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# Spanning the Irrational Divide

Research that favors rational over emotional drivers risks misdirecting clients' messaging

**S**tacks of marketing books, articles and presentations expound on the necessity for advertising to appeal to both consumers' minds and hearts. Although plenty of advertising tugs at the heart with no reference to concrete promises (consider the recent Gatorade "G" campaign) and some ads lack emotion entirely ("Reduces itching by 99%"), most ads contain a mix of both.

Single men who want to look more attractive conceal their gray hair with the brand that promises complete yet subtle coverage; automotive ads speak to complex consumer needs for performance, elegance, environmental responsibility and social esteem; mothers respond to assurances that their chil-

ous reason: Consumers will not be exposed to advertising that is purely rational. Their response to the rational concept will reflect, well, their rational thinking; their emotions will be left out of the conversation. Moreover, as we know from neurological studies, rational and emotional messages often drive one another, and separation of them in research will likely misrepresent the impact of their combined strength. Worst of all, the white card research findings may not just be wrong; they will likely misdirect future messaging.

Rather than spend endless hours crafting the perfect white card statement, the time would be better spent developing concepts that include words and images that convey

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dren will be happy consuming a great tasting fruit drink that has the goodness of vitamin fortification.

So it is anomalous that rational and emotional advertising messages, so often intertwined in ads themselves, are sometimes separated in research.

Consider this e-mail that was recently sent to my firm from an ad agency as we prepared for brand-positioning research: "We would like to make the accompanying visuals only package graphics without emotion. This will eliminate any variables that might influence the reading that we get. If we include pictures that have an emotional connotation, they might sway people's reactions and therefore influence the responses that we get on the concepts themselves."

Our response to the ad agency's suggestion: The distinction between rational and emotional messages can be helpful for clarity in creative briefs. By separating the two categories, creatives often better process them into executions that encompass both domains. However, it does not follow that the rational-emotional distinction allows for separate research assessment of rational and emotional messages.

When brand managers and advertising executives want learning on rational and emotional appeals as distinctive attributes for heuristic purposes, research experts know how to craft questions that unveil how well consumers process and are persuaded by these different kinds of messages. But because for so many brands rational and emotional content work hand in glove, purely rational-focused research is deficient.

So-called "white card" concept statements—the kind requested by the aforementioned agency—containing only rational benefits for brands that will be advertised with both rational and emotional appeals are incomplete for an obvi-

both the rational and emotional sides of the brand equation. The terms for these kinds of concepts vary: "adcepts" and "ad-like-objects" are among the most widely used descriptions. These stimuli should include a clear statement that expresses the consumer need and the brand solution, expressed with evocative copy and engaging visuals. With this process, respondents will be provided with choices of well-crafted competing concepts that function as discussion starters for richer consumer responses than white card concepts typically generate.

Everyone wins when the process is improved. Account planners receive more complete direction for creative briefs. Creatives gain access to consumers' minds and hearts. Brand managers get better advertising. Even account managers are happy because the agency's creative development process moves more rapidly, the agency's creative work is better and potential clients come out of the woodwork.

So the next time someone suggests advertising research key on a solely rational message, ask them if the brand is well served by ignoring consumers' emotional responses. If they say yes, perhaps you should suggest that they spend more time watching *Dr. Phil*.

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