



Westwood One

**AUDIO ACTIVE**  
G R O U P

# Another Dull Whitepaper: The Extraordinary Cost of Dull



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Create with Confidence

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Communications Strategy

# About the study

Based on foundational work from Adam Morgan and Peter Field looking at IPA data on rational vs. emotional advertising and media spend figures, the Cost of Dull research becomes even clearer when adding in emotional response data from System1's Test Your Ad database.






This analysis examines 55,000+ U.S. TV ads and 151 U.S. AM/FM radio ads. It also drills down to business-to-business ads (2,600+ U.S. TV and 9 U.S. AM/FM radio ads) to determine the cost of dull among the B2B audience.

# System1 star ratings correlate creative quality with long-term share growth; The more you feel, the more you buy

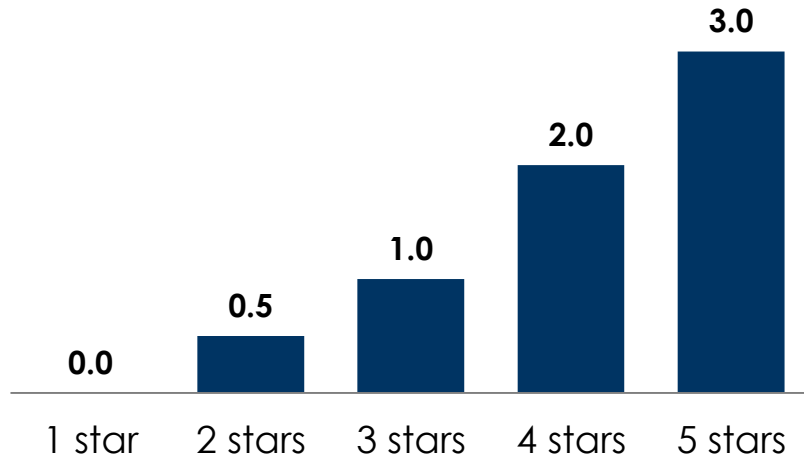
## Star rating:

Predicts long-term brand growth from the emotional response to the creative and how positive the reaction is



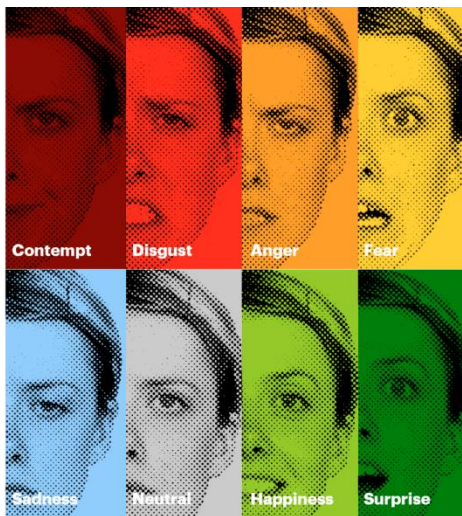
				
<b>Low</b>	<b>Modest</b>	<b>Good</b>	<b>Strong</b>	<b>Exceptional</b>
Distribution of global ads				
<b>42%</b>	<b>34%</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>1%</b>

Likely long-term % share gain by star rating  
(Assumes advertiser share of voice is at least +10% greater than its market share)

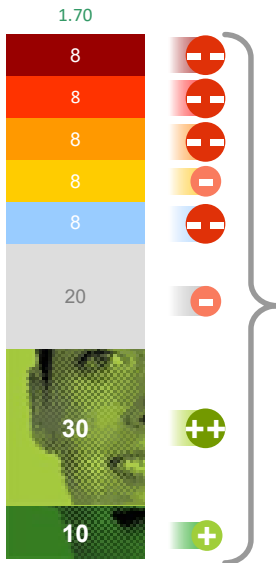


# System1's star rating measures long-term advertising effectiveness using emotions

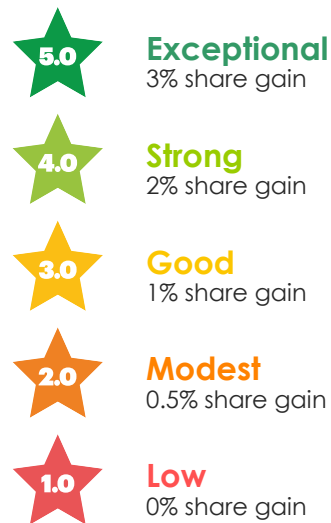
Paul Ekman's core human **emotions are captured.**



