

THE POWER OF CHRISTMAS COMMERCIALS!

Many advertisers use certain, specific moments in their advertising to draw even more attention to their message. Christmas commercials are ideally suited to share a special message. Large-scale research by DVJ Insights shows that Christmas commercials require more attention, are appreciated more positively and, after watching the entire commercial, also lead to more interest in the brand. If the advertiser has also incorporated the corona crisis in the commercial, they will perform even better. However, the impact is less than expected. Many commercials fail to convert this attention into effect, as too little account is taken of the memory structures of consumers. This is not as bad with generic Christmas commercials, then as it is with Corona-based Christmas commercials.

WHY SHOULD YOU CHANGE ADVERTISING?

Adapting is perhaps the magic word of 2020. Adapting to a new [situation](#), adapting your behaviour, your possibilities, and even [adapting Christmas](#). Yet, one thing has not changed; in the Netherlands, Christmas commercials only appear on TV when 'Sinterklaas' has left the country, whilst in the UK and Germany they can sometimes be seen from the end of November. Within the advertising world, the symbolic start is given by John Lewis, whilst others follow swiftly. The retailers often take the cake, but more and more marketers adapt their commercials to the time of year. The most important question we therefore face every single year; why do advertisers do this every year? And; are Christmas commercials really more effective than the average ad?

Within science, there has been a lot of research into the effects of adapting, from which we know one thing for sure: adaptation makes sense, but this is by no means meant for everyone. Earlier in the year, [DVJ studied](#) the effect of adapting advertising to the corona situation. These corona-based commercials attracted more attention, were generally more positively valued, but has less impact than ordinary commercials. The reason was simple: too many advertisers forgot to account for the existing memory structures. As a result, people could remember the advertisement, but no longer the sender (the brand and the message).

The key question for this project was to uncover whether your commercial, and therefore your message, should be adapted to Christmas.

SET-UP OF THE STUDY

We tested the power of Christmas commercials through our unique holistic test. Next to measuring the appreciation by using statements, we first place the Christmas commercial in an advertising reel where respondents can determine if, and for how long they want to keep watching. By taking into account the way people deal with advertising in the pre-test, we can predict the impact of commercials much better.

Although the commercial block in our pre-test normally consists of commercials of different lengths, categories, and brands, we created a special "Christmas reel" for this test where Christmas commercials and regular commercials compete for attention. Just like on TV, the Christmas reel in every market is dominated by retailers, which, as mentioned, are most profitable during this period.

[DVJ's test model](#) consists of a unique combination of behaviour registration with implicit and explicit question techniques that make it possible to look at different advertising dimensions. In this article we have selected a few KPIs that are important to better understand the impact of advertisements:

- Willingness to watch: we measure the willingness to watch by placing the advertising material of the campaign in a realistic context of other creatives within the same environment. We give the respondent the opportunity to decide how long they are willing to give attention to each ad, with real behaviour instead of forced, and register exactly how much attention each advertisement is given.
- Impact of the advertisement: The impact of the ad is measured by determining how many people can remember the brand and the message after normal exposure and based on normal behaviour. This has a high predictive value because we don't use forced exposure (forced exposure would have led to misleading results due to ad avoidance).
- Advertisement diagnostics: we use different diagnostic tools such as free associations, evaluation and activation statements to better understand the differences in effect.

We compare the results with our benchmark, focusing on the top 20%, because we know that average results lead to a limited impact on the market.

DO CHRISTMAS COMMERCIALS RECEIVE MORE ATTENTION?

A reason to incorporate Christmas is to generate more attention or engagement. If a certain topic attracts a lot of attention, we can expect other advertisements that tackle that same topic, to also attract more attention. And as we know, engagement and attention are extremely important to break through the clutter.

	Aver. all Christmas ads	Aver. COVID Christmas ads	Aver. regular Christmas ads	Aver. all ads
Average duration/time watched	57%	59%	54%	57%
Audience retained after 10 sec.	62%	66%	57%	58%
Watched entirely	43%	46%	37%	42%

Table 1

EVALUATION OF CHRISTMAS COMMERCIALS

To understand the evaluation of the corona related ads better, we also asked a series of questions related to the ads. In Table 2 we looked at the evaluation of the Christmas commercials. We re-indexed the "corona related Christmas commercials" against the normal advertisements.



