



WE ARE JUST LIKE YOU

the role of emotion in advertising

by Victoria Farrow

Advertising is an ever-changing, ever adaptable means of communication. Throughout its history and its many transformations, its goal has remained the same: to sell product. But something has changed; it's approach in doing so. Sut Jhally speaks about consumption, and what drives us most to consume. Very obviously, ego and desire are what drives us to the marketplace. The purpose of advertising is to tell us we are incomplete without their product. And the best way to tell someone that they are incomplete is by the use of emotion. If you can relate to the audience's emotional need of the item, the more likely they'll want it. Storytelling and identifying to the audience plays a major role in our current marketplace.

Peddling imitation sex was the easiest way to gain attention and tap into a basic desire, but that is not as effective anymore. Maybe it's because society has become disenfranchised with its use, or because of the rising awareness of objectification, but whatever the reason, emotional value is making a comeback in the desire of objects. No, emotion is not new to the game. Emotion is instantly humanizing and a safe and effective way of playing into our desires. Sex, power, fear, violence, and crude humor are quick and easy ways of garnering attention to a product, but also very divisive. If an ad is seen as being discriminatory, it often sullies the company behind it. But emotional connection has no fallout. It's a guaranteed win for companies, an open door into the hearts, minds, and wallets of its audience.

MORE thought,
effort,
creativity,
time,
attention to detail
has gone into the selling
of the immense collection of
commodities
than any other campaign
in human history
to change public consciousness.

- Sut Jhally

Many years ago, an ad was simple and obvious in its purpose. Using Marshall McLuhan's own terms, ads used to be "hot". The message was immediate and apparent. However, people are less influenced by this now. Advertising is evolving into a "cool" message; to convince you that you want and need this product, not that it's being sold to you. Commercials are now mini-documentaries, an insight into the life of someone who's just like you. They feel, they struggle, they love, they laugh, all the while utilizing something that helps in achieving a desired life. That something is what you need for their life.

Brands used to treat the audience as an outsider, excluding them until they bought their product. But now they try to connect to the audience and include them in their message. They are trying to relate to you as a friend, or as someone you know, or as someone you identify with. First, brands had to lay the groundwork before becoming your friend. Branding goes through cycles: desire, ego, sex, and power establish themselves as something to be had. And then once had, what's to keep you sticking around? Family, friends, love, and most importantly, connection. Inclusiveness makes us feel important, and is a basic human desire.

Coca Cola, one the most recognizable and oldest brands, has a new campaign out called "Taste The Feeling". Going through their commercial and print ads, it's a mixed bag of family, friendship, and subtle sexiness. Their ad "Anthem" encompasses friendship and socializing, showing friends on an adventure or chatting it up while Coca Cola bottles are present in everyone's hands. "Brotherly Love" shows us the frustrating, yet loving relationship between siblings, that no matter how you may tease each other, family is always there when it's important. For instance, when your Coca Cola bottle is taken away from you by a bully. "Break Up" depicts an entire relationship, even to the bitter end and sweet reconciliation over a bottle of Coke. Because nothing is more romantic than using two straws for one bottle. "Supermarket" is just about plain sex appeal, but for once it's the male who's being objectified. Watching these casually, it appears as if these are normal people, going through normal lives. Yet will a glass bottle of soda give us these lives? That's what the marketing department is hoping for you to believe.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-AmKP9VE2Ms>

