

BRAND CONTACT

FRANK HARRISON

Unravelling the Gordian knot of brand contact

The increasing availability and influence of different media provoke two major challenges: how different media influence consumers and how companies need to organise themselves to use it. **Frank Harrison** describes research that tracks the influence of different media, reflecting on how this new knowledge requires a change in the way advertisers structure themselves to use it most effectively.

OF THE MANY challenges facing marketers, one of the most intractable is simply deciding where the marketing budget should be spent. How much should be spent on TV advertising versus online? Shouldn't more be spent on 'buzz' marketing? What about YouTube, Facebook and Twitter? Should point of sale get more? What about experiential marketing? Marketers are spoilt for choice, but choosing between options is getting harder and harder. Without comparable data across contacts, decisions can be subjective and risky.

Brand managers need a quick and affordable way to assess all the various contacts that consumers have with brands in their category. They need to know the relative influence of each contact, and how their brand is performing in each touchpoint versus competing brands. They need to know the relative worth and contribution of paid-for contacts compared to those that are owned (for example their brand's website) versus earned contacts (such as social media). This article describes, and summarises findings from, a globally deployed research method – the ZenithOptimedia ROI Tracker – that provides guidance on contact choice based on comparative metrics across all touchpoints.

Assessing sales contributions

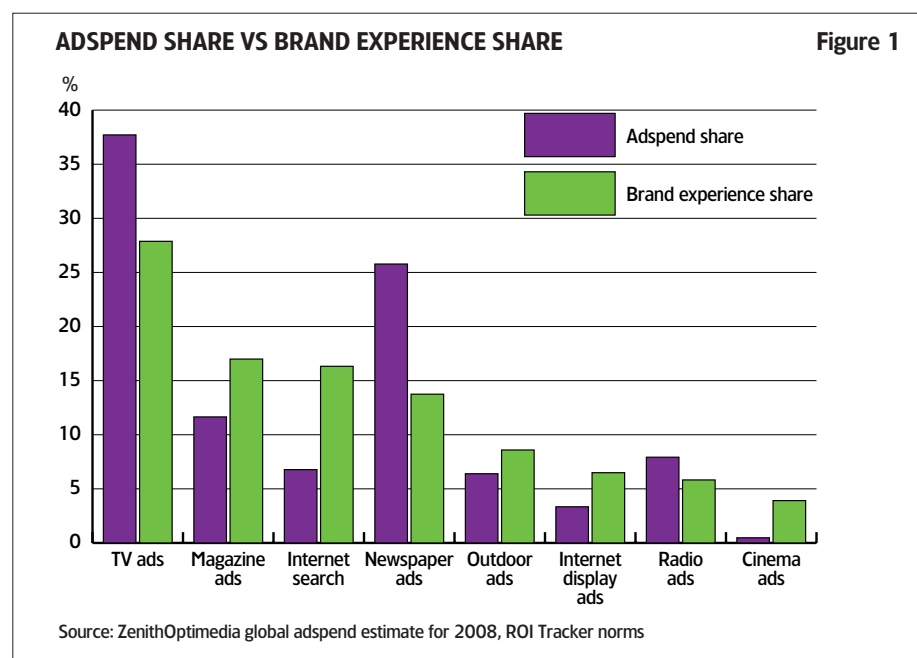
It would be reasonable to expect allocation of marketing budgets between

contact types to deliver roughly equivalent proportions of brand experience (see box for description of 'brand experience' metric). The more you spend on TV advertising, the more brand experience you would expect to achieve from TV. However, the ROI Tracker shows that some touchpoints are far better at delivering brand experience than others for every pound, dollar or euro spent – and this can provide a useful guide to more effective and efficient budget allocations across touchpoints.

At a global level there are some pretty large differences between adspend and brand experience profiles. Figure 1 compares these profiles

across major mass media in 2008. The chart shows that internet advertising (both search and display) delivers a much higher proportion of brand experience (through the mix of influence and consumer engagement) than its proportion of adspend. For every pound spent, internet advertising generates a disproportionately high brand experience return. Despite high growth in online adspend over the last few years, these data show the high potential for further growth.

Magazine, outdoor and cinema advertising also deliver a higher proportion of brand experience than adspend. Conversely, adspend share in newspapers is much higher than brand experience share and, to a lesser extent, the same is true for TV and radio advertising. ZenithOptimedia's global adspend forecasts show that this imbalance becomes less marked: internet adspend share is rising swiftly while newspapers' share of adspend is falling almost as rapidly.



Responsiveness declines as we get older

The ROI Tracker shows how contact effectiveness changes as consumers get older. At an all-touchpoints level, it shows that contact influence and levels of brand association decline swiftly as we get older. The older you are the less likely you are to respond to advertising. I suspect this is partly because older people are more familiar with brands and their advertising, probably more fixed in their ways and also less targeted by most advertising.

