes. Crucially, that same entertainment value also makes them more resilient to creative fatigue.

1

EARLY AND DISTINCTIVE BRANDING ENHANCES EFFECTIVENESS WITHOUT HARMING ATTENTION

Branding early, especially with well-integrated assets, helps audiences quickly recognize who the ad is from, amplifying impact, even at heavy frequency.

2

ENTERTAINING VARIETY SUSTAINS BRAND EFFECTS AND FIGHTS FATIGUE

Refreshing the same creative idea in new, entertaining ways keeps content fresh, helps fight fatigue, and builds higher levels of positive consumer sentiment as frequency increases.

3

CHAPTER 3

#THESHORT

HOW SALESMANSHIP CONVERTS



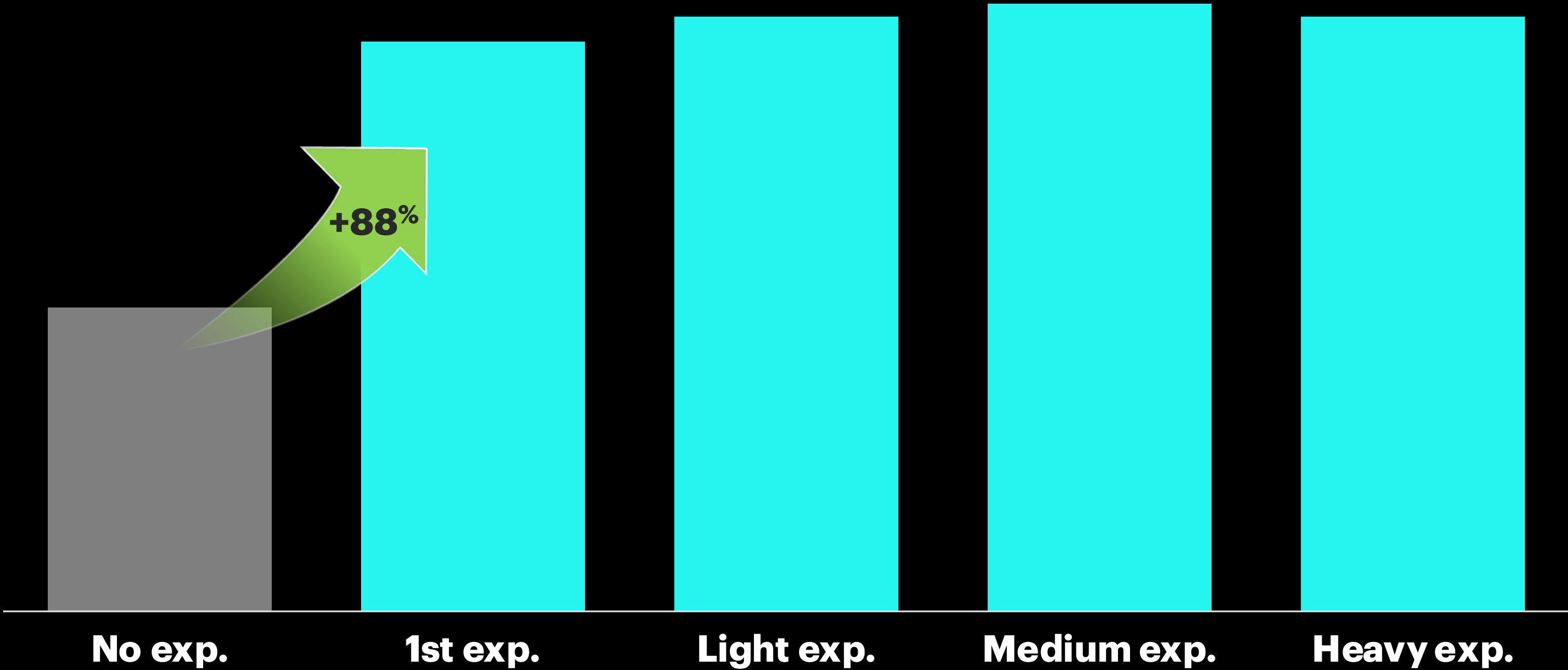
SHORT-FORM ADS
DELIVER BRAND CHOICE
LIFT FROM THE VERY
FIRST IMPRESSION.

One of the fundamental roles of advertising is to turn brand awareness and brand image into brand choice, ensuring a brand is mentally available (top of mind) and in a consumer’s consideration set when a purchase decision arises. Short-form ads deliver this from the very first impression, significantly increasing brand choice post exposure.

Frequency also plays a critical role in keeping brands salient and maintaining brand choice over time. Just as on other channels, brand choice gains decay over time without ongoing reinforcement. This is because consumer memory decays and competitor advertising chips away at mental availability.

SHORT-TERM BRAND CHOICE LIFT

STAS (Short-term Advertising Strength)



Comparison of Short-Term Brand Choice Lift by exposure level, measured using STAS (Short-Term Advertising Strength), showing change from no exposure to first and repeated exposures. Analysis conducted via System1’s Test Your Ad: Social with 8,000 respondents (TikTok users) across 80,000+ exposures in six markets (US, UK, Germany, France, Italy, and Spain).

HIGH FREQUENCY CAN'T COMPENSATE FOR CREATIVE QUALITY.

The first impression sets the ceiling for brand choice lift, with subsequent levels of frequency simply topping up brand choice to roughly the same level. You can't turn a weak ad into a great one with repetition.

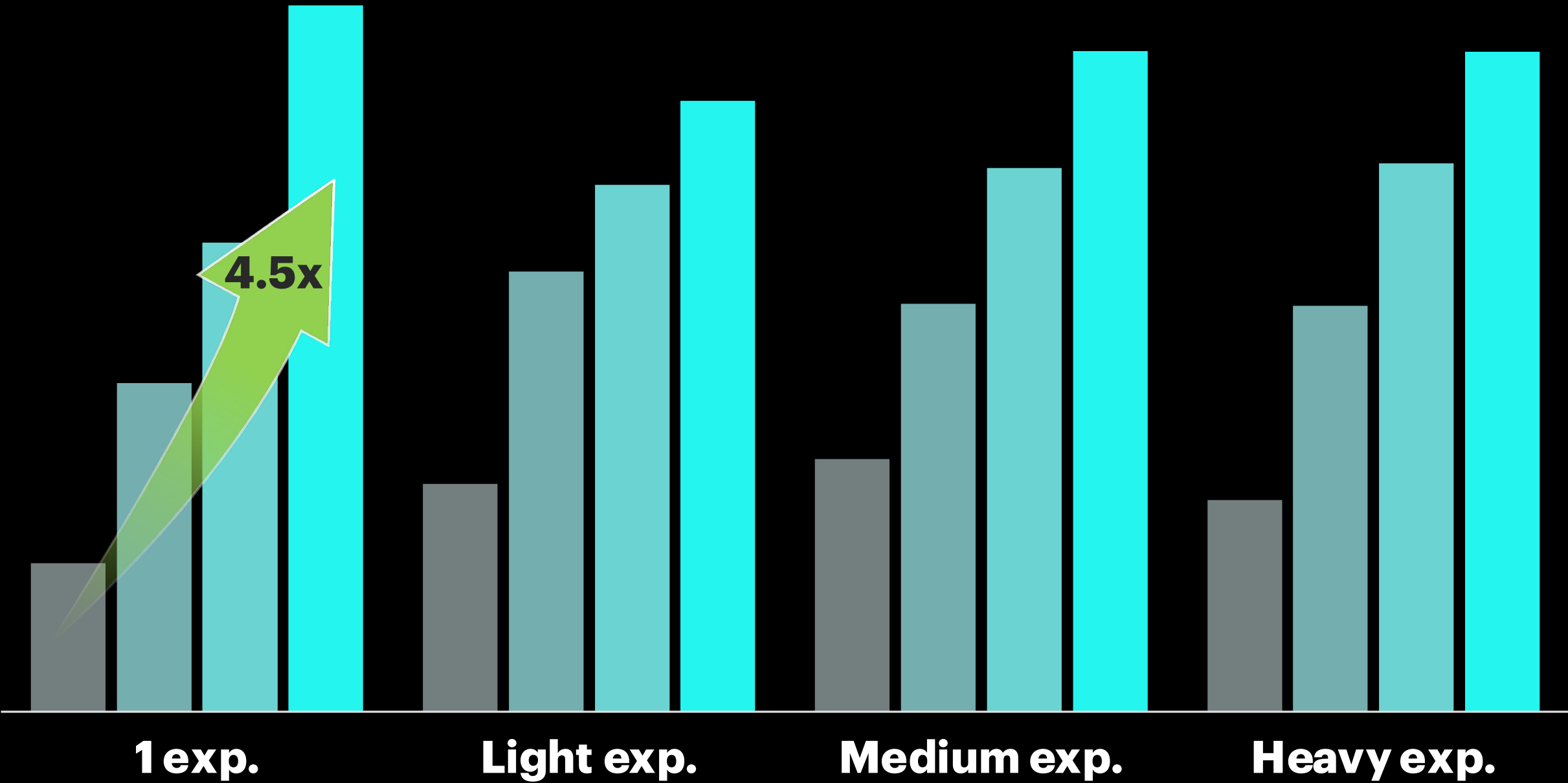
THE BEST ADS LIFT BRAND CHOICE AT ROUGHLY 4X THE RATE OF THE WORST.

The same holds true for brand lift as well. Research from TikTok reveals that users typically exhibit their most favorable response to a brand message upon their very first encounter with an ad. Higher average first view watch time (above 1.5 seconds) drives an average of 2.7 increase in relative brand lift¹.

This underscores a vital creative mandate: your ad's initial viewing is a prime opportunity, make it count.

SHORT-TERM BRAND CHOICE LIFT

STAS (Short-term Advertising Strength) by 1st impression lift²



Grouped by Brand Choice Lift after 1st impression

Bottom Quarter OK Quarter Good Quarter Top Quarter

¹Modeling Watch Time relation to Brand Lift using causal dose-response curve model indicated that reaching 1.5 seconds multiplied Relative Brand Lift by 3. Analysis between First View and Watch Time conducted by TikTok Data Science team on 377 questions from 109 studies across LATAM, METAP and APAC. ²Comparison of Short-Term Brand Choice Lift by exposure level, measured using STAS (Short-Term Advertising Strength), split by performance quartile after first exposure. Analysis conducted via System1's Test Your Ad: Social with 8,000 respondents (TikTok users) across 80,000+ exposures in six markets (US, UK, Germany, France, Italy, and Spain).

So if the fate of an ad is decided at that first impression, what can advertisers do about it? What creative features should advertisers prioritize to build brand choice and ultimately consideration? In our effectiveness study we discovered that System1's Spike Rating is a strong determinant of **both brand choice and intent lift**. Spike is a composite score made up of early brand recognition (Fast Fluency) and the intensity of the overall sentiment a consumer feels while watching an ad. In other words, to drive consideration short-form ads must focus on branding early and having a creative idea and message that creates interest with their target audience.

ADS WITH EXCEPTIONAL SPIKE RATING SAW A **25%** INCREASE IN BRAND CHOICE LIFT¹ & **2.6X** HIGHER INTENT LIFT².

INTENT LIFT

by Spike Rating, top vs bottom quartile



Split by Spike Raing
System1's measure
of early branding &
engagement

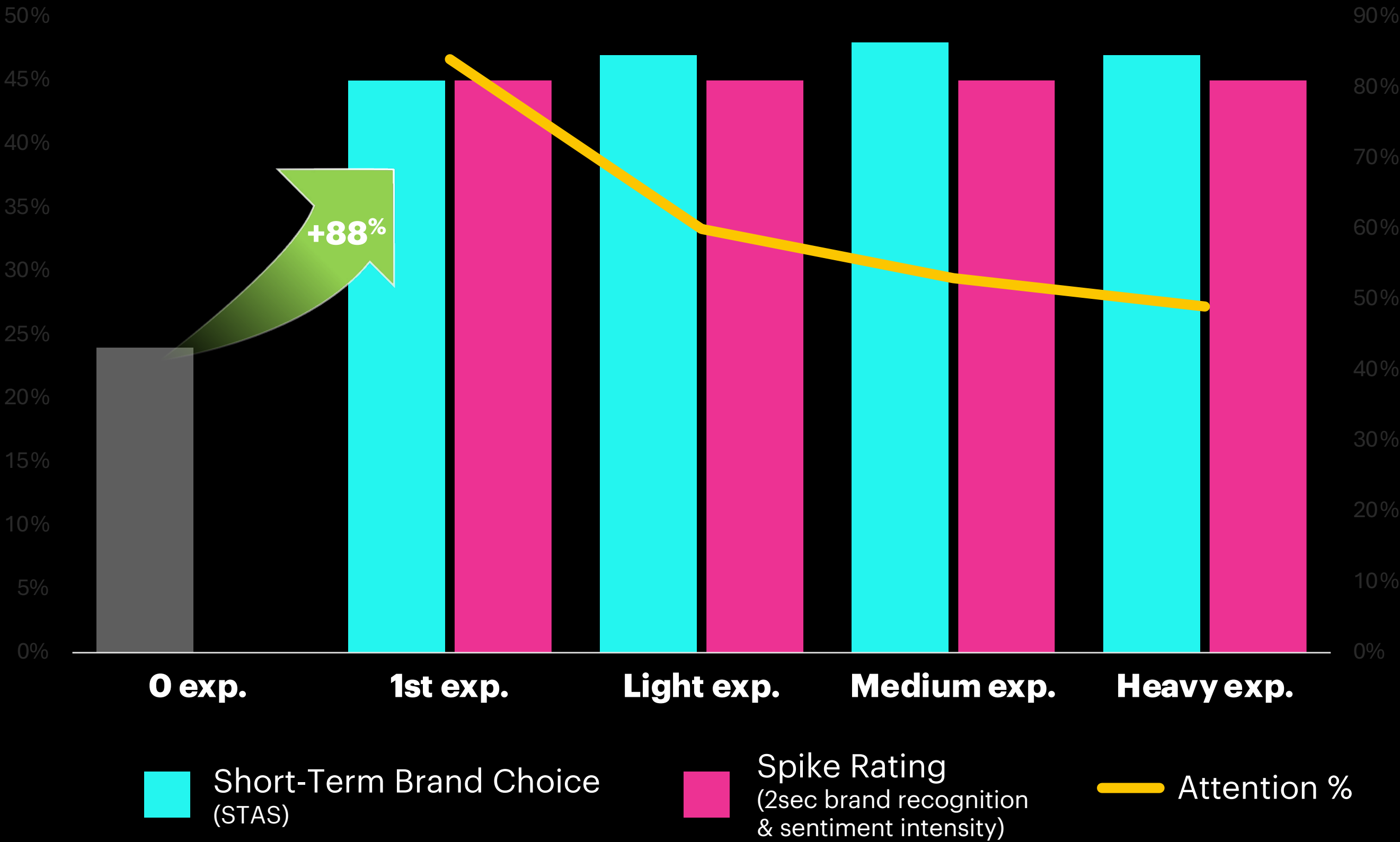
¹Comparison of top and bottom deciles for Spike Rating (sentiment intensity and 2-second brand recognition). Matched to Short-Term Brand Choice Lift, measured using STAS (Short-Term Advertising Strength) at heavy exposure. Analysis conducted via System1's Test Your Ad: Social with 8,000 respondents (TikTok users) across 80,000+ exposures in six markets (US, UK, Germany, France, Italy, and Spain). ²Comparison of top and bottom quartiles for Spike Rating (Top 25% vs. Bottom 25% of ads ranked by sentiment intensity and 2 second brand recognition). Analysis conducted via System1's Test Your Ad: Social with 84,788 respondents (TikTok users) across eight markets (US, UK, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Brazil, and Mexico), matched with 239 locally run TikTok Brand Lift studies.

