

# How Latin Americans respond emotionally to advertising

Comparing emotional response to ads in different countries can make campaigns more effective, say **Jorge Alagón-Cano** and **Rogelio Puente-Díaz** Millward Brown

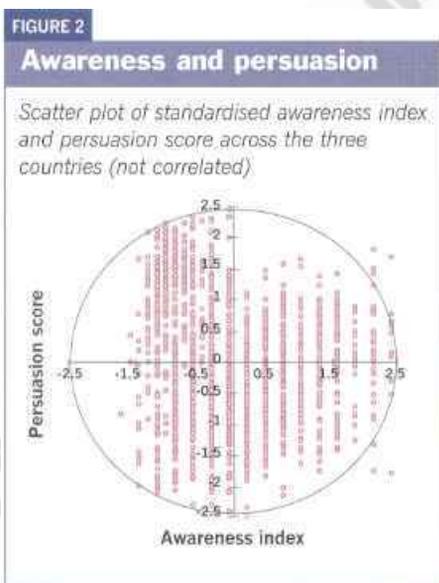
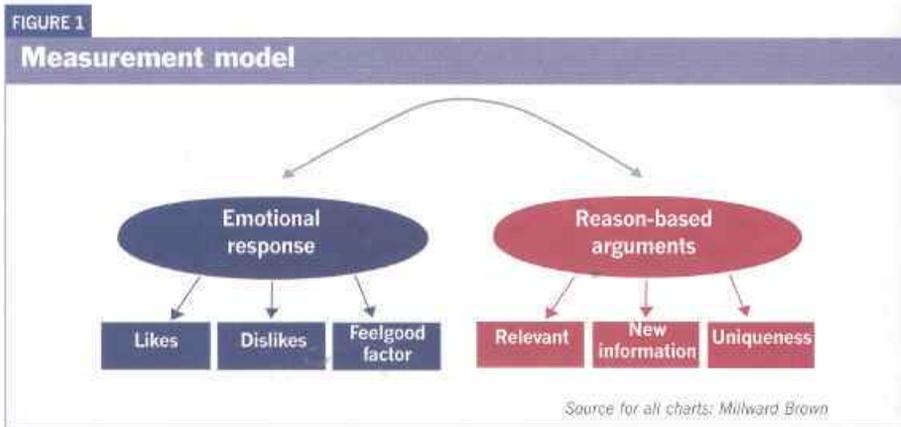
**E**MOTIONS COLOUR OUR LIVES. They play a central role in human experience and influence complex psychological processes, such as perception, memory, attention and self-regulation. Since emotions have an impact on key psychological processes, they have been hypothesised to play a central role in advertising (1).

Experts have also suggested that good advertising should provide consumers with reason-based arguments. Consequently, it is thought that an appropriate balance between emotions and reason-based arguments helps advertising achieve two important goals: to engage and persuade consumers (2).

A key question to address is whether advertising works the same in different parts of the world. To answer this, we need to explore the role of emotional responses and examine whether they affect engagement and persuasion similarly in different countries. Some experts believe local preferences are vanishing and the world is going global (3), but an analysis of Millward Brown's Global Link™ Database shows that not all ads 'travel' well, and the same ad works better in some countries than others. One reason for these differences might be that emotional responses to advertising can have different effects on metrics of ad effectiveness.

There is evidence in psychological literature suggesting that cultures, whether they are more individualistic or collectivistic, differ in the amount of attention given to emotional information. For example, research indicates that a collectivistic culture, such as Japan, puts more emphasis on emotional tone than word content in communication, compared with American culture, which places more emphasis on individual values (4). Japanese culture holds a more interdependent, rather than independent, conception of the self, which has important implications for how communication is processed. If this holds true for Latin American countries, we might expect emotions to play a different role across the three countries examined in this investigation - Mexico, Brazil and Argentina.

Franklin and Burgos (5) showed that



basic advertising principles are generally valid across cultures. That is, predictive metrics of sales in Link™ (our proprietary methodology of ad testing), awareness index (AI) and persuasion score (PS), combined into a short-term sales likelihood (STSL), are valid across regions (North America, mainland Europe, UK, Asia Pacific and Latin America). But whether the impact of emotional response on these metrics, AI and PS, is the same across cultures has not been examined.

If advertising's ability to engage and persuade consumers depends on the emotional response evoked, and if this is different across countries, the examination of this phenomenon has important practical and research implications. Given the importance of understanding

cultural differences in responses to advertising, our purpose was to examine whether the effect of emotional response (ER), as measured by the same questions included in our proprietary TV Link, was the same across three Latin American countries, by controlling for the effect of reason-based arguments (RBA). Differences in how emotional response impacts on advertising effectiveness across cultures can have important implications for brand managers and planners.

We used recent pre-test data of 668 TV commercials from three countries: Mexico (350 ads), Argentina (168) and Brazil (150). To test our hypothesis, we needed to take two steps. First, we needed to establish that constructs such as ER and RBA can be measured reliably across cultures - something known as measurement invariance in the structural equation modelling literature. Determining whether ER can be measured accurately by the same questions in three different countries is a necessary condition to, test whether the effects of ER are the same across cultures. Second, we needed to test whether the effects of ER on our two validated metrics of STSL - AI and PS - were the same across all three countries.