Figure 2 compares the influence (CCF) of TV versus internet display and search advertising, showing how influence changes for age groups from 15 to 59 years old. Figure 3 shows average levels of brand association for the same media and age groups. The charts show how TV advertising's average level of influence and brand association declines as people get older – falling by 25% and 42% respectively between teenagers and pensioners.

However, there are a number of notable touchpoints that are exceptions to this rule. In fact they work in the opposite way – they become steadily more effective as we get older. Specifically, the influence of internet search rises as we get older, exceeding TV advertising in influence by the time we are 45, and rising by 26% across the age groups. Other online touchpoints that display similar growth in influence as we get older include product comparison websites, brand websites, retailer sites and consumer opinion sites.

There may be a simple reason for this: as we get older we become wealthier but, paradoxically, steadily more value conscious. We are more likely to look for bargains (in-store promotions also get more influential with age), and the internet is a great place to go looking for bargains. Interestingly, the level of brand association from internet search, while lower than from TV advertising, remains fairly unchanged as people get older, so that by the time we are of pensionable age, the level of brand association

The ROI Tracker methodology

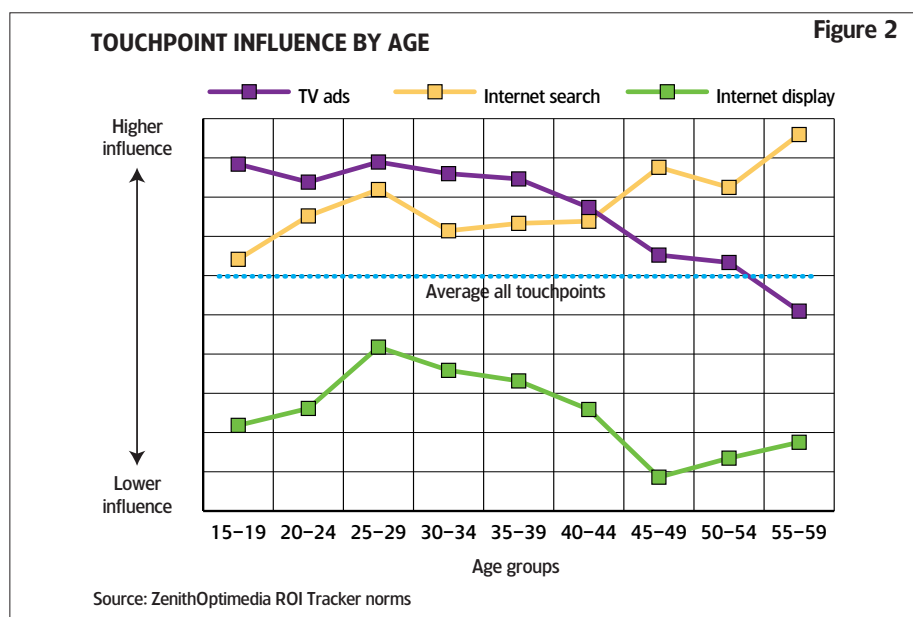
The ROI Tracker is a consumer research-based tool that ZenithOptimedia manages on behalf of its clients. It measures, and helps plan, marketing activities across all forms of brand contact, including mass media, sponsorship and events, one-to-one, experiential, digital, advice and recommendation, and the many contact types at point of sale. Each category-specific client project delivers three key metrics for each touchpoint:

- Contact Clout Factor (CCF): the relative influence of each touchpoint on category purchasing. This is derived from consumer responses to questions regarding each touchpoint's ability to a) provide information about category brands, b) make category brands appealing or attractive and c) play a role in category purchasing.
- Brand Association (BA): the percentage of category consumers associating each brand with each touchpoint, based on respondents agreeing that they have seen or heard the brand via the touchpoint in recent months.
- Brand Experience Points (BEP): a derived metric, based on weighting Brand Association by CCF, that indicates the relative contribution of each touchpoint to brand sales.

Since 2002 ZenithOptimedia has completed a total of 392 ROI Tracker projects for 95 clients, comprising 386,060 consumer interviews in 37 countries for 144 product and service categories. This large volume of data is stored in a database that provides normative data for over 150 touchpoints. The database reveals many insights into the value of all forms of consumer contact for brands. Here I pull together some of the more interesting, possibly provocative, insights from this database. Prepare for some marketing shibboleths to be challenged.