Interestingly, even as attention fades with increased frequency, Spike Rating and the brand choice it drives remain stable. Once the crucial first impression has been made, consumers need to watch fewer and fewer seconds of an ad to keep the brand top of mind, ready for conversion.

ATTENTION OPENS THE DOOR TO CONSIDERATION, BUT EARLY BRANDING & CREATIVE IDEAS THAT CREATE INTEREST ARE WHAT KEEP CONSUMERS IN THE ROOM.

SHORT-TERM BRAND CHOICE (STAS) X SYSTEM1 SPIKE RATING X ATTENTION DECAY

by Exposure



Comparison of Short-Term Brand Choice Lift by exposure level, measured using STAS (Short-Term Advertising Strength), alongside Spike Rating (2s brand recognition & sentiment intensity) and Attention (% viewed). Analysis conducted via System1's Test Your Ad: Social with 8,000 respondents (TikTok users) across 80,000+ exposures in six markets (US, UK, Germany, France, Italy, and Spain).

HIGHER VIEW THROUGH
DOESN'T LEAD TO MORE
CONVERSIONS.

The role of attention continues to become less important as consumers move from consideration to conversion and objectives shift towards action, reaffirming that

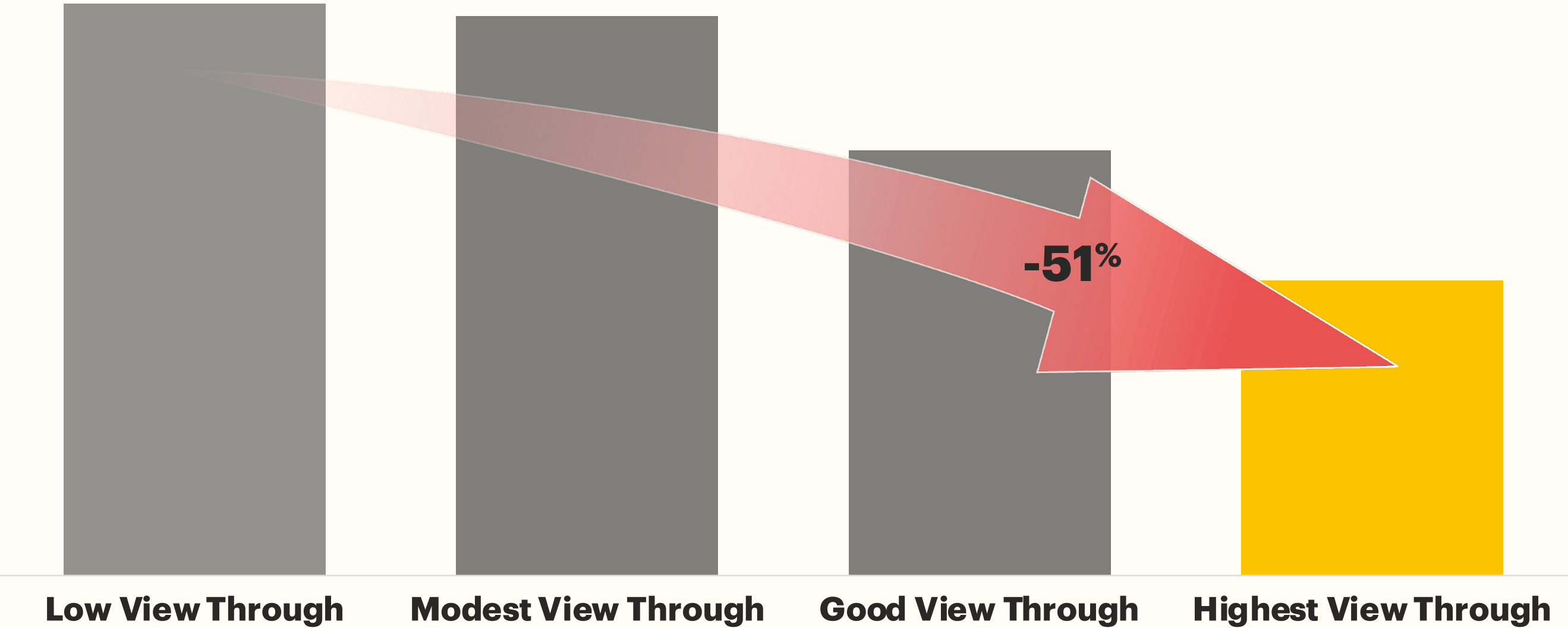
LOWER FUNNEL CAMPAIGNS SHOULD
CONTINUE TO OPTIMIZE FOR THEIR DESIRED
OUTCOME RATHER THAN FOR ATTENTION.

Indeed, there’s actually a negative relationship between view through and the conversion lift an ad drives.

Perhaps this is unsurprising as many of the top performing conversion ads are designed to get consumers to stop watching and to take the desired action. Creatively, they often do this by leveraging ‘Salesmanship’.

CONVERSION LIFT

by 6sec View Through, top vs bottom quartile



Analysis conducted via System1’s Test Your Ad: Social with 84,788 respondents (TikTok users) across eight markets (US, UK, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Brazil, and Mexico), matched with 119 locally run TikTok Conversion Lift studies.

As we mentioned in Chapter 2, **Salesmanship** is the counterbalance to **Showmanship** or what we've called **entertaining features**. In Orlando Wood's work *Lemon* (2019) and *Look out* (2021) Salesmanship features are those that assume the interest of the viewer in a product and brand, they speak to those in the buying mode. These creative features are designed to quickly convert awareness and interest into conversion. When entertainment drives attention and awareness, Salesmanship sells.

For this study we have defined the 9 most commonly used Salesmanship features in short-form video.

SALESMANSHIP CREATIVE FEATURES

Defined for short-form video

MANY WORDS ON SCREEN
SOMEONE TALKING
DIRECTLY TO THE VIEWER
LOTS OF FAST-CUT SCENES
A DIVIDED OR SPLIT SCREEN
FACTS, FIGURES & COMPARISONS
USEFUL INFORMATION
A FOCUS ON A PRODUCT
A CALL TO ACTION



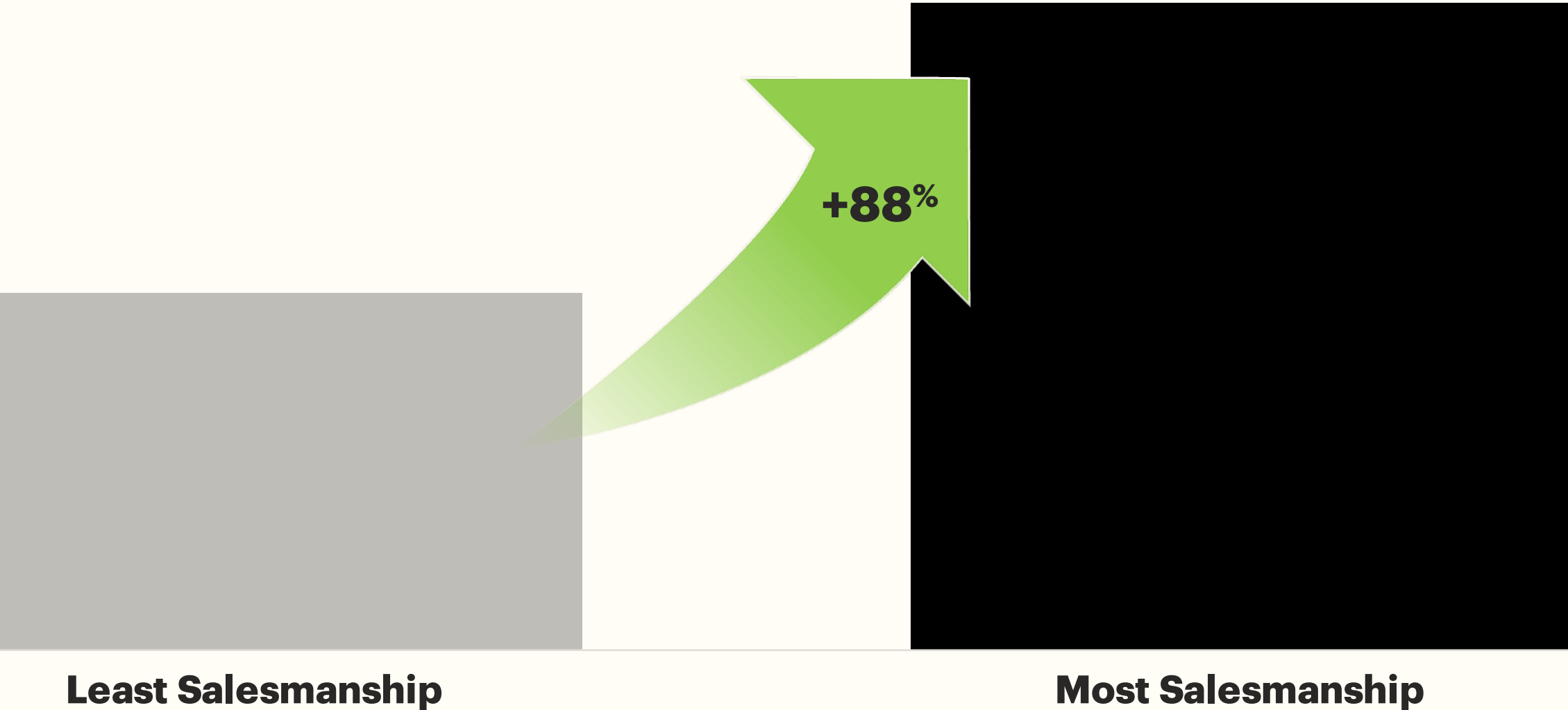
SALESMANSHIP CONVERTS.

As with the entertainment features, we split the ads in the System1 database by how many Salesmanship features they contained and the results were clear:

Ads with the highest levels of salesmanship features drive 88% higher conversion lift than ads with the lowest levels of salesmanship.

CONVERSION LIFT

by Salesmanship Features, top vs bottom quartile¹



¹Analysis conducted via System1's Test Your Ad: Social with 84,788 respondents (TikTok users) across eight markets (US, UK, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Brazil, and Mexico), matched with 119 locally run TikTok Conversion Lift studies.

But even ads which sell are not immune from the [Extraordinary Cost of Dull](#), highlighted by Peter Field, Adam Morgan and Jon Evans in their 2024 paper on the topic.

In short-form we also found that...

DULL ADS ARE 27% LESS EFFECTIVE AT DRIVING CONVERSION².

In other words...

THE ENEMY OF CONVERSION ISN'T DISLIKE, IT'S INDIFFERENCE.

²Comparison of top and bottom quartiles for sentiment neutrality (Top 25% most neutral vs. top 25% least neutral ads). Analysis conducted via System1's Test Your Ad: Social with 84,788 respondents (TikTok users) across eight markets (US, UK, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Brazil, and Mexico), matched with 119 locally run TikTok Conversion Lift studies.

CHAPTER 3 TAKEAWAYS

THE FIRST IMPRESSION IS MAKE OR BREAK

Ads that deliver strong early branding and strong intensity of sentiment (measured by System1's Spike Rating) on first exposure drive significantly higher brand choice and intent. Frequency can reinforce, but not rescue, a weak start.

1

WHILE ENTERTAINMENT BUILDS BRAND, SALESMANSHIP TURNS THAT EQUITY INTO CONVERSION

Creative features like someone talking directly to the viewer, lots of fast-cut scenes, or a product focus prompt immediate decisions and drive consumers to take action. Salesmanship sells.

2

THE ENEMY OF CONVERSION ISN'T DISLIKE, IT'S INDIFFERENCE

Dull ads that leave consumers feeling nothing drive 27% fewer conversions. To convert, whether it's positive or negative sentiment, advertisers must strive to leave consumers feeling something.