Emotions are weighted for **business effects.**



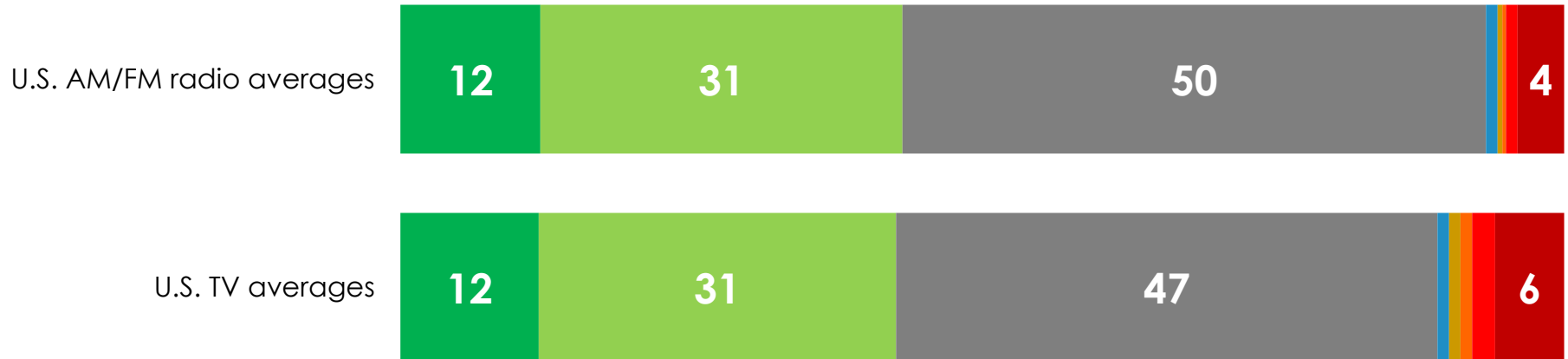
Resulting **star rating** is a prediction of long-term growth.



Projected share gains assume Excess Share of Voice (ESOV) of 10%, and average quality of competitor advertising

# Emotions build brands but neutrality (feeling nothing) is the main response to advertising

Average emotional response of all commercial category U.S. TV ads (55,000+) and AM/FM radio ads (151)

