

Interactive media: it's everywhere and it works

How interactivity can add significantly to conventional ad effects: **Doug Edmonds**, 2CV, and **Mark Brown** and **Steven Hess**, Weapon 7, examine the evidence

DIGITAL TECHNOLOGY IS changing media communications. There is a fundamental shift in content distribution from analogue platforms to new digital and interactive platforms. As "brands embrace these technologies, increasing their use of and investment in them as advertising platforms, the strategic importance of digital as a way of marketing and the effect of digital touchpoints are growing for marketers, their brands and agencies.

The challenge facing our industry is how to evaluate the communications effect of these new digital platforms and to establish what value they add above and beyond traditional communications.

Since 2005, Weapon 7 and 2CV have been conducting studies for clients to establish the advertising effects of interactive media and entertainment. This article outlines the strengths, weaknesses and challenges of these media. From this we can draw conclusions about how digital media are changing the way communications work and how this will develop as new digital platforms become viable for advertising.

What did digital ever do for us?

Before illustrating our findings, it is worth noting the structural changes that result from the new digital age and how we believe these will affect communications. * There are more digital devices. So there are more consumer touch-points than ever.

^ Many devices are networked. This allows applications to be downloaded onto them and sometimes the presence of a return path. Both allow interaction between the owner and a network.

>• Image compression and device capabilities mean that richer content can be communicated effectively to these touch-points. These technologies will improve.

^ Digital devices allow users to interact with and manipulate content, putting them in control.

^ New human-computer interfaces using sensory inputs, like touchscreens, will make interaction easier and universal,

As a result of these factors, digital consumer touchpoints are becoming viable communications channels for brand owners. Outside the dramatic increase in advertising spend going online, recent years have seen the rise of interactive TV, mobile advertising and IPTV (internet protocol TV) rolling out across the UK. Each of these conforms to the principles of all digital networks, but most interesting from a communications perspective is how these devices and platforms will change the impact and effect of advertising.

The benefit of digital in direct response is well documented. Leads can be counted and clickthrough rates monitored. Less well explored is the effect that physical or considered interaction has on consumers. We believe that the process of interaction changes the state of the user, creating a significant impact on communication effect.

FIGURE 2



This paper focuses on two key points. We will identify the impact of a consumer interaction with a brand's advertising; and the value it adds above established broadcast advertising platforms.

Interaction and communication: a theory

A number of different sources suggest that interaction aids both communication and learning. The process of thinking can be conceived of as a network of neurons firing in a specific pattern in the brain. As neurons are used, they become thicker and more permanent. It follows that the stronger the stimulation, and the more common, the more likely the stimulus is to be remembered. This is the leap from stimulation to memory. Memories are formed more effectively when multiple parts of the brain (hearing, seeing, smelling, motor skills, touch) are stimulated.

From a communications perspective, this supports the hypothesis that incorporating interaction into a traditional medium should aid both communication and subsequent effect.

To test this, we hypothesise that: increased interaction with advertising generates more effective communication.

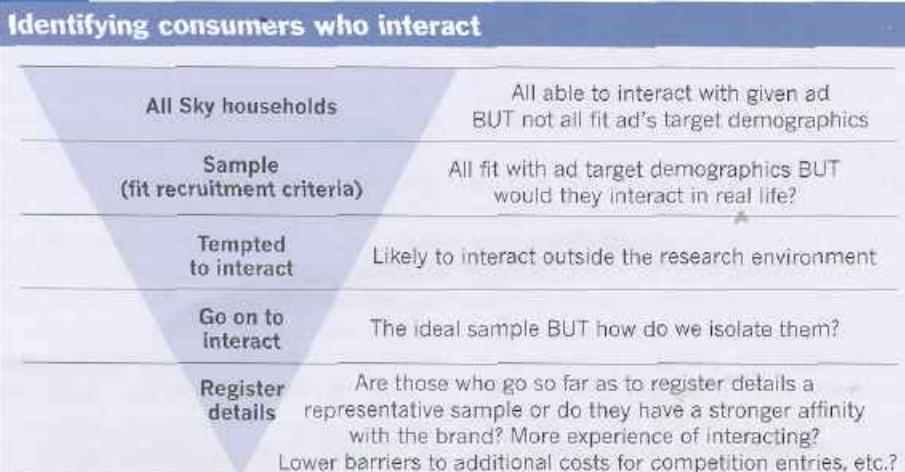
To prove or disprove this hypothesis requires an experimental framework. This should comprise:

- > a real-life context
- >• an appropriate methodology
- ^ an idea of the most relevant sample
- *• an understanding of the nature of the effect.