3

CHAPTER 4

#THELONG&THESHORT

THE RETURN ON ENTERTAINMENT



The previous chapters unpacked how different creative features drive effectiveness across the funnel, from sparking attention, sentiment and brand outcomes to building brand choice and driving conversion. But they also raise an important question:

MUST ADVERTISERS CHOOSE BETWEEN ENTERTAINING THEIR AUDIENCES OR SELLING TO THEM?

For decades, marketers have operated under a perceived trade-off. Emotional, entertaining ads build brand over time, while more rational, direct-response creative is required to drive immediate sales.

BUT THIS RESEARCH CHALLENGES THAT BINARY VIEW.

As we've seen in Chapters 2 and 3, entertaining features do indeed drive attention and sentiment and in turn brand outcomes, while Salesmanship features fuel consideration and conversion. **The difference is, it doesn't have to be a trade-off.**



ENTERTAINING ADVERTISING BUILDS BRAND AND IT CONVERTS, IT DRIVES THE **LONG** AND THE SHORT.

THE LONG DOES THE SHORT OF IT

Marketers are often told they should choose. However, as short-form video has grown in popularity it provides marketers with an opportunity to do both.

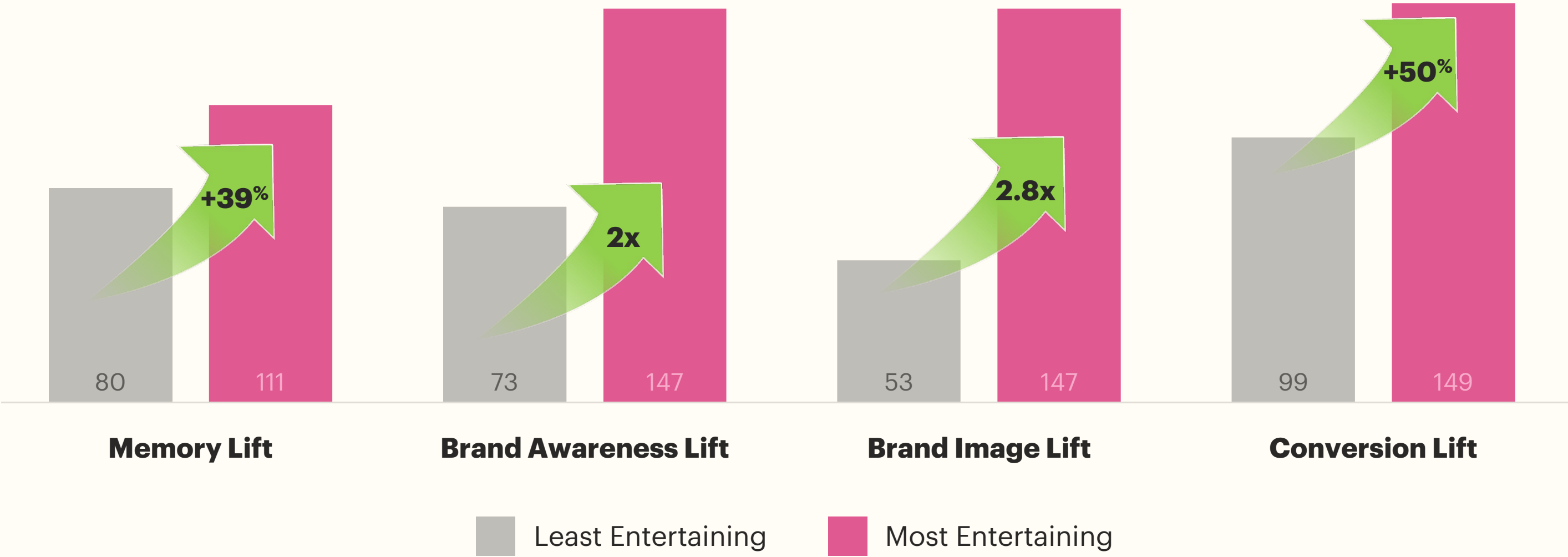
Ads that manage to entertain viewers not only see huge gains in brand-building, they also convert more.

By stopping the scroll, holding more attention, reaching more people and leaving them feeling great, entertaining short-form ads not only create lasting effects but they convert.

HAVE YOUR CAKE AND EAT IT. UNIQUELY, ENTERTAINING SHORT-FORM ADS BUILD BRAND AND CONVERT CUSTOMERS.

BRAND & CONVERSION LIFT

by Showmanship Features, top vs bottom quartile



Analysis conducted via System1's Test Your Ad: Social with 84,788 respondents (TikTok users) across eight markets (US, UK, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Brazil, and Mexico), matched with 358 locally run TikTok Brand and Conversion Lift studies.

THE HIDDEN COST OF SALESMANSHIP

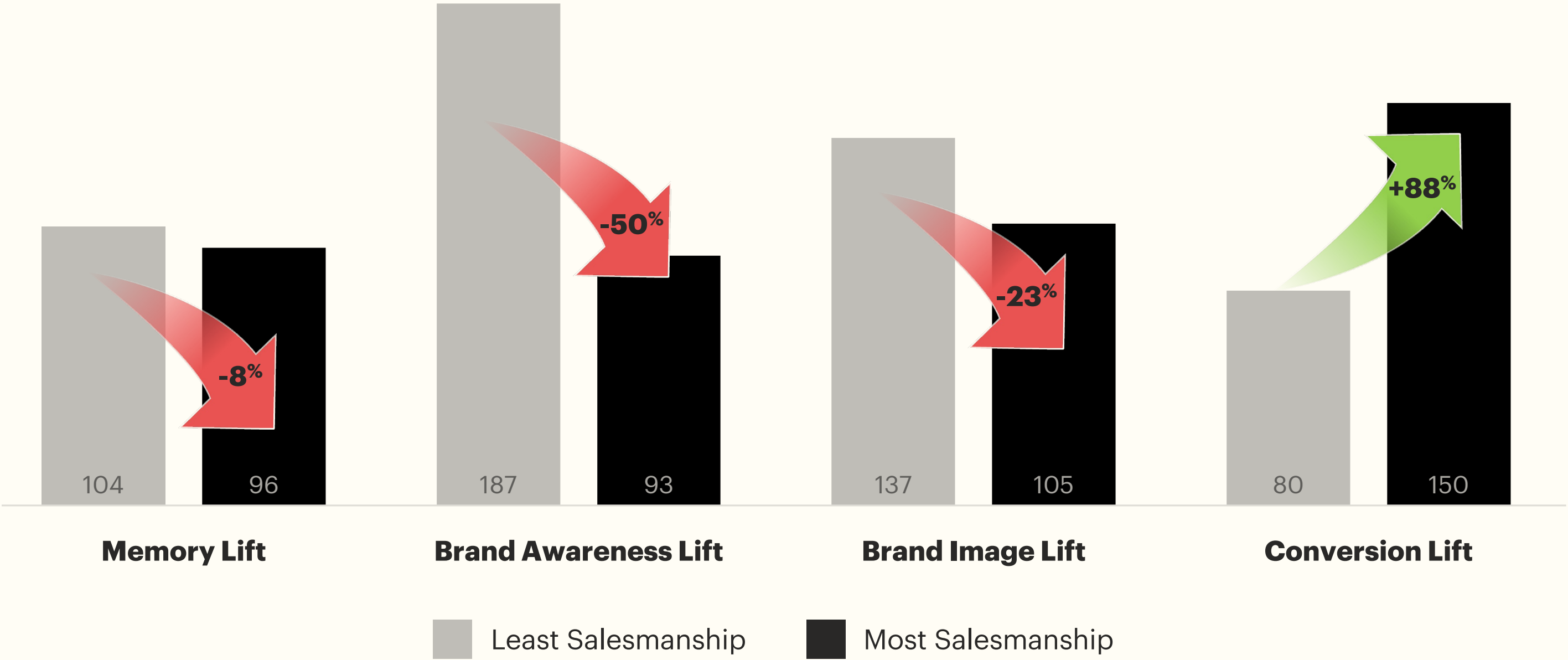
Crucially, Salesmanship doesn't help with brand-building. Assuming the interest of the viewer and creating ads that intend to land messages and product features converts harder but it comes with a hidden cost.

These types of campaigns see a reduced lift in Memory, Brand Awareness and Brand Image.

SELLING DOESN'T HAVE TO BE TRANSACTIONAL, IT CAN PUT ON A SHOW, AND WHEN IT DOES, BRANDS AND CONSUMERS WIN.

BRAND & CONVERSION LIFT

by Salesmanship Features, top vs bottom quartile



Analysis conducted via System1's Test Your Ad: Social with 84,788 respondents (TikTok users) across eight markets (US, UK, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Brazil, and Mexico), matched with 358 locally run TikTok Brand and Conversion Lift studies.

CHAPTER 4 TAKEAWAYS

ENTERTAINMENT DRIVES BOTH THE LONG AND THE SHORT

Entertaining ads don't just build brand, they also convert. The most entertaining short-form ads deliver strong lifts in both brand and conversion outcomes, challenging the idea that marketers must choose between entertaining their audiences or selling to them.

1

SALESMANSHIP SELLS, BUT AT THE EXPENSE OF BRAND

Ads which lean into Salesmanship are marginally better at driving conversions but fall short on driving brand outcomes like Brand Awareness or Brand Image. They perform, but don't build brand.

2

ENTERTAINMENT IS A STRATEGIC IMPERATIVE, NOT A TRADE-OFF

The most effective form to drive both the long and the short is ads that entertain! Selling doesn't have to be transactional, it can put on a show, and when it does, brands and consumers win.

3

CHAPTER 5

#HOWTOWIN

(BRAND) SIZE MATTERS

System1



#THELONG

This chapter turns universal insights into tailored actions.

Not all brands have the same goals, resources, or levels of brand equity. The creative strategies that work best for some will require adjustments for others. In this chapter, we go deeper into how advertisers can apply the findings from this research based on **brand size** and **creative style**.

Salesmanship features (see Chapter 3) work very differently for challenger and contender brands compared to category leaders.

LARGE BRANDS PAY A SMALLER PENALTY FOR SALESMANSHIP

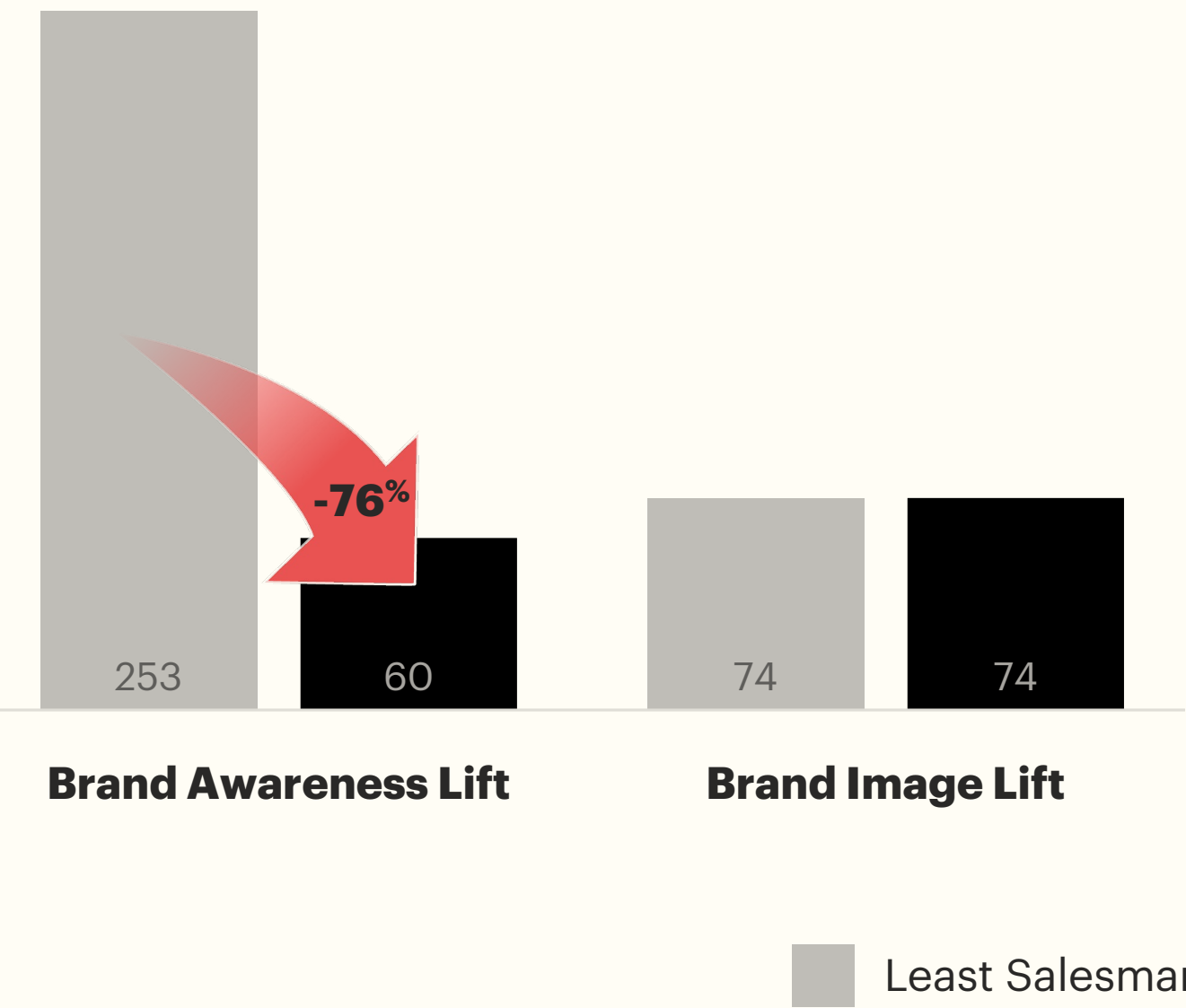
As we saw in Chapter 4, Salesmanship features struggle to drive brand effects. For challenger and contender brands, their low levels of equity only compound this problem. Without strong brand equity to give these ads credibility and foundation, Salesmanship for smaller brands disproportionately detracts from ads’ ability to drive brand outcomes.