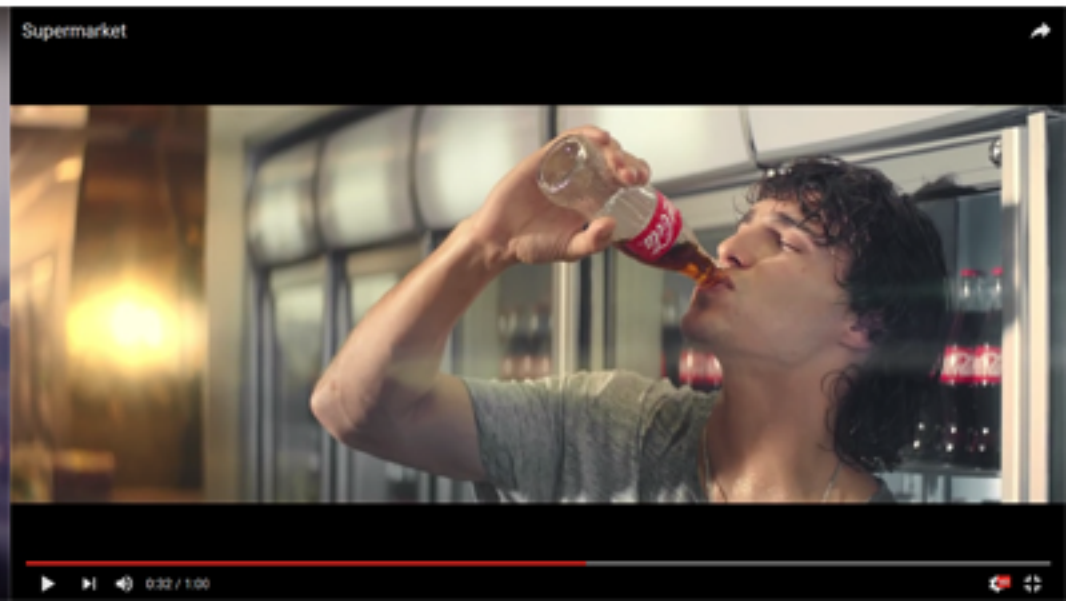
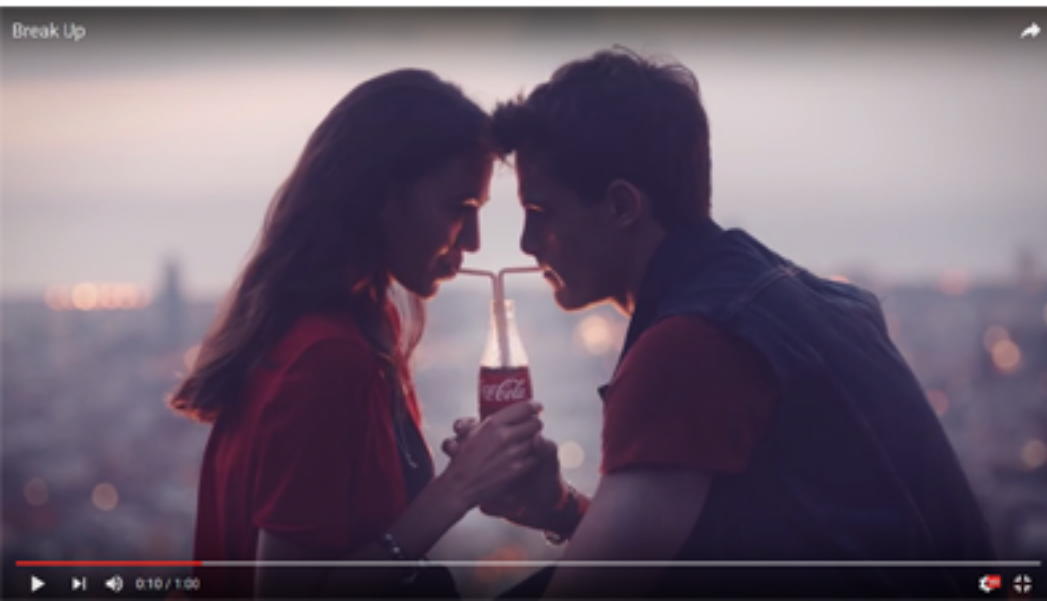


