

# YouTube's best ads of the last ten years: The neuroscience verdict

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Everyone loves a “greatest ever” list and [YouTube's top five ads of the last decade](#) – as voted by users – is no exception. From [Volvo Trucks' “epic split”](#), [Turkish Airlines “Kobe vs Messi”](#) selfie shootout and [Volkswagen's Darth Vader toddler](#), to female empowerment messages from Always and Dove, the list is a brilliant testament to global ad creativity.

Creativity and effectiveness go hand-in-hand, or they should do, and while the first is relatively easy to identify, proving ad effectiveness is a lot more complicated. With marketers increasingly turning to neuro-science to reveal subconscious factors involved in ad effectiveness such as emotional response and memory encoding, what makes these ads work from the brain's point of view? Here are five key insights.

## A clear narrative arc

When our brains are following a sequence of events, they pick up more strongly on elements that are related to one another. Focusing on a single narrative with a clear beginning, middle and end contributes to the brain storing an ad into memory, as the brain latches on to each new development in order to understand the story. There is compelling evidence to show that what goes into memory correlates with subsequent purchase decisions and behaviour.

While all five of the ads featured have a strong narrative, Volkswagen's ad, which starts with the toddler dressed as Darth Vader, tracks his increasing frustration as his “powers” don't work and climaxes with “Darth Vader” successfully “starting” the car, is a particularly clear example, providing a well-trodden path for the brain to follow, all the way to the end of the ad.

## The brand as hero of the story

Our brains are very selective about what goes into memory otherwise we'd be overwhelmed by irrelevant details. This means that brands that are intrinsic to an ad's narrative are more likely to be put into memory. Each of the five ads featured in the line-up succeed in this respect.

In Always#LikeAGirl ad and Dove Real Beauty Sketches, the brands are the resolution of the ad answering the question, who is bringing me this content?

## **Patterns and repetitions**

Our brains are programmed to spot connections between individual elements in a sequence of events; patterns and repetitions help highlight the connection between the different elements of the narrative.

## **Tension/anticipation**

In our brains anything that builds tension is sending signals that something important might be about to occur. The signals put our brains on high alert and makes them very receptive to whatever might follow. Tension might be built by any one of a number of things – music building to a crescendo as in the Volkswagen ad's use of *The Imperial March* (Darth Vader's theme), a sequence of scenes building towards a climax (Turkish Airlines, Volkswagen, Volvo, Dove).

## **A focus on people/characters**

All of the top five ads focus on a few characters (instead of many) who are human beings (as opposed to animations), which helps to create a stronger sense of personal relevance, making it easier for viewers to identify with the situation. A sense of personal relevance is key to driving levels of memory encoding enabling brands to directly appeal to consumers.