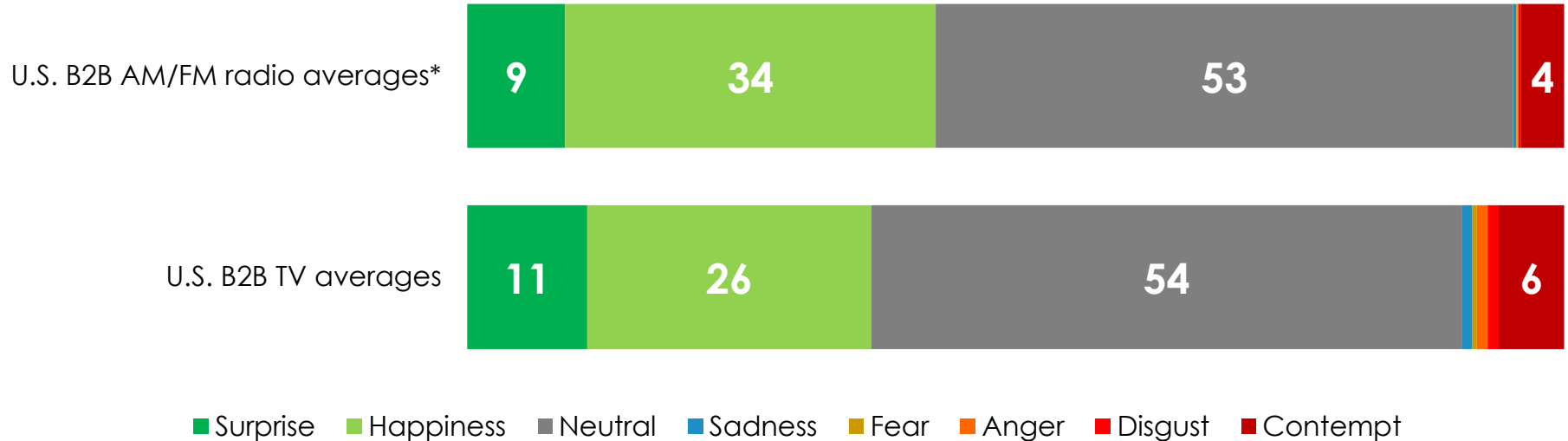


■ Surprise ■ Happiness ■ Neutral ■ Sadness ■ Fear ■ Anger ■ Disgust ■ Contempt

Sadness, fear, anger, and disgust all scored 2 or less each

# Emotions build brands but neutrality (feeling nothing) is the main response to B2B advertising

Average emotional response of all commercial category U.S. B2B TV ads (2,600+) and B2B AM/FM radio ads (9)



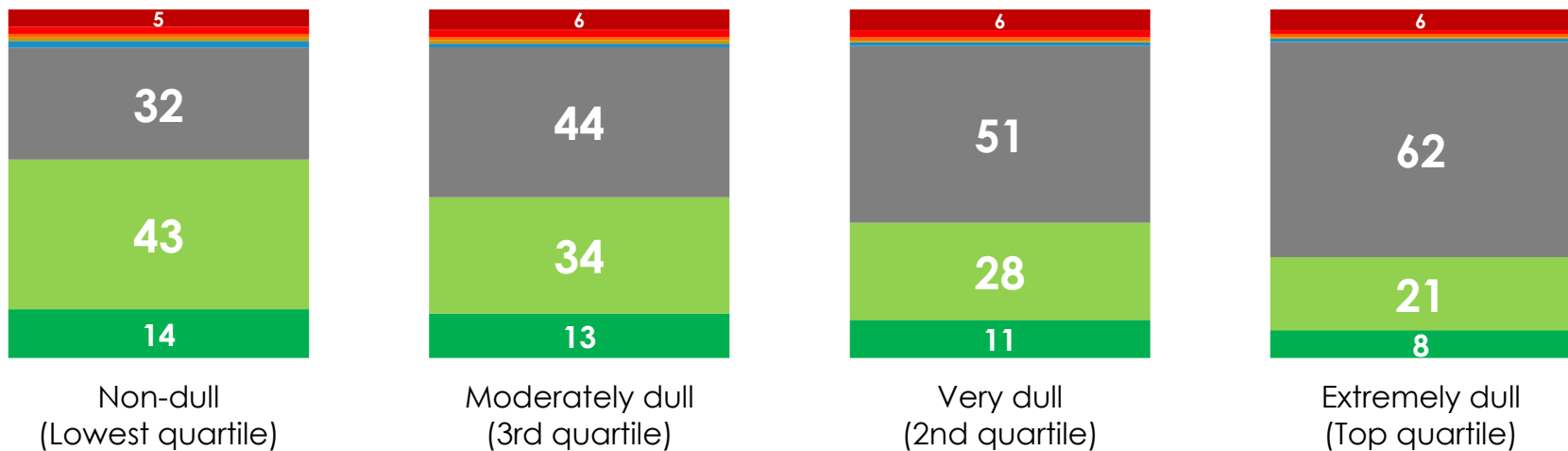
Sadness, fear, anger, and disgust all scored 2 or less each

\*U.S. B2B AM/FM radio averages made up of only 9 ads

# Grouping U.S. ads into dullness quartiles, happiness and surprise are the two active emotions that suffer most as neutrality rises

Average emotional response of all commercial category U.S. TV ads (55,000+) tested in System1's Test Your Ad Premium platform premium since 2017; ~13,900 ads per quartile