<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0oYIOBun8UI>

Coca-Cola

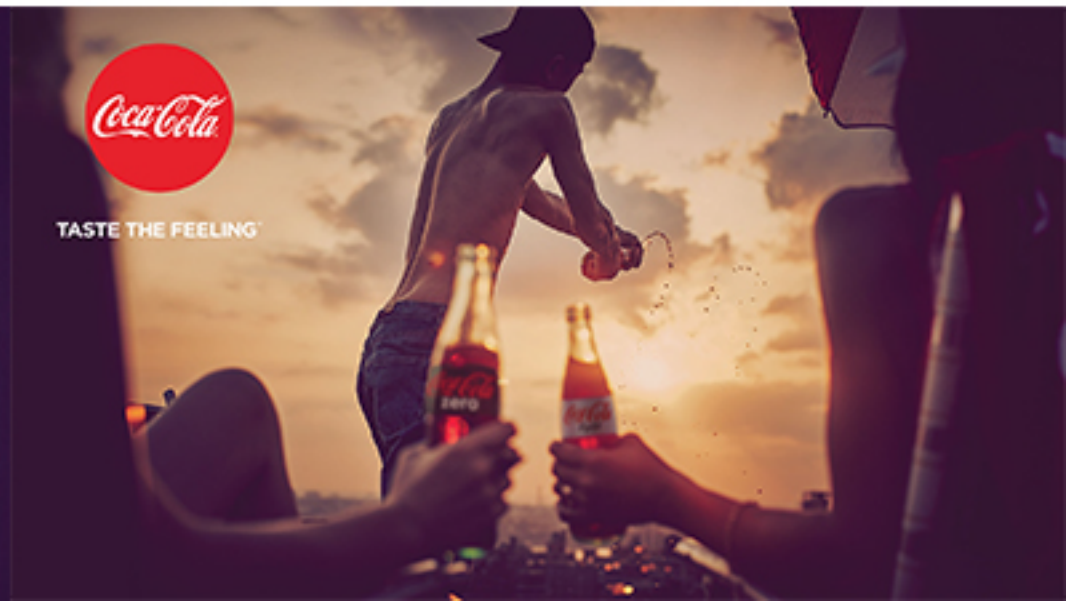
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_xp2T_TooFO

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ONQqyHV44KY>

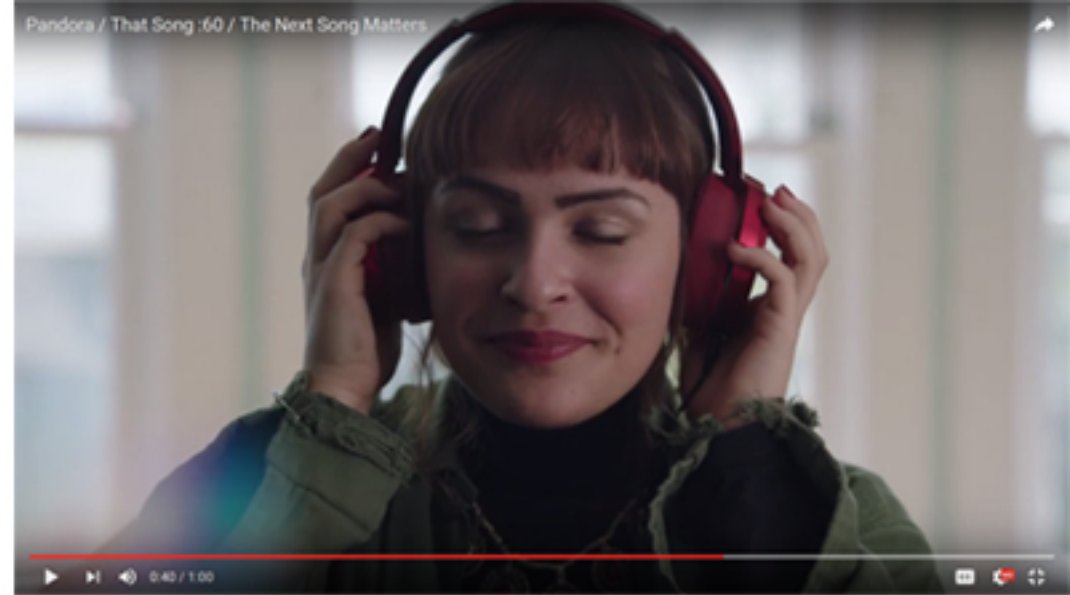




Their print ads go through the motions as well: friendship, love, sex and adventure. All basic things that most people desire, shown through a connection with a beverage. These ads tell us that the simple act of drinking soda, specifically Coca Cola, will bring us closer together.