For category leaders, while high Salesmanship is not the optimal approach to driving brand outcomes (especially Brand Awareness), it is able to deliver some smaller Brand Image gains.



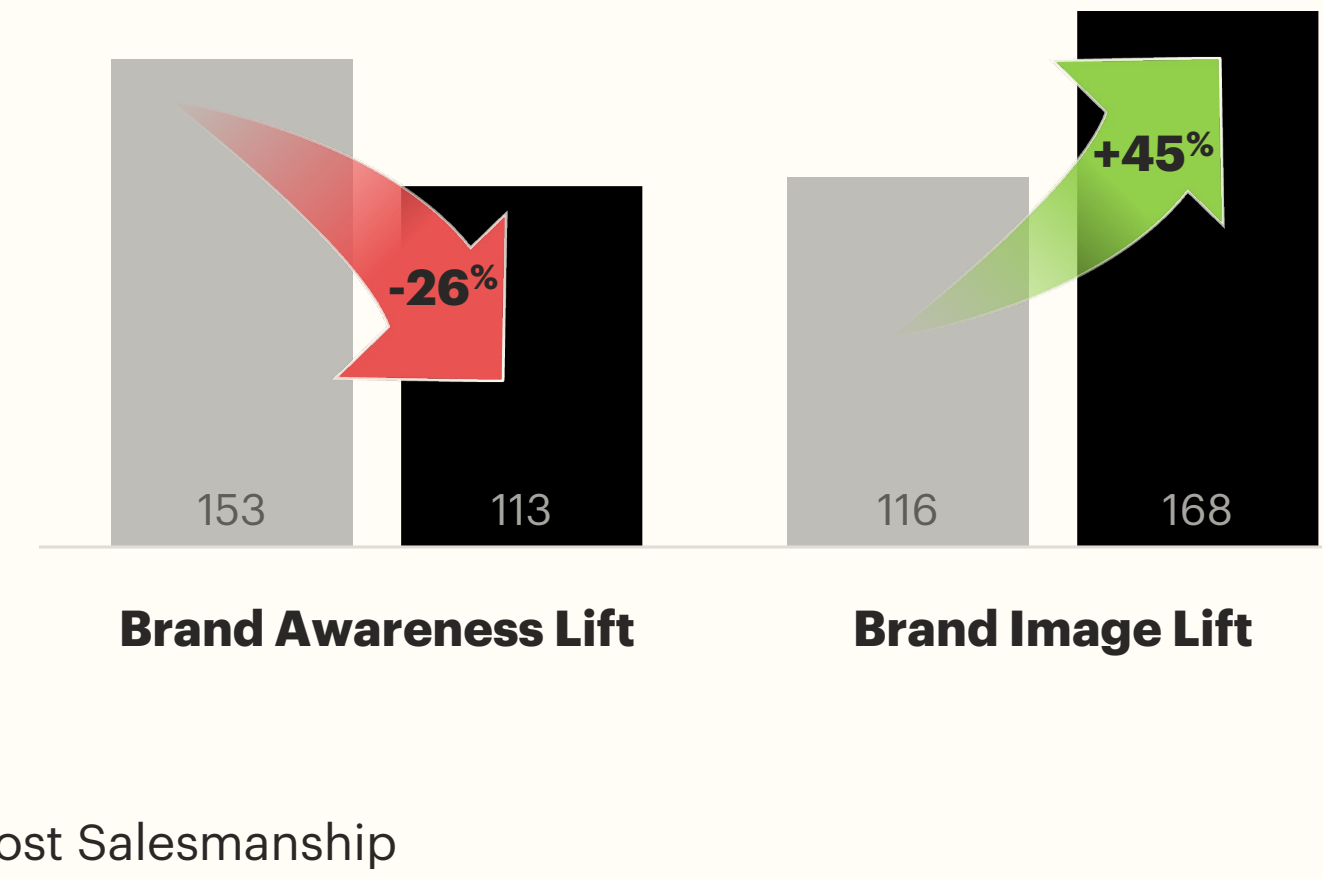
BRAND LIFT

Challengers and Contenders by Salesmanship Features



BRAND LIFT

Category Leaders by Salesmanship Features



Comparison of top and bottom quartiles for Salesmanship, based on prevalence of Salesmanship Features. Split by brand size (Challengers & Contenders vs. Category Leaders). Analysis conducted via System1’s Test Your Ad: Social with 84,788 respondents (TikTok users) across eight markets (US, UK, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Brazil, and Mexico), matched with 239 locally run TikTok Brand Lift studies.

#THELONG

DISTINCT ENTERTAINMENT: ADS THAT SUCCESSFULLY ENTERTAIN WHILE BRANDING EARLY.

Using entertaining ads is a brilliant strategy for brands of all sizes to grow but we see large brands having an unfair advantage here. Ads from smaller brands that aren’t distinctive from the outset struggle to build awareness, because the positive sentiment and attention that entertainment drives isn’t being correctly attributed to the brand.

The fix? Distinctive Entertainment.

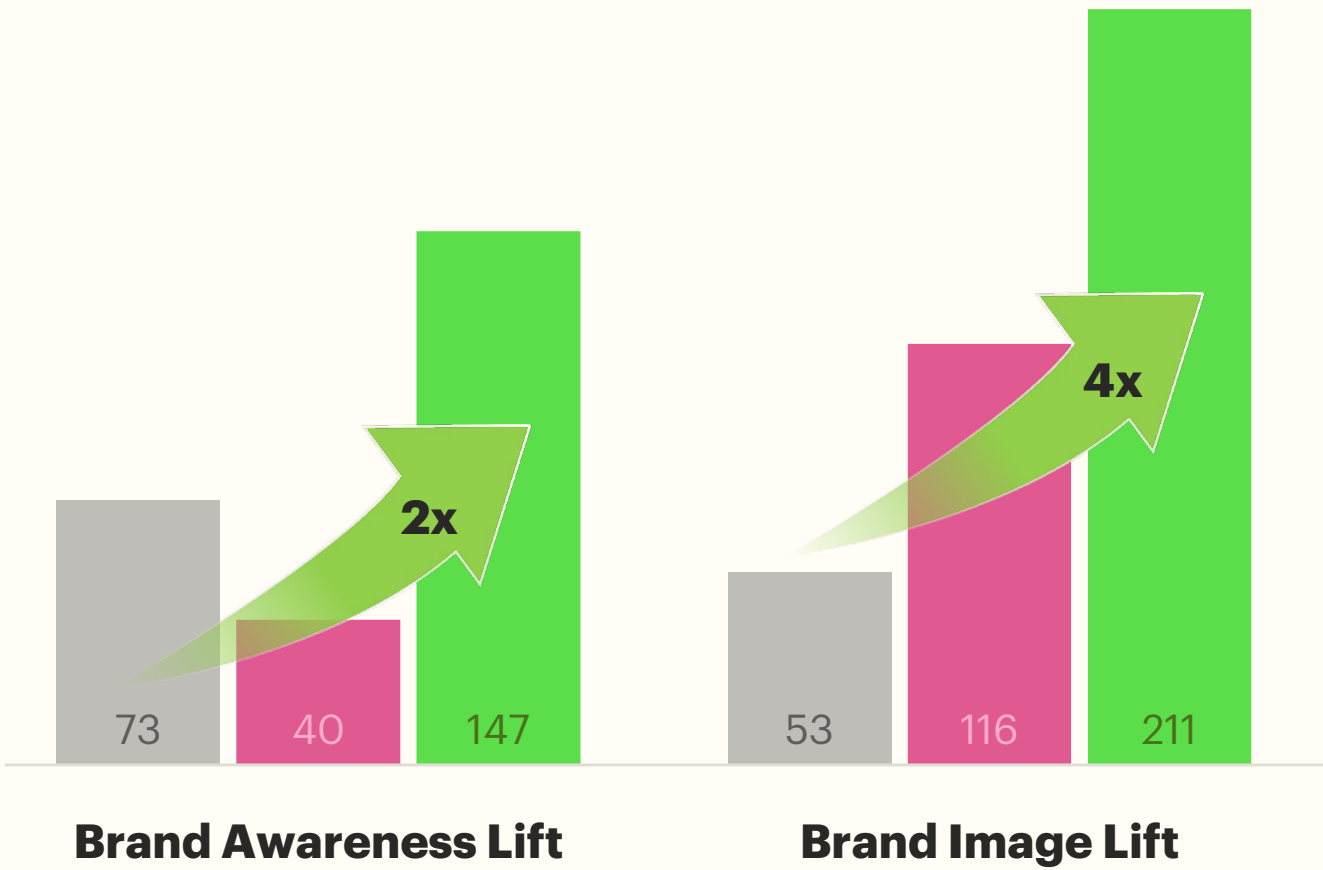
While especially important for smaller brands, Distinct Entertainment should be the new go-to for brands of all sizes to grow with short-form video.

Don’t fall at the final hurdle. Capitalize on the power of entertainment by making sure it’s well branded.