■ Surprise ■ Happiness ■ Neutral ■ Sadness ■ Fear ■ Anger ■ Disgust ■ Contempt

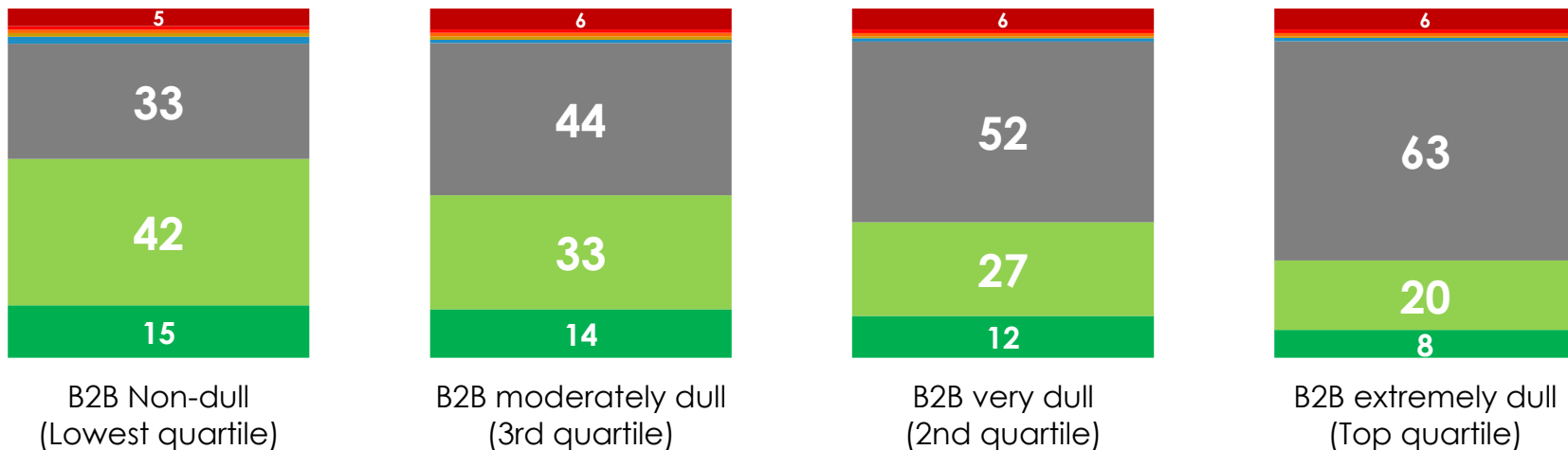


Sadness, fear, anger, and disgust all scored 2 or less each

# Grouping U.S. B2B ads into the total market dullness quartiles, happiness and surprise are the two active emotions that suffer most as neutrality rises

Average emotional response of all commercial category U.S. B2B TV ads (2,600+) tested in System1's Test Your Ad Premium platform premium since 2017; 256-1,289 ads per quartile

■ Surprise  
 ■ Happiness  
 ■ Neutral  
 ■ Sadness  
 ■ Fear  
 ■ Anger  
 ■ Disgust  
 ■ Contempt



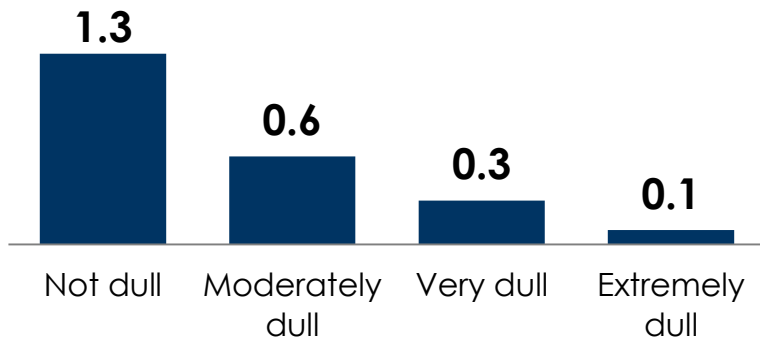
Sadness, fear, anger, and disgust all scored 2 or less each



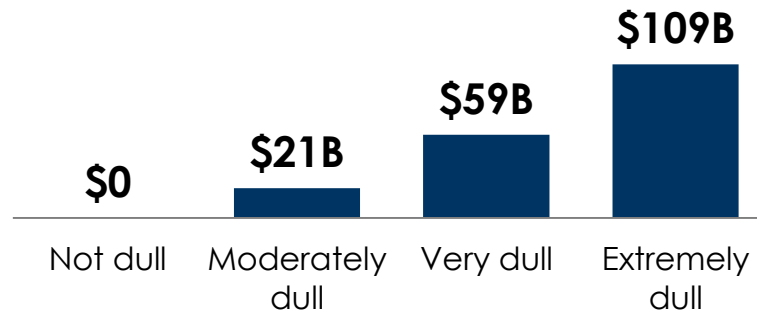
**“When you look at the levels of emotion for each quartile, one thing is obvious. Higher neutrality only really has an impact on positive emotions - happiness and surprise. The level of negative emotion, including anger, contempt, disgust, stays constant. A boring ad is as likely to trigger that negativity as an interesting one.”**