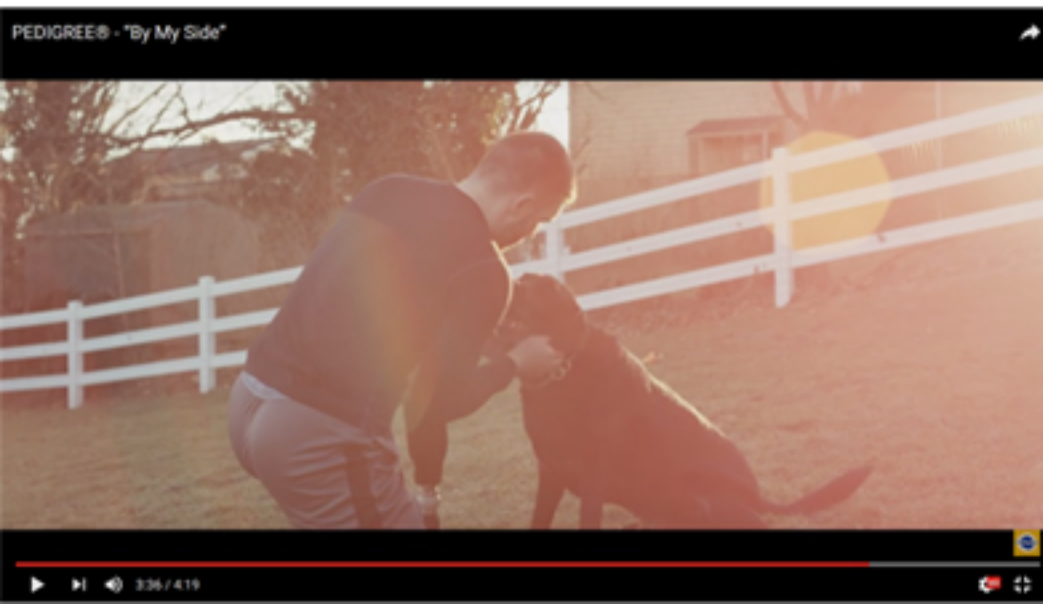


Coca Cola, being the all encompassing brand that it is, can afford to stretch itself across many emotions when it comes to selling their product. But when sex isn't appropriate for the product, that's where deep emotion needs to be depicted. The feeling of connection is most important. Pandora, the music streaming website, has an ad that shows how we all connect through music. How we each have a song that soothes us, or inspires us, or gives us a feeling of being bigger than we are. At any given time, there's someone out there listening who's going through the same emotions you are. But will a subscription to a website really make us feel these things?



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TjZYJj4yIhs>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H4BosVk1SRg>



Pedigree, the animal food company, uses animals (of course) to connect to us. We see a story of a man and his family, and how his dog helped him with PTSD. It's not a story everyone can exactly relate to, but as long as the viewer is someone who has been or currently is a dog owner, it will play on your connection to your dog. The commercial is 4 minutes long, and the product makes its appearance in the last 30 seconds. That's how emotion in this story plays a bigger role than the product itself. Because if you love your dog, the least you can do to show it love is by feeding it Pedigree.