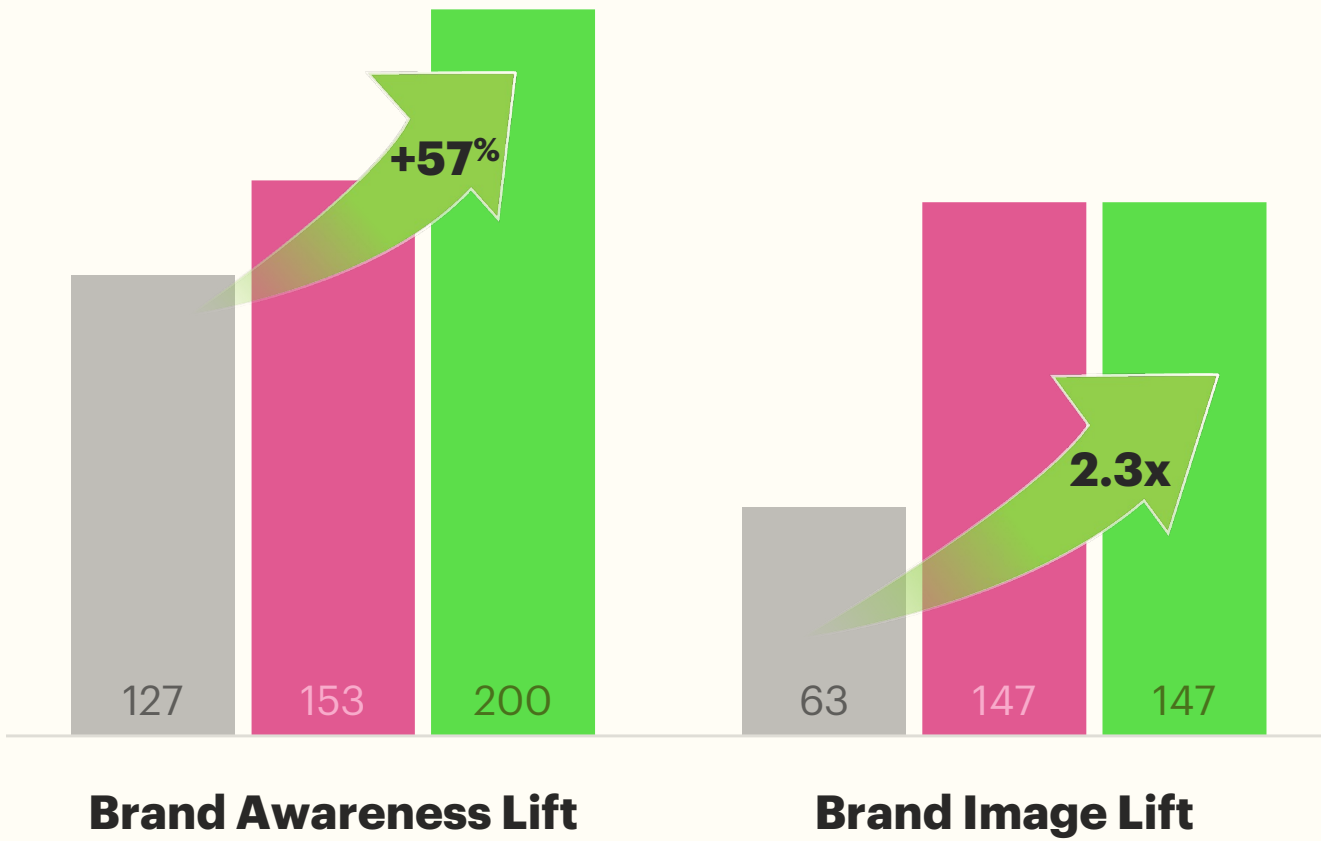
BRAND LIFT

Challengers and Contenders by creative style



BRAND LIFT

Category Leaders by creative style



Least Entertaining Most Entertaining Distinct Entertainment

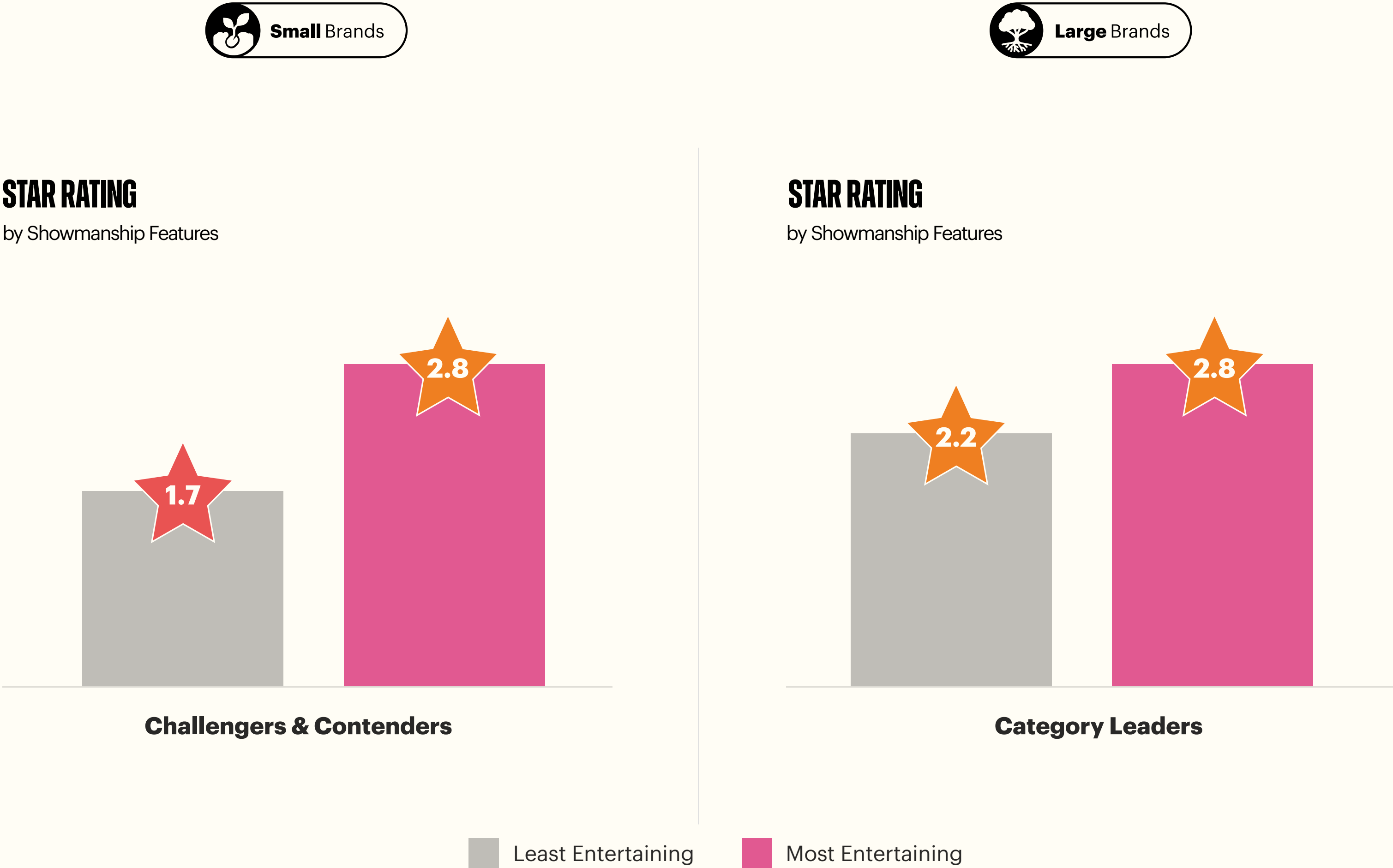
Comparison of top and bottom quartiles for Entertainment Level, based on prevalence of Showmanship Features. Includes ‘Distinctive Entertainment’ - ads in the top quartile for prevalence of Showmanship features and early branding. Split by brand size (Challengers & Contenders vs. Category Leaders). Analysis conducted via System1’s Test Your Ad: Social with 84,788 respondents (TikTok users) across eight markets (US, UK, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Brazil, and Mexico), matched with 239 locally run TikTok Brand Lift studies.

#THELONG

ENTERTAINING ADS ALLOW SMALL BRANDS TO GROW LIKE BIG BRANDS.

Entertainment also levels the playing field for challenger and contender brands when it comes to driving positive sentiment with consumers.

The least entertaining ads are still able to more effectively drive positive sentiment towards category leaders than they are for challenger and contender brands, once again highlighting the advantage of brand size. **However, the most entertaining ads erase that difference**, delivering equal levels of positive sentiment across brand size.



Comparison of top and bottom quartiles for Entertainment Level, based on prevalence of Showmanship Features, matched to Star Rating (ads creating positive sentiment). Split by brand size (Category Leaders vs. Challengers & Contenders). Analysis conducted via System1's Test Your Ad: Social with 84,788 respondents (TikTok users) across eight markets (US, UK, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Brazil, and Mexico).

#THESHORT

Entertainment and Salesmanship both drive conversion no matter the brand size. But there are still important differences in effectiveness for each.

CATEGORY LEADERS

For category leaders, Salesmanship proves especially effective at driving conversions, as it’s able to capitalize on their superior levels of brand equity.

CHALLENGERS & CONTENDERS

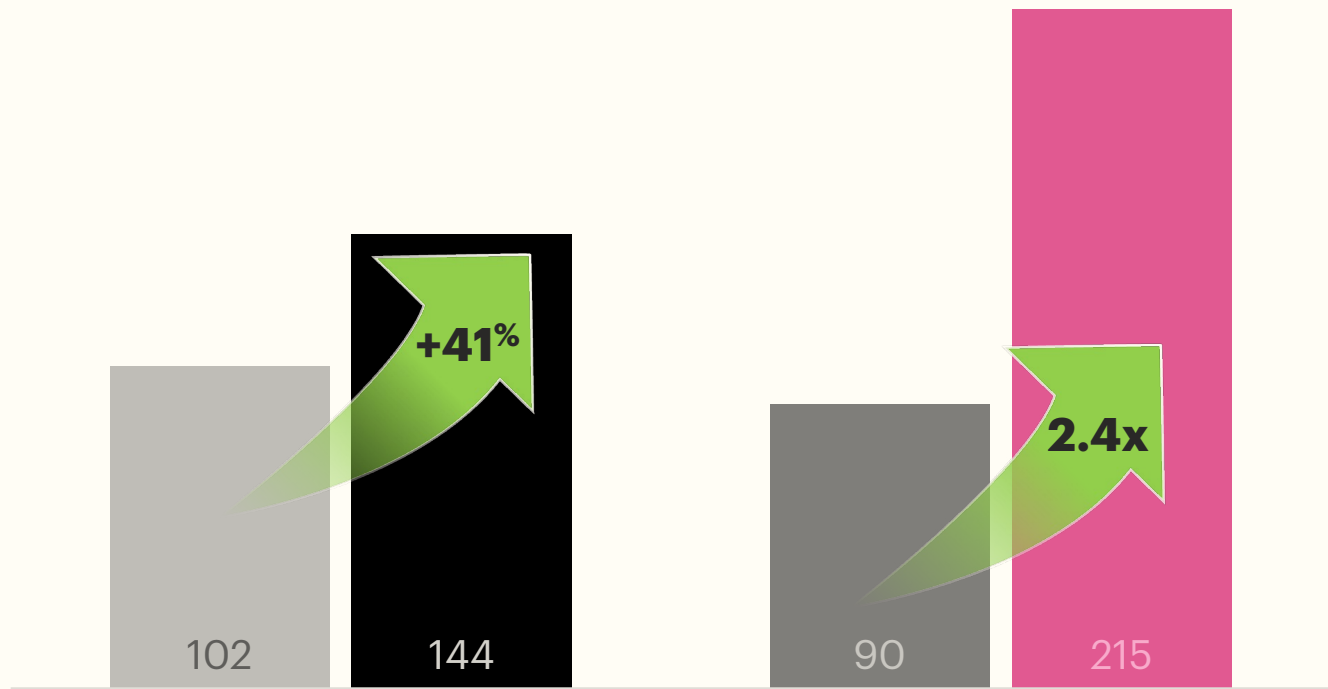
For challenger and contender brands, without this latent equity, entertainment creates an enormous conversion advantage for them.

#SHOWMANSHIP #SALESMANSHIP



CONVERSION LIFT

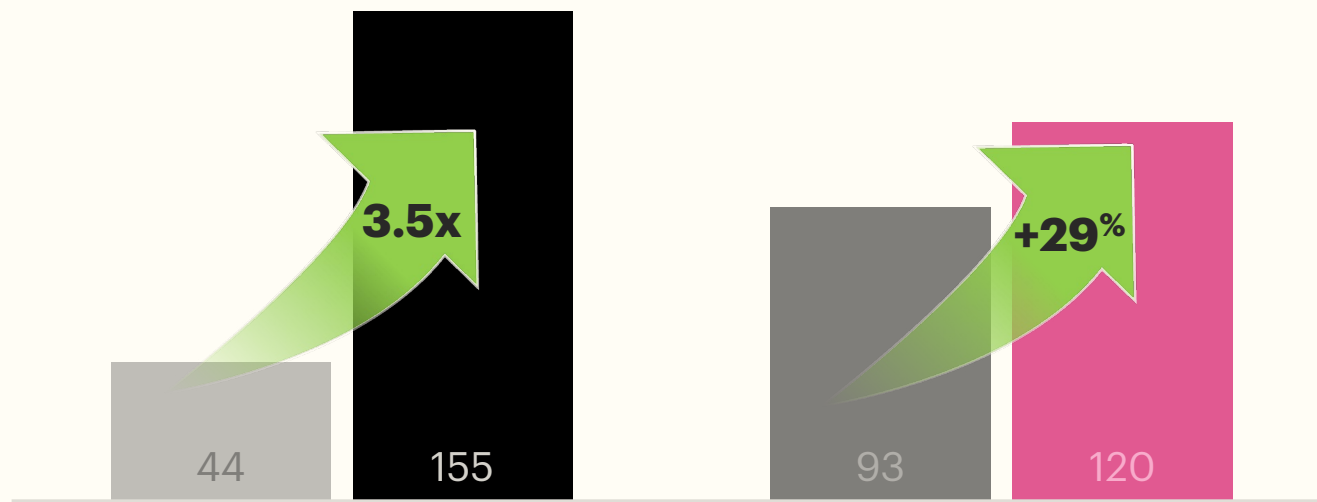
by Showmanship & Salesmanship Features



Challengers & Contenders

CONVERSION LIFT

by Showmanship & Salesmanship Features



Category Leaders

Least Salesmanship Most Salesmanship Least Entertaining Most Entertaining

Comparison of top and bottom quartiles for Salesmanship and Showmanship features. Split by brand size (Challengers & Contenders vs. Category Leaders). Analysis conducted via System1’s Test Your Ad: Social with 84,788 respondents (TikTok users) across eight markets (US, UK, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Brazil, and Mexico), matched with 119 locally run TikTok Conversion Lift studies.

#THESHORT

LARGE BRANDS GET AN ADVANTAGE:
EARLY BRANDING HELPS THEM CONVERT
MORE BUT SMALLER BRANDS NEED TO
LEAN ON SENTIMENT.

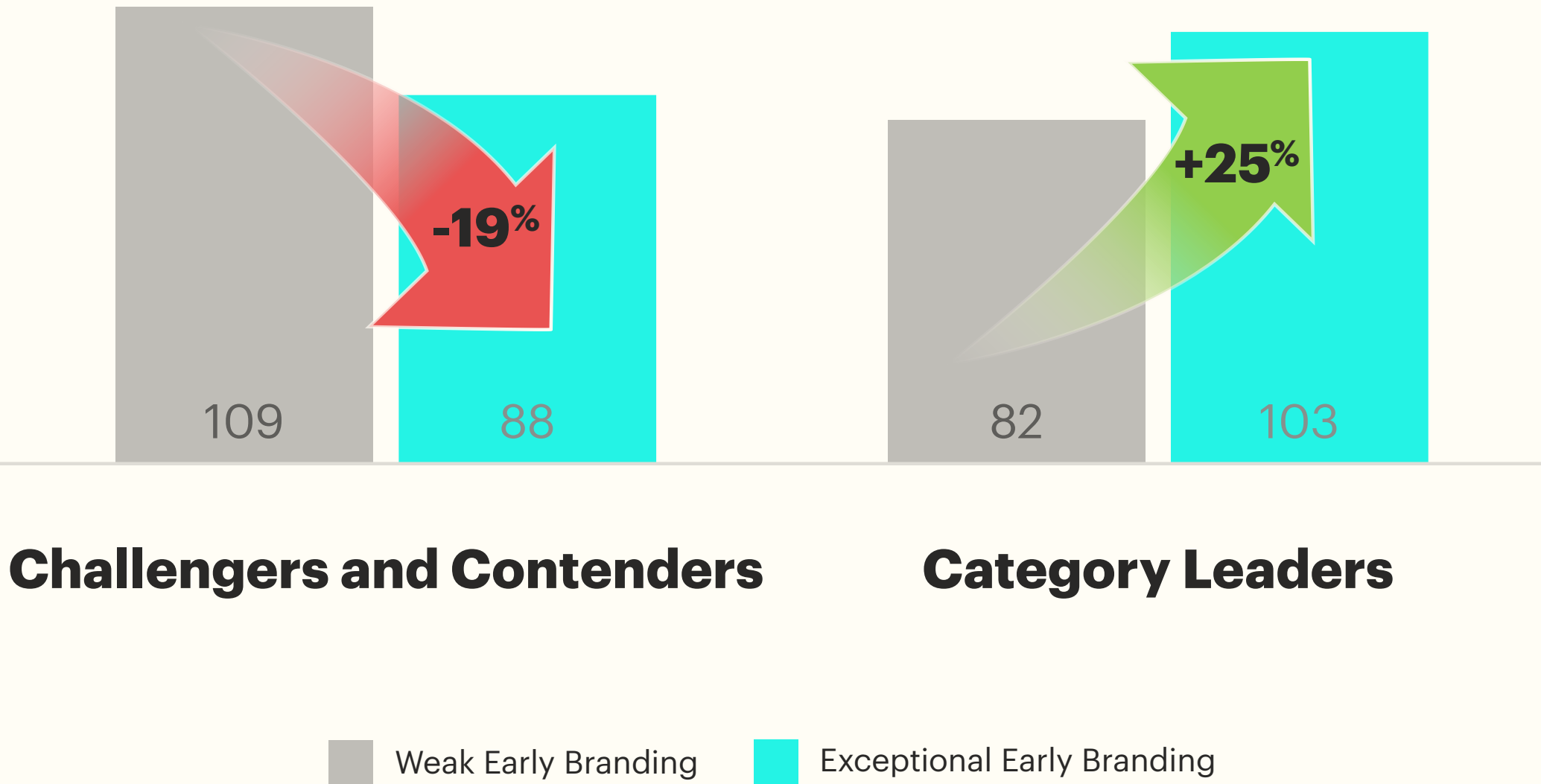
We see a similar pattern across brand size on positive sentiment and early branding. **Much like Salesmanship, strong early branding boosts conversion rates for category leaders but not challenger and contender brands**, due to the disparity in brand equity between the two.