A real-life context

The most important component of this 'experiment' is a real-life example of interaction with media, and a control. While

FIGURE 1



there are many interactive media available, many are fledgling (for example, mobile and much web-based advertising); and they have no static counterpart to act as a control, where we require a non-interactive platform capable of delivering a base message. Over time, these new channels will become established and offer the opportunity for similar research, but at present only interactive TV has the requisite attributes of scale and a non-interactive counterpart to provide a control (the classic TV ad).

While we have focused on this nascent medium, the broad findings should apply to all interactive platforms.

The rise of interactive TV provides the opportunity to test theories in real-life market conditions where we can use research to identify what interaction adds to communications. By comparing a known medium with a known medium plus interaction we can identify the impact of interaction on the effect of traditional TV advertising.

An appropriate methodology

Our next step is to identify a methodology. The Interactive Communications Effectiveness (ICE) approach was born out of a need to demonstrate to clients the effect of their interactive investment. Weapon 7 understood the medium and 2CV was eager to measure. Using our pooled knowledge, we devised a cost-effective, robust approach that seemed appropriate.

In essence, our approach compares responses to a set of brand and advertising questions among a sample of respondents exposed to a standard TV commercial (TVC) against a sample who have been exposed to the standard TV commercial and have also experienced an interactive ad. To avoid any research effects, we conduct the research in respondents' homes.

Defining the sample

Our start-point for defining the sample is Sky households, as this is the dominant interactive TV platform used by UK advertisers. To design a watertight approach, we need to avoid sampling bias. This is a challenge: we need to speak to people who have interacted with this type

of advertising, to see what interaction adds to communication; yet interaction rates are low enough to make them hard to find - and those that are self-declaring (leaving their contact details in an ad) are probably too predisposed to the brand.

For analysis, we take sample definition a step further. For results to be valid, we must avoid polarising respondents by asking them to do something that they have not done before - interact with advertising. It is therefore important to compile a sample of those who have interacted with the advertising but are not predisposed to the brand.

Our core sample is people tempted to interact with a specific ad, as they are closest to real-life interactors. Since past behaviour is the strongest predictor of future behaviour, it is unsurprising that they are significantly more likely to have interacted ('pressed red') in the past than those not tempted to interact.

Figure 1 shows that identifying consumers who actually interact with an ad will be costly, and we believe those who interact and register their details will be too predisposed to the brand to be a reliable, representative audience. By identifying those who are tempted to interact with the advertising after watching the TVC, we can establish a real-life sample of interactors.

Understanding the effect

For our theory to be useful and relevant to marketers, we need to put it into a marketing context: we need a standardised framework for evaluating our results. To identify the additional effect of interaction we must analyse the hierarchy of communications and identify where interaction should improve communications.

Figure 2 outlines four simple levels of communication effects - from awareness building to purchase intent. While awareness and message association can be effects of an interactive campaign, this medium has other strengths. We believe its power is to drive brand favourability and purchase intent.

Brand favourability is a broad, complex measure, so difficult to measure. We believe brand favourability comprises those attributes of a brand that positively differentiate it from its competitors: a combination of appeal, knowledge and relevance. These factors all help to reduce the 'risk' and the 'unknown' associated with a brand. Reducing 'risk' leads to increased purchase intent.