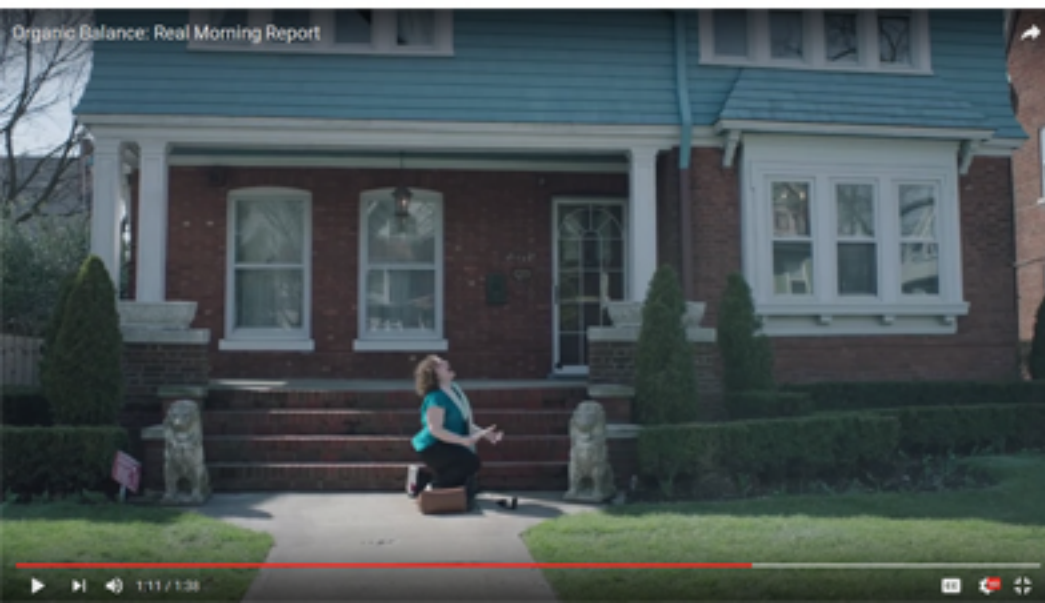
Chase bank uses a bit of humor and family in their latest commercial. A father who'd dress up as a fairy "dadmother" for his daughter's birthday, would of course guarantee her collegiate future by opening an account at Chase for her. If you love your daughter and would do anything for her, be responsible by opening an account with Chase, when really any bank would do.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YXF03slRxfY>

Humor is also instantly humanizing and can connect easily to audiences. The dairy product company, Organic Valley, has a hilarious commercial about ordinary women going through a wide array of morning scenarios, that at least one must specifically connect to you. It starts off by exaggerating commercial stereotypes; that all women are flawlessly put together, and live a charmed life. But we all struggle to start our day. One thing we no longer have to worry about is breakfast. Organic Valley has that covered with their protein shake. And they've even taken it up a notch by making the ad interactive. There's a link at the end that will take you to a site that has many of the situations in the commercial available for you to answer personally. It feels like you are connecting to the struggles of other women, when essentially they're probably using your answers as market research on how to sell their product more effectively.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bh19YxASA-4>



Excitement is a mysterious and, well, exciting emotion to use to sell us something. Toyota's "Biometrics" commercial for their latest Prius isn't particularly about connecting with others, but about adventure. How, that if we get a Prius and spin it around an empty warehouse, our heart rate would rise and we'd have smiles on our faces. But it's not possible to drive like this on a public road, now is it?



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JCotbAn8XVs>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WREXBUZBrS8>



The next commercial isn't really selling us a product, but awareness. Emotion is the greatest tool in this type of marketing, especially guilt. The ad illustrates the cycle of a strawberry; from farm, to packaging, to grocery store, to your refrigerator, where it sits, until it grows moldy and is ultimately thrown away. Don't you feel bad for ignoring that strawberry now? Are your eyes opened to the lengthy process this strawberry has, just for it to have been thrown away? Many of the Ad Council's commercials are like this. Using guilt and behind the scenes storytelling to sell us on living their lifestyle.

<https://www.youtube.com/user/adcouncil/videos>

Having written about a wide range of emotions and their unifying powers, that's not to say that sex, power, or autonomy are non-existent. These ads still exist, however they've become a bit cliché. Have they really lost their effectiveness though? I don't believe so. Whether it is a basic desire in us to be sexy, powerful, & independent, or if these things were implanted in us by the media, remains unclear. Which is why they are still effective.