Ads for smaller brands must do more to win consumers over in order to convert. And just as entertainment is a powerful strategy for doing so, the positive sentiment it drives helps these brands convert. Ads with exceptional Star Rating (positive sentiment) help smaller brands increase conversion lift by 77%.

In the absence of category leading levels of brand equity, entertainment and driving positive sentiment are a winning strategy for conversion.

CONVERSION LIFT

by Fast Fluency, split by brand size



Comparison of top and bottom quartiles for early branding recognition (Fast Fluency) and Star Rating. Split by brand size (Challengers & Contenders vs. Category Leaders). Analysis conducted via System1’s Test Your Ad: Social with 84,788 respondents (TikTok users) across eight markets (US, UK, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Brazil, and Mexico), matched with 119 locally run TikTok Conversion Lift studies.

#BRANDING

BUILDING EARLY RECOGNITION

With early branding playing a crucial role for brands of all sizes when it comes to driving brand outcomes and proving particularly advantageous for category leaders on conversion, this then begs the questions, what is the most effective way to drive this metric? How can advertisers be distinctive? And how should they think about the perceived trade-offs that may or may not come with this?

As Chapter 2 touched upon, early branding does not broadly lead to decreases in attention. However, there are some important caveats to this. Not all distinctive assets are created equal.

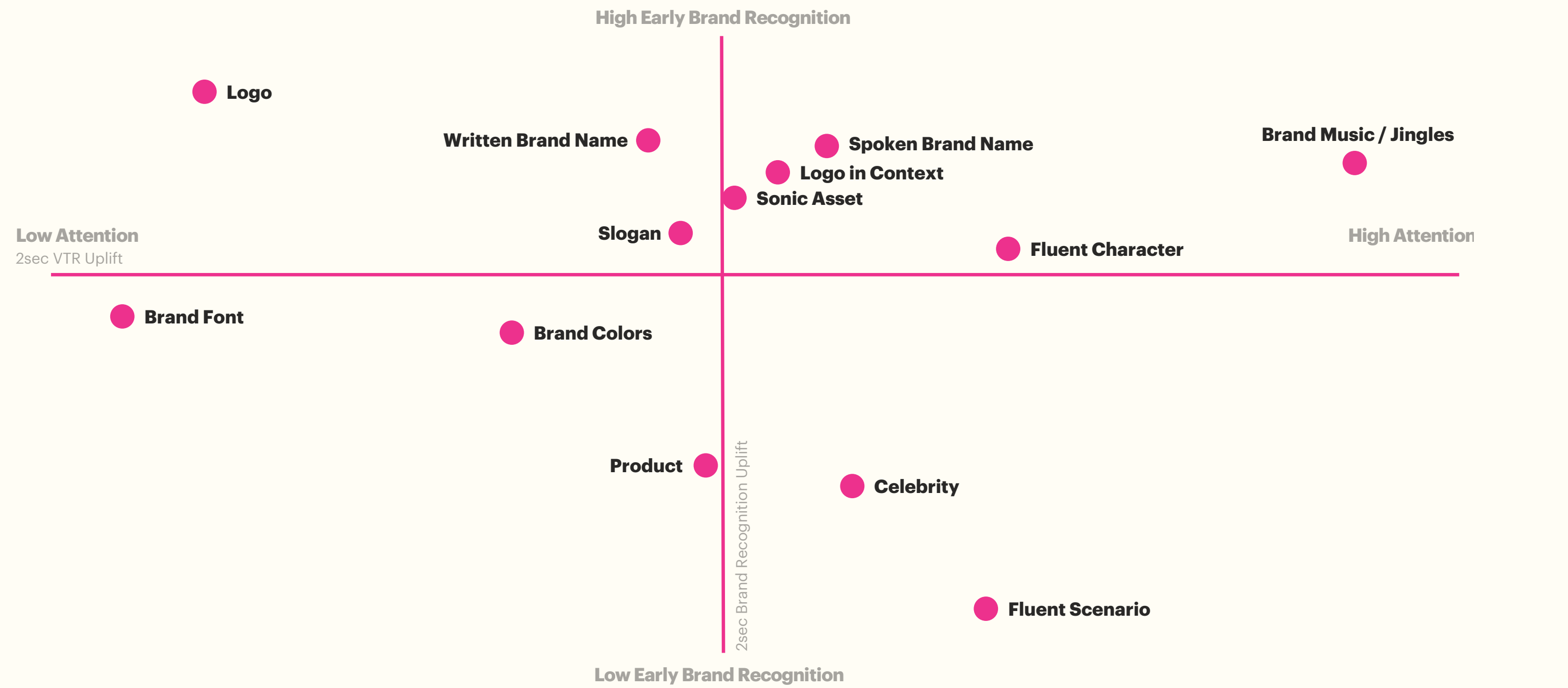
This chart shows the trade-offs (of lack thereof) between attention and early brand recognition for each kind of distinctive asset.

Logos are the most powerful asset for driving recognition but have one of the highest costs in terms of attention. After years of brands simply putting their logo in the first 2 seconds of digital ads, consumers have likely been conditioned to swipe past these and the ensuing attention decline results in lower brand awareness gains.

A LOGO ISN'T A HOOK BUT OTHER DISTINCTIVE ASSETS ARE

HOW DISTINCTIVE ASSETS DRIVE ATTENTION AND FAST FLUENCY

(When present in the first 2 seconds of an Ad)



Comparison of Attention and Early Brand Recognition (Fast Fluency) for ads with and without distinctive brand assets in the first 2 seconds. Attention measured via change in 2-second view-through rate (VTR); Fast Fluency via change in 2-second brand recognition; both relative to the average. Analysis conducted via System1's Test Your Ad: Social with 84,788 respondents (TikTok users) across eight markets (US, UK, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Brazil, and Mexico).

#BRANDING

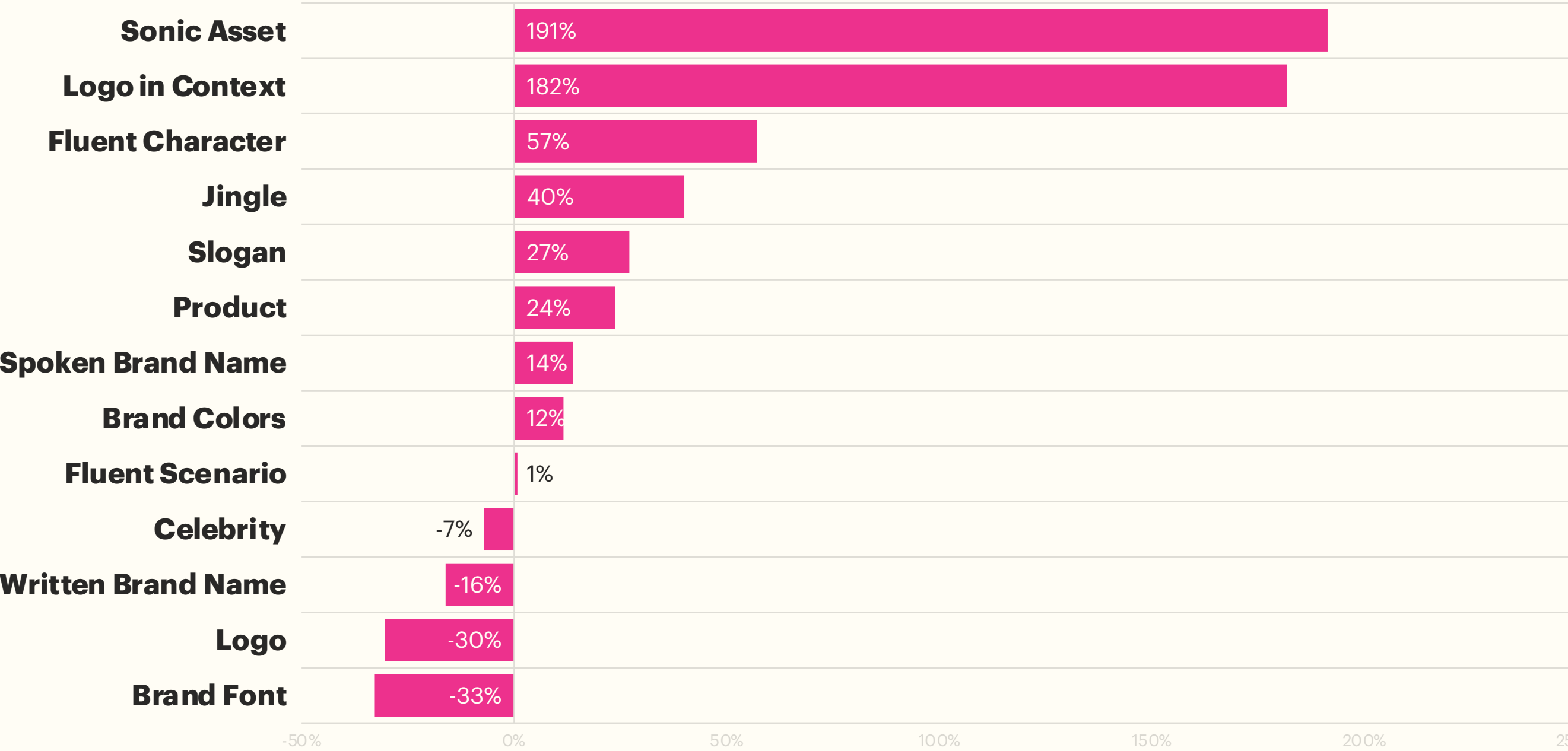
Advertisers should instead prioritize distinctive assets which both hook attention and drive 2 second brand recognition (Fast Fluency) to maximize brand awareness gains. A great example of this are logos in context, which are integrated into the scene of an ad and typically help boost recognition and attention.



Fluent Brand Characters, Brand Music/Jingles, Sonic Assets and Spoken Brand Names are other distinctive assets which also win on recognition and attention. But as the chart to the right shows, aren't the only way to drive effective brand recognition and ultimately brand awareness.

CHANGE IN BRAND AWARENESS LIFT

if brand asset present in first 2sec



Comparison of Brand Awareness Lift for ads with and without distinctive brand assets in the first 2 seconds. Analysis conducted via System1's Test Your Ad: Social with 84,788 respondents (TikTok users) across eight markets (US, UK, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Brazil, and Mexico), matched with 239 locally run TikTok Brand Lift studies.

#BRANDING

BRAND & ATTENTION SWEET SPOT: USE UP TO 4 DISTINCTIVE ASSETS

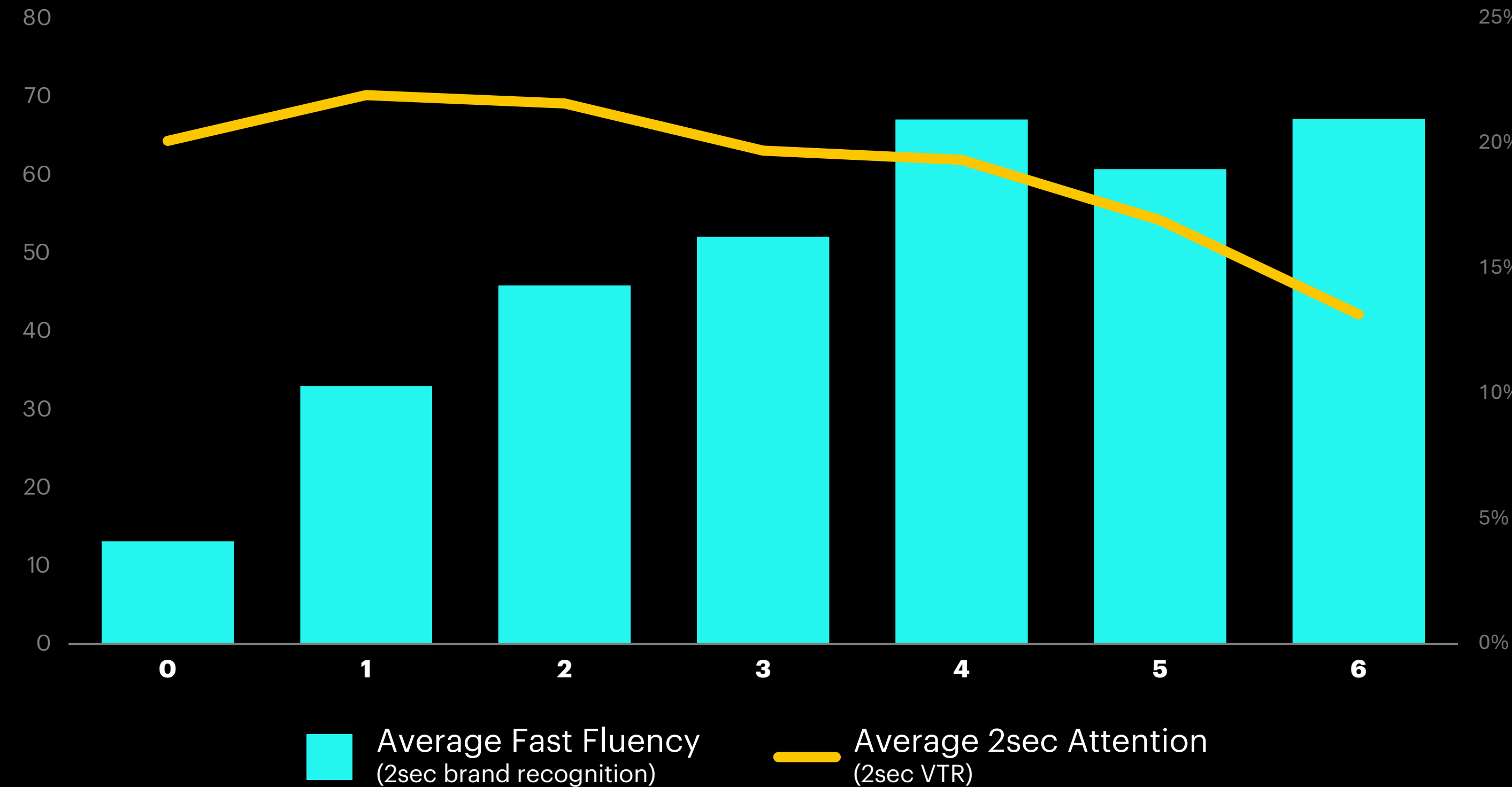
What’s clear is that there is also a sweet spot in terms of the *number* of distinctive assets an ad should leverage in the opening 2 seconds.