In addition, interaction can help overcome other barriers associated with communications per se, such as comprehension and enjoyment. By reducing or >•

TABLE 1

Enjoyment levels

Enjoyment examples (enjoy a lot/quite enjoy)	Difference between test and control (+/-)	Difference between those tempted to interact and control
Alcohol	+5%	+21%
Mobile operator	+15%	+23%
Soft drink	+14%	+26%
Public health	+5%	+13%
NRT	+8%	+32%

TABLE 2

Enhanced brand knowledge

New information examples (a lot/some)	Difference between test and control (+/-)	Difference between those tempted to interact and control
Mobile phone	+8%	+16%
Mobile operator	+10%	+4%
Soft drink	+11%	+25%
Gaming	+6%	+7%
Energy	+11%	Low base
Automotive	+12%	+19%
Mobile operator	+16%	+23%
NRT	+19%	+31%

removing these barriers, the power of communications can be enhanced.

The results

We focus on four key questions:

1. Does interactivity lead to greater enjoyment?
2. Does interaction allow people to learn more about brands?
3. Does interactivity lead to greater comprehension?
4. Does interaction change appeal and consideration?

Using data from 15 studies conducted in the past year, we can provide some answers to these questions. All common measures have been included, to provide a robust view of the performance of interactive TV vs standard TV.

1. Does interactivity lead to greater enjoyment?

The questions specifically ask respondents how much they liked and enjoyed the interactive experience, and about their ease of understanding. We found that in 13 of 15 cases (87%) the 'tempted' cell dramatically outperforms the test and control cells on this measure (see Table 1).

In particular there are some strong examples of a 'deepening' of consumer involvement as a result of interacting. In

the five cases shown, differences average around +23%.

2. Does interaction allow people to learn more about brands?

A key ambition of interactive advertising is to provide more information about a brand. Delivering new news, whether tactical information about a new offer, or a new way of thinking about a brand, can be an aim for traditional TV advertising. It can influence purchase intent, brand perception or both. An interactive component can help to build this further for consumers, as shown Table 2. In 75% of cases the 'tempted' cell dramatically outperforms the test and/or control cells.

Table 3 shows examples where interacting with extra content has built or developed brand perceptions.

These examples show how interactive can deliver both short-term tactical and long-term 'brand-building' messages.

3. Does interactivity lead to greater comprehension?

In 9 out of 15 cases the 'tempted' cell dramatically outperforms the test and/or control cells on finding the interactive ad very easy to understand. In addition, there are some strong shifts on this between the test and control cells. This suggests that

comprehension is enhanced by interaction (see Table 4).

4. Does interaction change appeal and consideration?

The acid test for interactivity is whether it increases consideration scores. All advertising aims to generate some form of response. Responses might be a stronger consumer-brand relationship, ensuring that the brand features higher up a consumer's consideration list (appeal); or an immediate sales response (purchase intent). There is clear evidence that interacting bolsters responses on these metrics. In 8/9 cases (88%) the tempted cell dramatically outperforms the test and/or control cells (see Table 5).

Driving interaction - the trigger ad

While not our main research focus, we have identified that the 'trigger ad' (in addition to the interactive call to action) can profoundly affect the numbers of respondents interacting, and their mindset once there. When most respondents merely expect more information about the product, or a longer ad, their motivation to interact may be low.

Designing communication-rich interactive content that fits seamlessly with the trigger TVC can make the most of the wide reach presented by broadcast platforms. More promotionally orientated content drives interaction among the most committed viewers, which undermines the power of interaction relying on a formula often seen in DRTV campaigns. The true power of interactive media is to exploit broad-reach media, like TV. Here the trigger ad and the interactive experience draw in a wide group, irrespective of how far they are down the purchase-decision process.

Interactive effect - a summary

It is clear that an interactive addition has a positive, measurable effect on how a brand is perceived. More importantly, it drives consideration, showing: that purchase intent is affected, as well as imagery.

People are avoiding commercial messages more and more. This makes it increasingly difficult for brands to engage with audiences. We know most people

TABLE 3

Enhanced brand perceptions

How much do you think the advert suggests (strongly suggests)	Difference between test and control (+/-)
Alcohol brand is a consistently high-quality product	+12%
Mobile brand is always coming up with relevant products	+11%
Mobile brand offers simple, straightforward products	+15%
Soft drink brand is a brand that is instantly recognisable	+20%
Soft drink brand contains real fruit	+7%
Soft drink brand offers healthier alternatives than other drinks	+12%

TABLE 4

Improved understanding

Understanding examples (very easy)	Difference between test and control (+/-)	Difference between those tempted to interact and control
Entertainment	+8%	+10%
Mobile phone	+10%	+14%
Soft drink	+12%	+21%
Public health	+10%	+17%
Energy	+11%	Low base

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are conservative and risk-averse: past behaviour is a strong predictor of future behaviour. So, for a brand to achieve engagement beyond simple awareness and straightforward message association will become ever more difficult.