To accomplish our first step, we tested the model shown in Figure 1. The results showed that the constructs of ER and RBA can be measured reliably in Mexico, Brazil and Argentina (for the technical details of the results, contact the authors).

A good model is a prerequisite to assess the impact of emotional response on AI and PS by controlling for reason-based

**Jorge Alagon-Cano** is director of Millward Brown Optimor Mexico, specialising in econometric modelling, advertising and brand consulting. [jorge.alagon@millwardbrown.com](mailto:jorge.alagon@millwardbrown.com)

**Rogelio Puente-Diaz** is manager of the department of marketing sciences and R&D at Millward Brown Mexico, specialising in consumer behaviour and measurement. [rogelio.puente@millwardbrown.com](mailto:rogelio.puente@millwardbrown.com)



arguments. We now turn our attention to the testing of this proposition.

Before testing the effect of ER, it is important to examine whether our two validate metrics of STSL are correlated. Across the three countries, correlation between AI and PS is not significantly different to zero (correlation = -0.027). A scatter plot reveals no apparent relation between them.

To accomplish our second step, we examined the effect of ER on AI and PS. First, results showed that ER has a significant direct effect on RBA and AI, and a significant indirect effect on PS. Examining the effect of ER on AI more closely, we can see that ER has a significantly stronger effect on AI in Mexico and Argentina (.57 and .49, respectively) than in Brazil (.24).

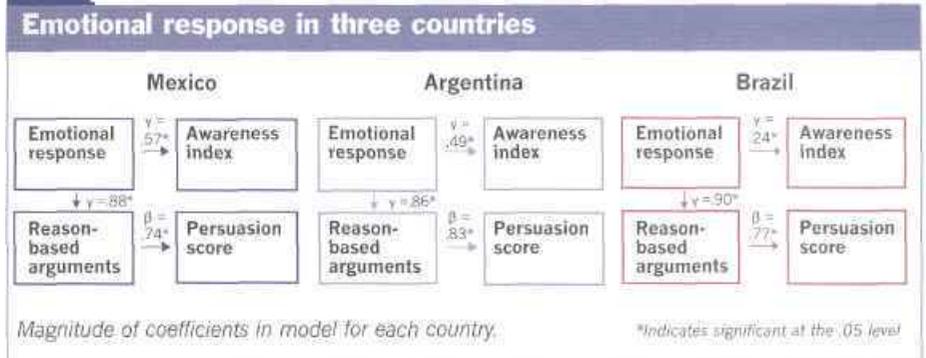
### Effect of emotional response

What are the implications of these findings for brand management and advertising? Our purpose was to examine how an ad diagnostic (or antecedent) - emotional response - influences awareness index and persuasion scores differently (in magnitude) in Mexico, Brazil and Argentina by controlling for the effect of reason-based arguments.

To do so, we first established that the constructs of ER and RBA can be measured in all three countries. We then found that ER to a TV ad influences both branded engagement (AI) directly and persuasion (PS) indirectly, and therefore STSL. This pattern holds on average for all TV ads across three countries in Latin America - Argentina, Brazil and Mexico - but magnitude of effect is different.

These findings have important implications for practitioners. First, they suggest that in other Latin American countries, and perhaps in other regions of the world, emotional response affects the power of advertising copy and can be diagnosed in pre-test. Second, if the magnitude of effects was different across three countries with more cultural similarities than differences (eg Mexico, Argentina and Brazil), we would expect similar, if not larger, differences between other countries with more pronounced cultural differences (eg Germany versus Mexico).

FIGURE 3



The idea that emotional responses impact advertising effectiveness holds true, yet the magnitude of the effect is not the same across different countries.

Another interesting finding from our analysis that has important implications for brand managers is that ER influences AI (directly), RBA (directly) and PS (indirectly) in all three countries. These results suggest that ER not only influences branded engagement (AI), but also has the ability to facilitate RBA.

This result is consistent with research on emotions and their effect on learning and engagement. The work of Damasio and Le Doux (6) strongly suggests that we feel first and think second. Emotional response to advertising is hypothesised to influence important psychological processes, such as attention. These are thought to facilitate the assimilation of reason-based arguments and to increase branded engagement, and our results support this notion. Thus ER can serve as a facilitator for the processing of more functional arguments in advertising.

Emotional responses to advertising are important, and cultural similarities and differences are intriguing. The findings from our investigation point to the importance of emotional response for engaging and persuasive advertising. Emotional response played an important role in all the countries studied, with some differences in the magnitude of the effect.

Differences in the magnitude of the emotional response might help to explain why some ads travel well and others do not. If the strength of emotional response to a TV ad can shed light into

this phenomenon, managers might be able to adjust their campaigns to be consistent with their brand strategy, but also taking into account how culture influences the processing of communication.

While we were able to find differences in the effect of emotional response, these might not be the only reason why some ads do not 'travel' well.

There could also be substantial variability in the type of content, verbal and non-verbal, that causes an emotional response. Researchers, planners, creatives and brand managers might want to consider the complexity of possible differences between countries when assessing and creating communication campaigns.

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