Ads which leverage **4 distinctive assets** in the opening 2 seconds are recognized by consumers at 2x the rate of ads which leverage 1, with limited declines in attention. Beyond 4 assets we see that attention starts to decline significantly.

4 assets may sound like a lot but given that these can be audio and visual, it’s certainly achievable, especially if they are integrated into the story, adding value and context.

NUMBER OF DISTINCTIVE ASSETS USED IN FIRST 2 SECONDS

by Fast Fluency and Attention Level



Comparison of Fast Fluency (2-second brand recognition) and Attention (2-second view-through rate) based on the number of distinctive brand assets used in the first 2 seconds. Analysis conducted via System1’s Test Your Ad: Social with 84,788 respondents (TikTok users) across eight markets (US, UK, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Brazil, and Mexico).

#CREATIVESTYLES

And finally, how can these learnings be applied across creative style?

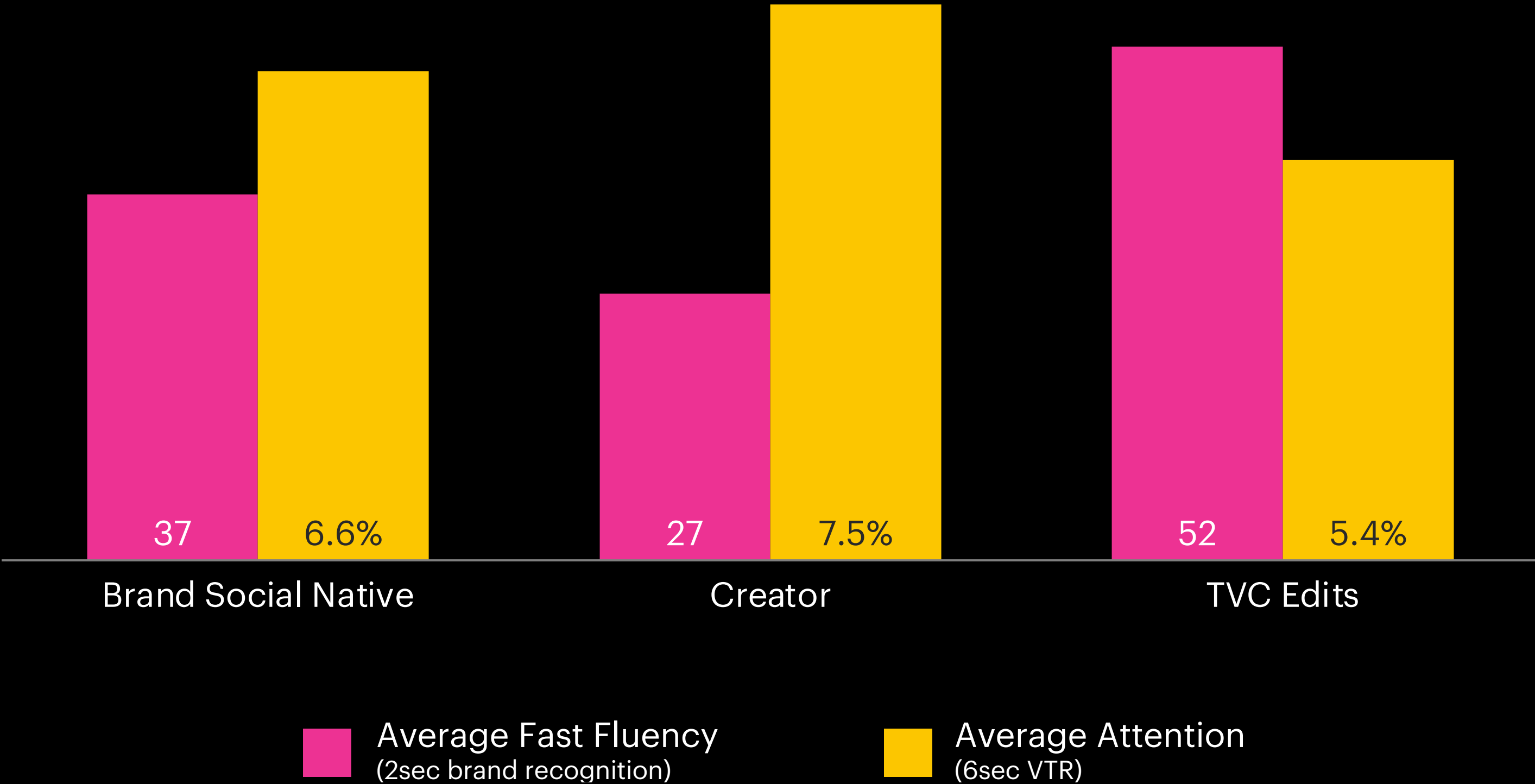
There are significant differences in the level of early branding and attention across creative styles and therein lies an opportunity for advertisers.

TikTok users pay creator ads 39% more attention than they do traditional brand ads (e.g. TVC edits), yet at the same time, they're able to correctly identify which brand the creator ad is for at roughly half the rate of traditional brand ads.

THE CREATOR OPPORTUNITY:
CREATOR ASSETS HOLD
MORE ATTENTION BUT SEE
HALF THE EARLY BRAND
RECOGNITION.

FAST FLUENCY & ATTENTION

by Creative Style



Comparison of Fast Fluency (2-second brand recognition) and Attention (6-second view-through rate) by creative style—Brand Traditional, Brand Native, and Creator Led. Analysis conducted via System1’s Test Your Ad: Social with 84,788 respondents (TikTok users) across eight markets (US, UK, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Brazil, and Mexico).

#CREATIVESTYLES

WELL-BRANDED CREATOR ASSETS ARE THE TICKET TO BRAND GROWTH IN SHORT-FORM.

Ads which are more distinctive (with exceptional early brand recognition) improve brand outcomes across all creative styles. But distinctive creator led ads deliver the best of both worlds: they harness the increased attention creators garner, without sacrificing early brand recognition.

These ads successfully integrate branding in a way which not only feels natural but at its best is integral to the story being conveyed. In turn, they are able to deliver enormous Brand Awareness and Brand Image gains in comparison to brand traditional and brand native ads.

DISTINCTIVE CREATOR ADS DRIVE

2.3X

more Brand Awareness lift

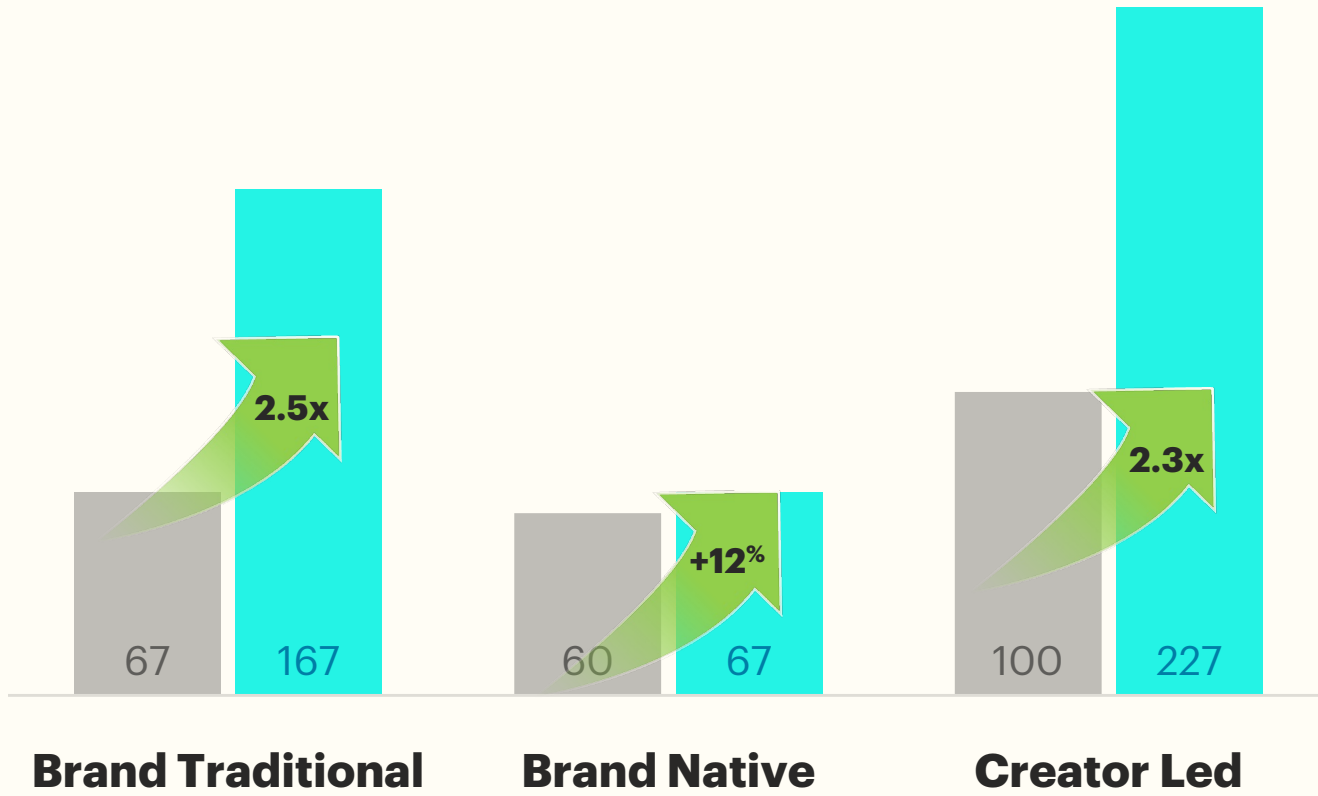
3X

the Brand Image lift



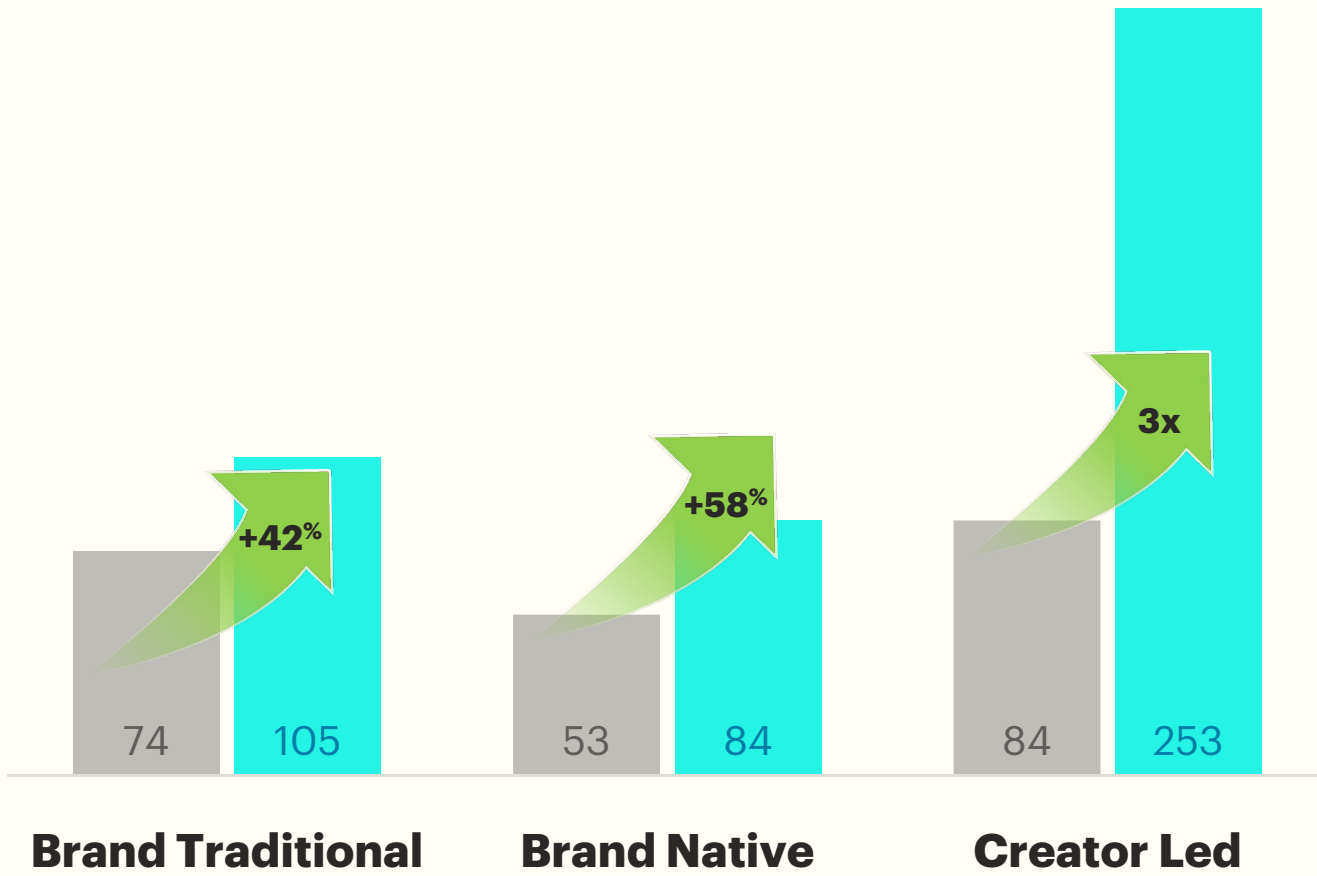
BRAND AWARENESS LIFT

by Fast Fluency. Split by Creative Style



BRAND IMAGE LIFT

by Fast Fluency. Split by Creative Style



Weak Early Branding Exceptional Early Branding

Comparison of top and bottom quartiles for early branding recognition (Fast Fluency). Split by creative style (Brand Traditional, Brand Native, Creator Led). Analysis conducted via System1's Test Your Ad: Social with 84,788 respondents (TikTok users) across eight markets (US, UK, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Brazil, and Mexico), matched with 239 locally run TikTok Brand Lift studies.