# The cost of dull advertising to U.S. brands: The duller the ad, the greater the cost

Annualized share of market gain points projected from Star ratings by level of dullness



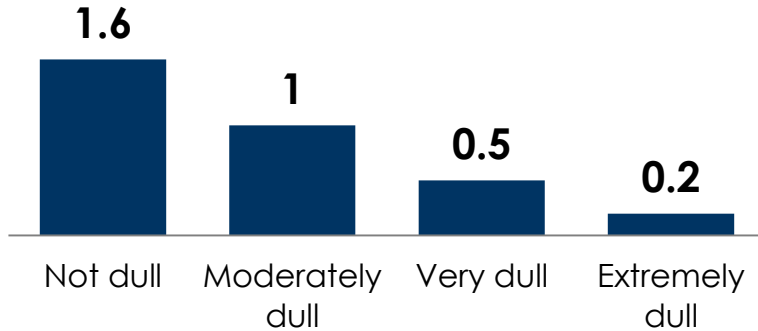
Estimated extra annual spend over current levels needed to match forecast growth potential of not dull ads



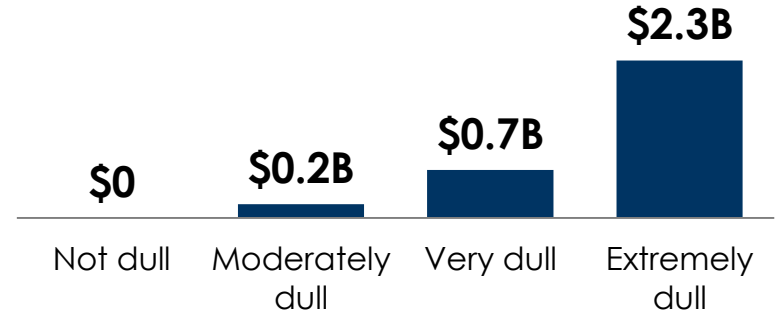
**How to read:** The not dull ads can grow a brand's market share by an average of 1.3 points per year while extremely dull ads barely grow market share (0.1). Extremely dull ads would have to spend an additional \$109B to generate the share growth of the least dull ads.

# U.S. B2B brands: The cost of dull advertising: The duller the B2B ad, the greater the cost

Annualized share of market gain points projected from Star ratings by level of dullness of B2B ad



Estimated extra annual spend over current levels needed to match forecast growth potential of not dull B2B ads



**How to read:** The not dull B2B ads can grow brand's market share by an average of 1.6 points per year while extremely dull ads barely grow market share (0.2).

# Audio ads with more right-brain features create future demand with longer-lasting effects versus left brain (duller) features

## Left brain

- Unilateral communication (including testimonials)
- Commanded action (e.g. call to action)
- Audio repetition
- Comparisons and claims
- Data and figures
- Abstracted product or service feature
- Technical language (heavy terms and conditions)
- Strong product focus
- Flatness, lack of audio depth
- Highly rhythmic music



## Right brain

- Characters with vitality
- Story unfolding
- Clear sense of place
- Sotto voice and the pause (dramatic intimacy)
- Unexpected contextual noise
- Sounds of the living
- Dialogue
- Playing with words
- Distinctive accents
- Music with discernible melody

# The four drivers of dull advertisers

- 1. Performance:** There is a trend towards ad spend going to performance channels like search, digital display, and social media advertising. There's nothing inherently less creative about any of these channels. But the metrics they are measured on are invariably short-term and transactional. Performance marketing channels don't directly aim to build brands or create long-term mental availability, they're aimed at people in the market now. Such ads tend to aim for fluency - brand recognition - before emotional impact, which leads to higher neutrality. In other words, dullness.
- 2. Optimization:** This helps explain why performance marketing advertising is so dull. Put simply, the more channels and media types you're advertising across, the simpler your assets need to be, in order to be optimized for as many different touchpoints as possible. That's why every logo these days seems to have moved from distinctive, colorful font choices and designs to a monotone, sans-serif typeface. Modern logos and brand identities will work at any size, on any screen, in any ad format. The price? They're a lot duller. That goes for every visual brand asset - they're being redesigned to be simpler, more flexible, but unfortunately less interesting.