Gatorade's ad features famous soccer players, competing with one another to be the best of the best. They have celebrity and power, which Gatorade would like for you to think was given to them by their drink, when in actuality it's from their hard work ethic and training.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=77k2iP4mGJs>

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rEnB_GU8Kns



Motorola shows us autonomy and independence with their new phone that is able to go 48 hours without recharging. Think of all the adventures and freedom you would have when you aren't attached to a cord. Or better yet, when you leave your phone at home and focus on the adventure itself.

And finally, sex appeal. BMW uses a sexy model to be on screen for 5 seconds and then she sits inside a car for the rest of the 45 second commercial. This ad is also interactive, as it was a game to see if you can guess which car at the end holds the model. Is it a vulgar display of sexuality? No. But it's still using a beautiful woman to get your attention, and then the game holds onto your attention.



<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=V6dm7gFFFgs>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VyM9ok6Z3PY>



To culminate my exploration into the many themes involved in media, Alfa Romeo, the automotive company, not so subtly made a commercial that's all about emotion in it's vehicle. "If Emotion Made A Car" doesn't quite use emotion to connect to the audience, but to humanize the vehicle instead. Pain makes it stronger, loss feeds its need to win, tears fuel it, passion is its motor, the engine roars with ambition, lust triggers its ignition, envy is for the passenger, pride drives it, and it leaves a trail of sin for those left behind. Giulia (pronounced Julia) would steal your heart. Sounds more like a person than a car to me.

Jhally's lecture touched upon everything I've written about and more. He claims that the marketplace will use anything and everything to get our attention to make us feel like we need their product. That is their sole purpose. They treat us like we need them, but they would be useless without us. Is there a way for us to hold the power? Of course there is, and we already do. We ultimately are the ones to make the decision to buy the product or not. Advertising doesn't reach out and open our wallets, we are in control of this. It's up to the consumer to actually buy the product, and it's up to the product to sell itself with the help of advertising.

Recently, there has been development in the audience holding even more power over the advertisers. Streaming entertainment services and web browser applications now give us a choice in filtering the amount of ads we are exposed to. Before, we'd be bombarded by commercials during our television shows every 8 minutes, or an ad would follow us around the computer screen, but not anymore. Netflix, Amazon Prime, and Hulu Plus' Limited Commercial Plan give us the opportunity to watch TV without interruption. Ad blocking software for our web browsers span across a multitude of devices and even then there is an abundance of choice for each of those devices. As these services become more popular though, it creates a problem for the advertisers. Where will they go to be seen?

One word: Infiltration. Marketing has become quite clever in this way. Many streaming services force the viewer to watch a 30 second or minute long ad before starting their show. Nothing can be done to skip it or block it, as it is basically built into the program you are trying to watch. On the internet though, it is different. Instead of forcing the viewer to sit through something, it's inserted into the main content. A catchy title or an intriguing image, pretty much back to the basics of print ads. Many blogs now have sponsored content, meaning the advertisement is disguised as an article within the blog. Tricky, isn't it?

Are we doomed? No. The world as we know it is the way they already want it. Advertising is not destroying anything, as it created the world we're currently living in. Are we really a culture that has no real human desires outside of those sold to us by the media? That is possibly the hardest question to answer, and it will probably never be answered. There will never be a world completely ad-free in the future. We've even become accustomed to the possibility of advertising being even more invasive due to dystopian movies depicting television screens lining every building, every street, and even the walls inside our homes. And as Sut Jhally pointed out, mile-long billboards in space hovering over Earth is just on the horizon...literally.

So, if we can't completely get rid of advertising, what is there to do? Live with it? Hide from it? Become aware of it. As you have read for yourself, I pointed out the simple goal of each of these ads, and that's all it really takes. Sure, some of them are great stories, but that's all they are. They are trying to sell you something, it doesn't mean you have to actually buy it. No product can truly give you friendship, family, love, sex, power, celebrity, or independence. Only you can create these things for yourself. Remember, the choice is yours, and yours alone.

CHOOSE WISELY.