#CREATIVESTYLES

CREATOR ADS THAT BRAND EARLY AND CREATE POSITIVE SENTIMENT PROVIDE A HUGE OPPORTUNITY FOR BRANDS OF ALL SIZES TO INCREASE MASS BRAND AWARENESS.

These fundamental principles - using entertaining creative features to leave viewers feeling great, and pairing them with distinctive assets to ensure that feeling is clearly linked to your brand - are proven ways to grow brands of all sizes. However, when you dig deeper into their effect across brand size and creative styles, their impact becomes even more striking.

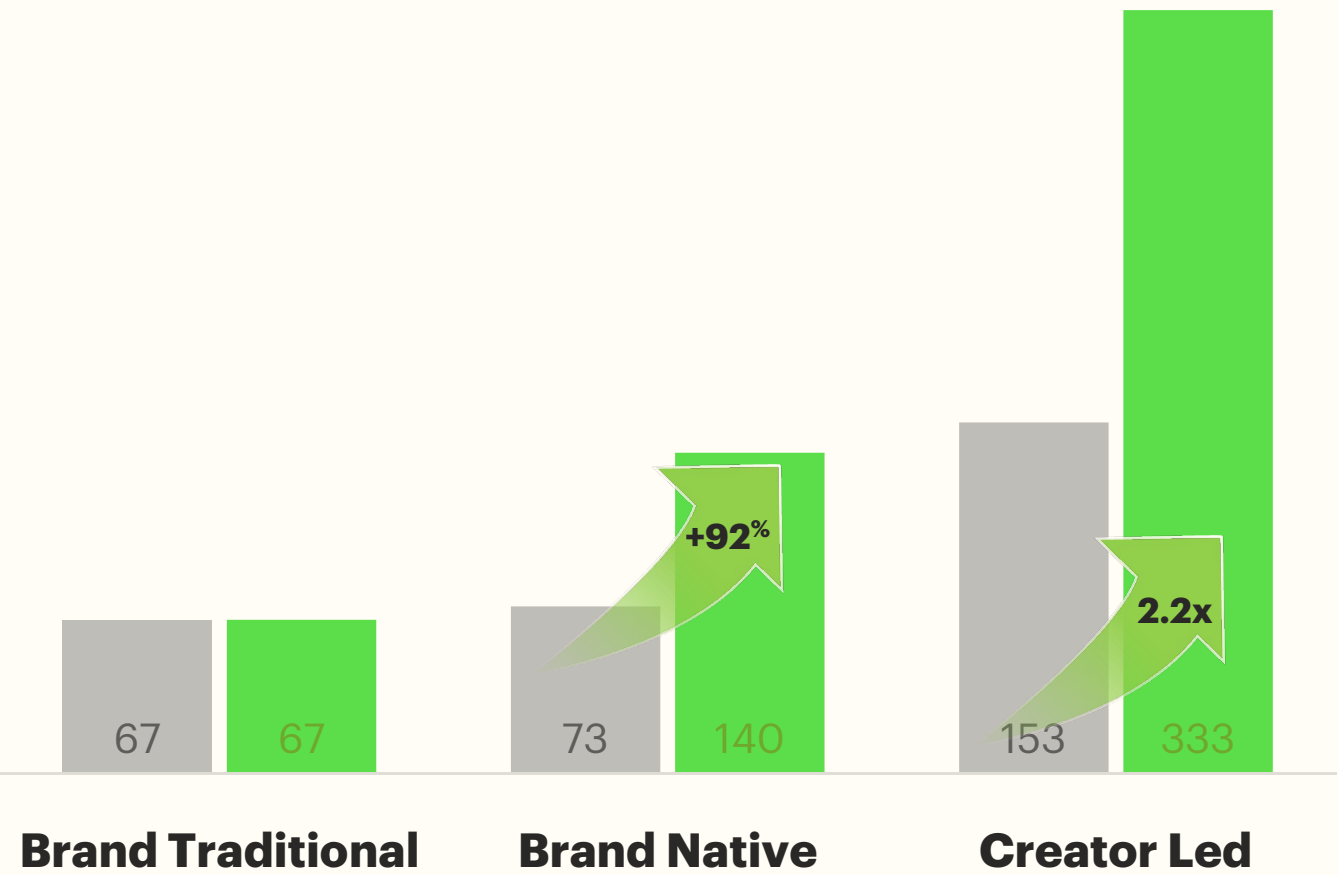
When challenger and contender brands apply these principles to creator led ads, they're able to punch well above their weight and compound their brand growth.



Small Brands

BRAND AWARENESS LIFT

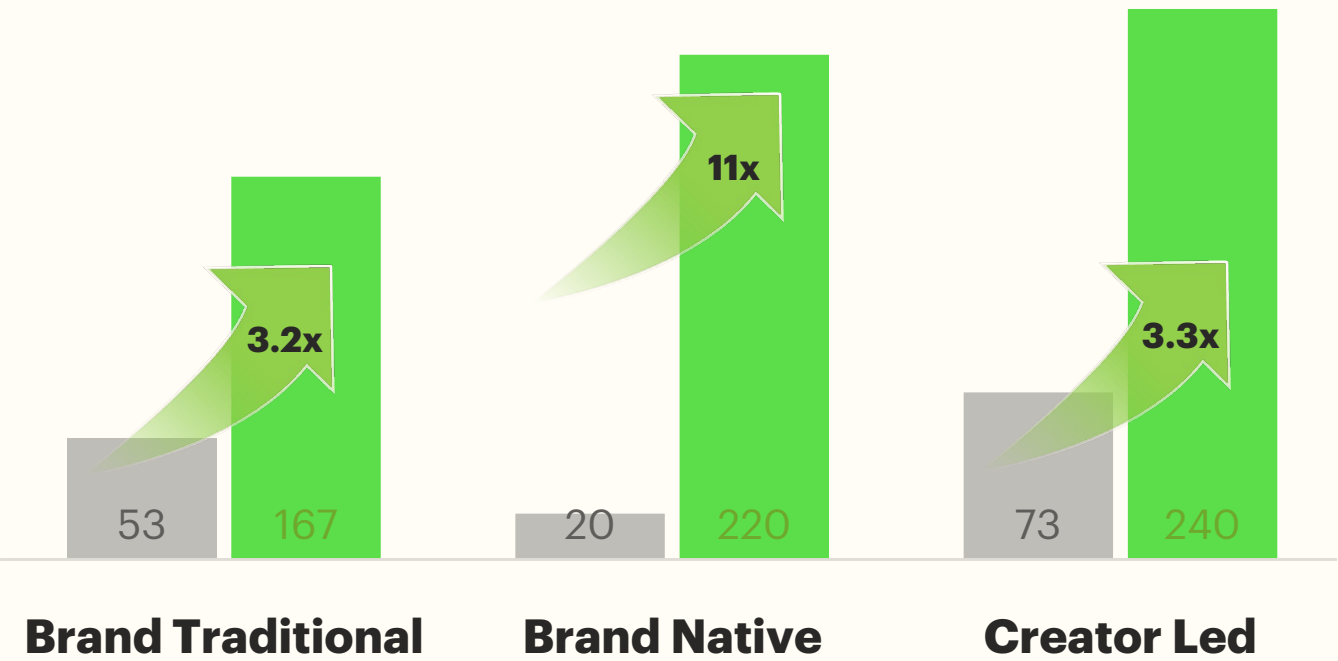
Challengers & Contenders



Large Brands

BRAND AWARENESS LIFT

Category Leaders



Low Early Branding & Low Positive Sentiment

Exceptional Early Branding & Exceptional Positive Sentiment

Comparison of top and bottom quartiles for both Star Rating and early branding recognition (Fast Fluency) combined. Split by creative style (Brand Traditional, Brand Native, Creator Led). Analysis conducted via System1's Test Your Ad: Social with 84,788 respondents (TikTok users) across eight markets (US, UK, Germany, France, Italy, Spain, Brazil, and Mexico), matched with 239 locally run TikTok Brand Lift studies.

BRAND SIZE SHAPES HOW CREATIVE WORKS & WHAT IT NEEDS TO DO



This chapter underscores a fundamental truth: effectiveness isn't just about what creative you use, but how and for whom it's deployed. Brand size shapes how creative works and what it needs to do. For category leaders, brand equity acts as a tailwind, allowing even less entertaining or lightly branded creative to build brand. And when it comes to conversion, that same equity allows them to lean more heavily into Salesmanship - **because the brand itself does much of the heavy lifting.**

Challenger and contender brands, on the other hand, must be far more deliberate. Every second of creative has to work harder. It must entertain, and it must do so with early and distinctive branding in order build brand. When it comes to conversion, entertainment and the sentiment it drives **unlock a disproportionate advantage, helping smaller brands punch well above their weight.**

While early branding has historically come at a perceived cost to attention, this research challenges that assumption. With the right mix of distinctive assets - especially when integrated into the creative narrative - brands can hook attention and earn fast recognition. This is especially true for creator-led formats, where distinctive branding turns high attention into high impact, offering all brands, but especially smaller ones, a pathway to outperform.

CHAPTER 5 TAKEAWAYS

BRAND SIZE MATTERS

Brand size shapes what creative needs to do. Category leaders can (but shouldn't) rely on superior equity to carry less distinctive or less entertaining creative, while challenger and contender brands can't afford to and must make every second count.

1

SMALLER BRANDS MUST ENTERTAIN EARLY AND DISTINCTIVELY TO WIN

Without the tailwind of equity, challenger brands need creative that entertains, driving attention and sentiment. When they do, they can punch above their weight - especially on conversion.

2

BRANDING DONE RIGHT ISN'T A TAX ON ATTENTION, IT'S A DIVIDEND

With the right mix of distinctive assets, especially when woven into the creative narrative, brands can hook attention and earn early brand recognition. In creator-led formats, this turns high attention into high impact, offering all brands, and especially challenger and contender brands, a powerful path to outperform.

3

FINAL WORD

All too often, the choice between the long and the short is framed as binary. Emotional, entertaining ads build brand over time, while more rational, direct-response creative is required to drive immediate sales.

This paper challenges those outdated assumptions with new empirical evidence for why entertainment isn't just a vehicle for attention but a strategic imperative for marketers looking to maximize creative effectiveness in a short-form digital landscape. One which empowers brands, especially challengers and contenders, to convert demand effectively without sacrificing long-term brand building, all while fighting the effects of creative fatigue.

In short,

ENTERTAINMENT=EFFECTIVENESS

System1

1 ENTERTAINMENT, AND THE ATTENTION AND SENTIMENT IT DRIVES, BUILDS BRANDS AND COMBATS CREATIVE FATIGUE

By leaning into showmanship features like characters acting, a story unfolding or something out of the ordinary, marketers can drive outsized brand outcomes and make ads more resilient to wear-out.

3 THE FIRST IMPRESSION IS MAKE OR BREAK

Frequency can reinforce but can't rescue a weak ad, the first impression is crucial. Make it count.

5 BRANDING DONE RIGHT ISN'T A TAX ON ATTENTION, IT'S A DIVIDEND

When early branding is distinctive and seamlessly woven into the creative narrative, it doesn't detract from attention, it enhances it. It earns recognition fast, amplifies impact, and holds strong even at high frequency.

2 ENTERTAINMENT DRIVES BOTH THE LONG AND THE SHORT

The most effective form to drive both the long and the short is ads that entertain! Selling doesn't have to be transactional, it can put on a show, and when it does, brands and consumers win.

4 THE ENEMY OF CONVERSION ISN'T DISLIKE, IT'S INDIFFERENCE

Dull ads that leave consumers feeling nothing drive 27% fewer conversions. To convert, whether it's positive or negative sentiment, advertisers must strive to leave consumers feeling something.

6 CREATOR ADS WIN ATTENTION, EARLY BRANDING MAXIMIZES ITS IMPACT

Creator-led ads capture outsized attention, but often lack recognition. By integrating distinctive assets early, brands unlock a powerful path to outperformance.



“ Showmanship builds brands, and as this paper proves, it also converts. On short-form video platforms like TikTok, where attention is earned not given, ads that entertain deliver on both fronts. For marketers, this represents a whole new stage to play on. ”

ORLANDO WOOD
CHIEF INNOVATION OFFICER
SYSTEM1

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