These studies show that interactivity offers brand owners the chance to increase the knowledge and experience people have of the brand. Moreover, in conjunction with a broadcast medium like TV (however distributed), it enhances both reach and knowledge.

This does not mean that traditional TV advertising will become redundant. Rather, we expect to see it redefined, from an end-point in communications towards a facilitative role, encouraging consumers to discover a richer, more engaging experience. Arguably this will lead to more focused TV advertising, as it no longer has to meet all the objectives in the communications hierarchy, merely the first two. This strategic shift should affect the economics of commercial production and the advertising industry's business models.

Beyond TV: how context changes communication

Today, interactive TV is just one of many interactive media. In two studies, we looked at how the effect of interaction differs across platforms and the subsequent shifts in communication effectiveness.

For example with TV, consumers mostly interact with their remote control, sitting in an armchair (leaning back); whereas online they are physically closer to the screen, (leaning forward). Respondents who interact with the same content online (as opposed to on TV) have increased understanding scores in comparison with TV. We believe this difference is driven by the change in context, influenced by factors such as device location, size of screen or the different expectations people have of the medium. Similarly, running the same execution online led to less polarising of response on likeability and enjoyment; running it on TV produced a more persuasive experience.

If we are to use video online, it may not be appropriate to follow the conventions of TV. When online, people feel less negative

TABLE 5

Enhanced appeal and brand consideration

Appeal examples (much/a little more appealing)	Difference between test and control (+/-)	Difference between those tempted to interact and control
Mobile operator	+8%	+10%
Mobile phone	+16%	+26%
Soft drink	+35%	+45%
Energy	+15%	Low base
Purchase consideration examples (much more likely)	Difference between test and control (+/-)	Difference between those tempted to interact and control
Mobile operator	+9%	+16%
Mobile phone	+21%	+28%
Mobile operator	+12%	+10%
NRT	+3%	+17%

towards rational content, as the context is one where they seek information.

This is shown by scores for delivery of new information; in a recent comparison, an execution run online generated double the agreement for 'communicates a lot more new information about a brand/ service'. A final piece of evidence for increased rationality is that spontaneous message association is 42% higher for online.

This suggests that, while interactive TV reinforces brand favourability, the same execution run online increases message association and communication.

Conclusions

Two clear conclusions emerge from this. First, adding interactivity to a traditionally non-interactive medium, increases brand favourability and brand knowledge, driving brand consideration.

Second, running the same execution online, on a naturally interactive medium, increases message association and communication. The big question is 'Why?'

We believe the differences are driven partly by the relationship between the consumer and the media platform, and partly by the different contexts for communication. The internet is a medium 'of the people'; the dialogue it facilitates has a strong adult-to-adult, peer relationship. This makes it a more efficient rational communications channel.

Conversely, because of the stature of TV in people's minds (among the majority of UK consumers), its relationship with people is closer to parent-child. It is more

emotional, so not necessarily the most effective medium for rational communication. Adding interactivity gives the advertiser licence to communicate rationally within the emotional realm of TV.

Moving forward

As we embrace more interactive digital communications platforms, the communications landscape will change. Getting messages in front of consumers may become increasingly difficult. Along with this, we believe interactivity will become more relevant.

There are two clear roles for interactivity: to extend an emotional connection; and to cut through noise and deliver rational messages. These roles are very different and largely context-dependent.

This presents challenges to advertisers. Many of the new communications channels are nascent. We don't understand the context for their consumption, nor do we really understand their relationship with audiences, so it is difficult to define the role for interactivity for each. There clearly is a role, but how people consume video games or use their mobile phones will determine how advertising, interactive or otherwise, will work on these media.

As advertisers seize these opportunities, the media will define their relationship with the audience; only then will we start to understand how the channel works and the role for interactivity. ■