# The four drivers of dull advertising

- 3. Averaging:** It's not just brand logos that look the same. Designs, color schemes, tones of voice, even selfie poses are converging in what commentator Alex Murrell has called "The Age Of Average." This is a kind of optimization effect too - individuals and brands copying what seems to be working for others, but at market scale the effect is to homogenize everything. Nothing looks bad but nothing stands out. That's a recipe for dullness.
- 4. Procurement:** Marketing decisions have long been subject to strict procurement processes but we live in an era of cascading budgeting cuts, with clients cutting marketing budgets and holding companies implementing cuts of their own in turn. The result is that creative directors are having to pay more attention than ever to the bottom line, and that agencies and clients have less time to work on a campaign and get from good to great. In those circumstances, it's no wonder repetitive or dull ads get through too often.

# Recommendations

- **Meeting the audience where they care and speak to them in their language:** People find ads interesting when the ads are about things they care about too and aren't full of business-speak or jargon.
- **Use the real bar to judge what's interesting, not one we invented ourselves:** As marketers we can't lie to ourselves and pretend something's going to interest our audience when it really won't. Fortunately, there are ways of measuring these things, like testing with System1's Test Your Ad Premium platform, for example, that will give a fast, objective measure of how interesting consumers find an ad.
- **Show real distinctiveness and character:** Make sure your ad looks and feels distinctive and distinctively you. Use a recurring brand character, Fluent Device, or other colorful and entertaining assets.
- **Use emotion, drama, and storytelling:** Entertain for commercial gain. Nothing beats dullness more thoroughly than an entertaining ad - particularly a funny one.
- **Deny key assumptions and surprise the audience:** Happiness isn't the only beneficial emotion for advertising. Surprise plays a big part too. Dullness kills surprise. So it's worth deliberately aiming to go against some audience expectations and give them something that will make people sit up.



# Thank You

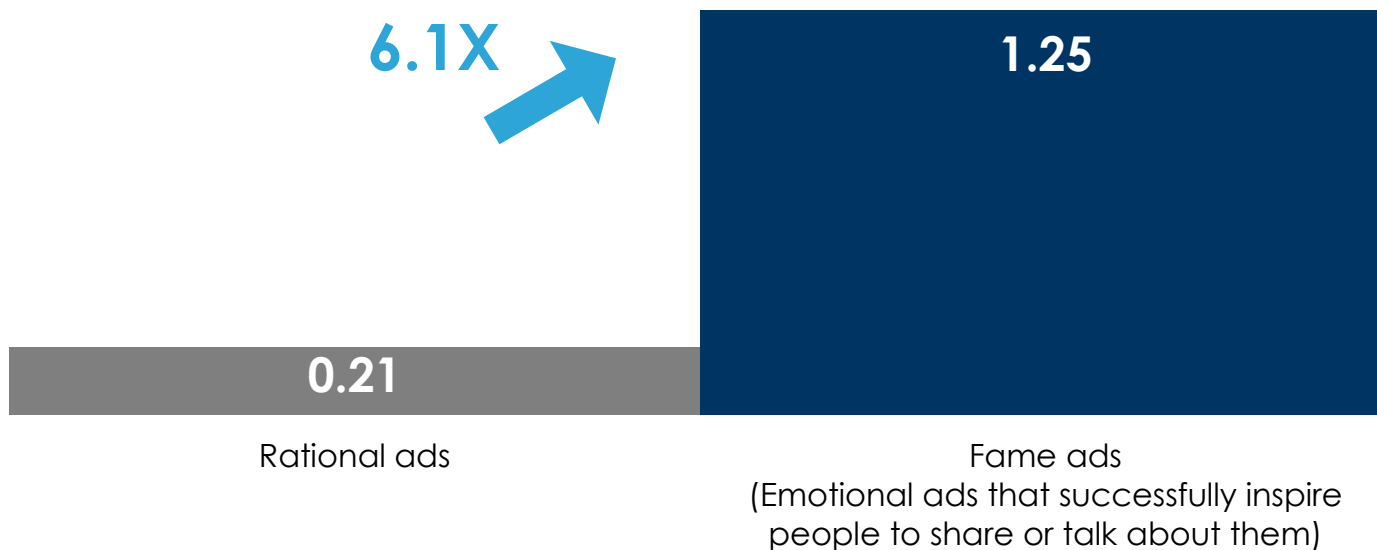
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# Appendix