	Aver. all Christmas ads	Aver. COVID Christmas ads	Aver. regular Christmas ads	Aver. all ads
...is fun	47%	50%	43%	34%
...is not annoying	49%	51%	46%	47%
...is funny	36%	37%	35%	20%
...is relevant	45%	47%	41%	24%
...is credible	51%	52%	48%	39%
...is distinctive	44%	49%	36%	35%
...want to share with others	29%	33%	23%	13%
...gives me a positive impression of the brand	42%	46%	36%	39%
...is easy to understand	65%	65%	66%	64%
...fits the brand	54%	53%	56%	51%
...gives me energy	34%	37%	30%	14%
...gives me a good feeling	46%	51%	40%	28%
...shares something new	33%	37%	27%	43%
...is close to me	35%	39%	29%	18%
...makes me more interested in the brand	32%	34%	28%	23%
...makes me want to buy my Christmas shopping at the brand	29%	29%	27%	16%

Table 2

Based on these questions we see big differences. In general, Christmas commercials are more attractive and relevant than normal ads. If the commercial incorporates corona, this appreciation increases even further. This ties in with the [DVJ Covid-19 report](#) where consumers share that advertisers should adapt their advertising, as it makes the ads more attractive and relevant than ordinary ads. We also studied whether Christmas commercials influence the impression of the brand.

Here, we see that using Christmas and corona in advertisements will also lead to better results in terms of effects on consumer attitudes. It leads to a more positive impression of the brand, and more interest in the brand. The results aren't entirely unexpected, as we have seen in previous studies that when advertisers are able to respond to the current mood of consumers, they will generate more and better impressions for the brand.

These results clearly show that incorporating Christmas is highly appreciated by consumers. It also shows that Christmas and corona work even better together. Congruence with the moment and situation is therefore very important. We do see big differences between good and bad commercials, as shown in Table 3.

	Highest scoring commercial: Kruidvat	Lowest scoring commercial: Postcode Loterij
...is fun	60%	33%
...is relevant	56%	28%
...makes me more interested in the brand	44%	19%

Table 3

DO CHRISTMAS COMMERCIALS GENERATE MORE IMPACT?

The most important question is of course related to the impact of the ads on the position of the brand and the message in the mind of the consumer. This is measured by using a natural environment where people get the chance to show their normal behaviour. In Table 4 we have compared the performance of corona related ads with normal ads, and looked at the best and worst-performing ads. Previous research has shown that brand and message recall is strongly related to in-market impact and should always score high. Only ads that perform at the top 20% level can break through the clutter and generate impact.

	Aver. all Christmas ads	Aver. COVID Christmas ads	Aver. regular Christmas ads	Aver. all ads
Unaided brand recall	46%	43%	50%	49%
Perceived message clarity	44%	41%	47%	48%

Table 4

Based on these results we see that the impact of Christmas commercials is more or less the same as with normal ads. Despite the fact that the advertisements receive more attention, and people are more positive after having watched the entire ad, they have a similar impact on brand and message recall as regular ads.

	Highest scoring commercial: McDonald's	Lowest scoring commercial: Postcode Loterij
Unaided brand recall	56%	30%
Perceived message clarity	50%	38%

Table 5

We even see that corona Christmas commercials have less impact. The biggest differences are between the best and worst-performing advertisements. The best-performing corona advertisements generate five times the brand impact than the worst-performing advertisements. This teaches us an important lesson: creating a good Christmas commercial is not easy. You can hit the nail on the head, but you can also miss it completely.

CONCLUSIONS

Christmas is a rewarding theme for a campaign. Responding to those special emotions strikes a sensitive chord among many respondents. Still, it is not that easy to make a good Christmas commercial. The results and recommendations can be summarised as follows:

1. Responding to the moment generates a lot of attention. Advertisements that do this generally receive more attention. These advertisements are also seen as relevant, and lead to a positive impression of the brand. The use of this momentum can help your brand a lot, but you need to keep following the topic's interest – because it will diminish. If you also manage to incorporate the current corona situation in your commercial, that attention and appreciation will increase even further.
2. The impact of Christmas commercials does not differ from regular advertisements. These commercials can't use this increased attention and relevance in a positive way by creating more impact. The reason for this is that these advertisements are often not properly linked to consumers' existing memory structures. If you incorporate the corona situation, this becomes even more difficult. You must find a way to build on those memory structures consumers already have. If you don't, you will waste a lot of money, and generate no impact at all.
3. Don't let your Christmas commercial obliterate your brand. To take advantage of the increased interest and attention of consumers without compromising a positive impact on your brand, Christmas commercials must contain even stronger brand cues than a regular commercial. This can be done in various ways, for example by (more) making explicit use of unique brand features, or by showing the logo more often, longer, or earlier on in the ad.