# Dull ads don't work very hard

Share growth per unit of ad investment  
Share of voice efficiency: Percentage points of marketing share gain per 10 percentage points of excess share of voice (share of voice – share of market)

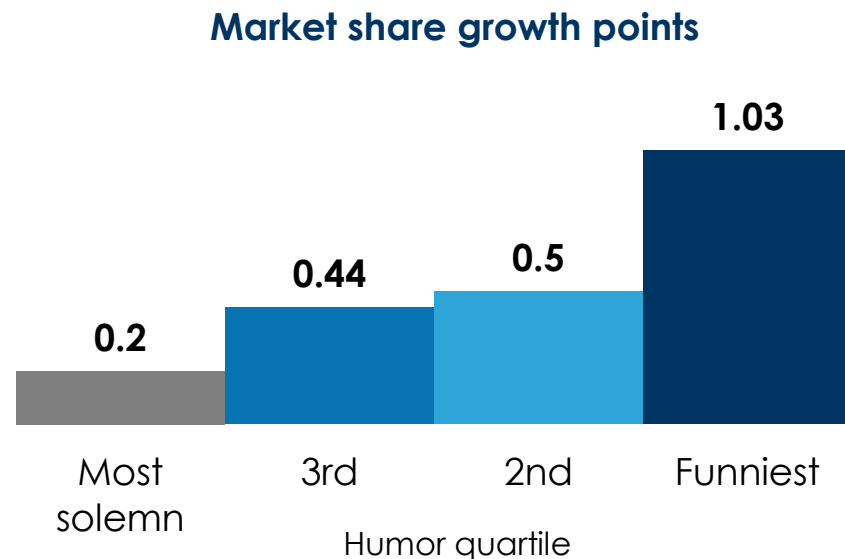
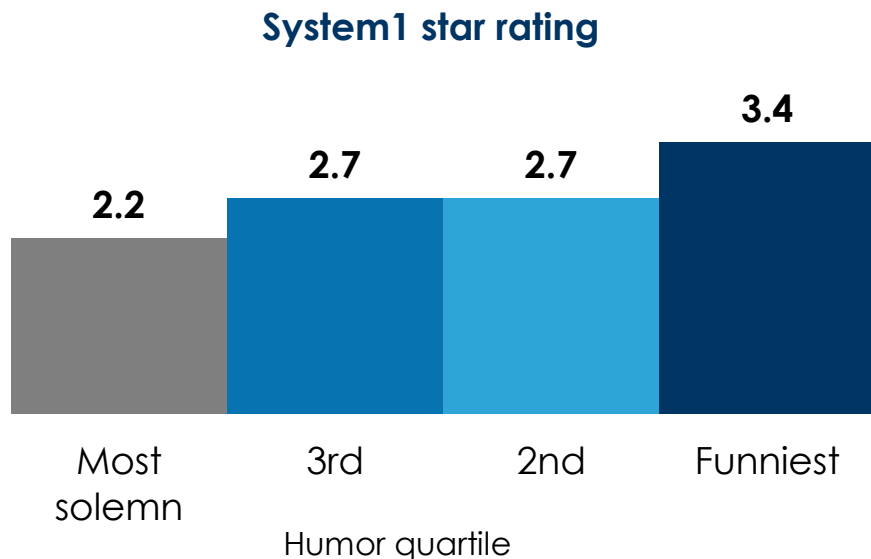


# Dull ads convert existing demand; Interesting ads create future demand

<b>Dull ads convert existing demand</b> via short-term sales activation	<b>Interesting ads create future demand</b> Lasting business outcomes via brand building
Create a lead	Create a memory
Generates sales now	Influences future sales
Tightly targeted	Broad reach
Short term	Long term
Persuasive messages	Emotional priming

# Humorous ad work: The funniest ads drive 5X more market share growth than ads that are the least funny

The funniest ads have much stronger creative effectiveness star ratings and drive far more market share growth potential



Source: System1; Average System1 Star Rating for UK Test Your Ad Pro ads based on Type of Happiness = Amused Quintiles >4000 ads; Annualized SOM gain points projected from Star Ratings assuming a brand of 5% SOM and 15% SOM = +10 ESOV