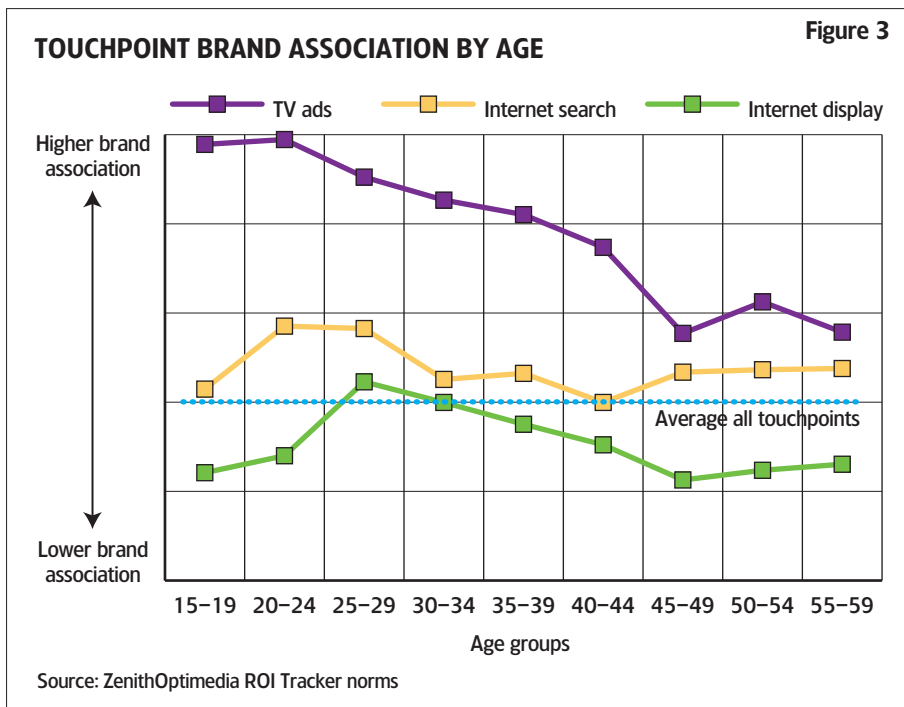
Acknowledgement

In January 2002 ZenithOptimedia became the first agency to license global use of the Market ContactAudit (MCA) from Integration Marketing & Communications. Four MCA questions are included in the ZenithOptimedia ROI Tracker, an otherwise proprietary process and methodology that helps marketers maximise the effectiveness of their marketing mix.



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from search is almost as high as from TV ads.

The story for internet display advertising is quite different to search. Firstly, the influence of internet display advertising is low, much lower than for TV advertising or internet search. Levels of brand association are also low for internet display, much lower than for TV and lower than for internet search – at all ages. Interestingly there is quite a sharp rise in influence and level of brand association for internet display advertising between the ages of 15 and 29, but then both fall steadily as people get older. Internet display advertising, and the use of the internet as a vehicle to

build brand equity, still has a long way to go before it can be regarded as an effective competitor to TV advertising for most brands.

Big differences between categories

The ROI Tracker shows that there is large category variance in contact influence and level of brand association. For example, TV advertising for confectionery is very much more influential on brand choice than for financial services. In this case, part of the reason is down to the age factor: confectionery ads target younger people than ads for financial services (and

younger people are much more responsive to TV ads). It is also due to the difference in purchase intervals: confectionery is bought more regularly than car insurance, so more consumers are considering purchases more often. There are other reasons, but the point I wish to make is simply that contact influence is category specific. No two categories are the same.

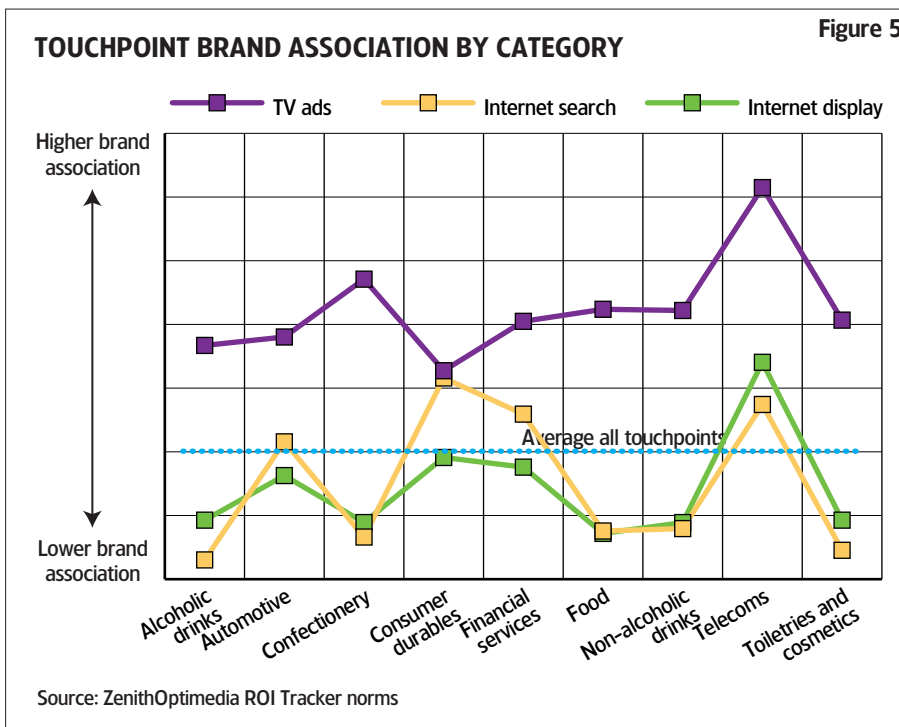
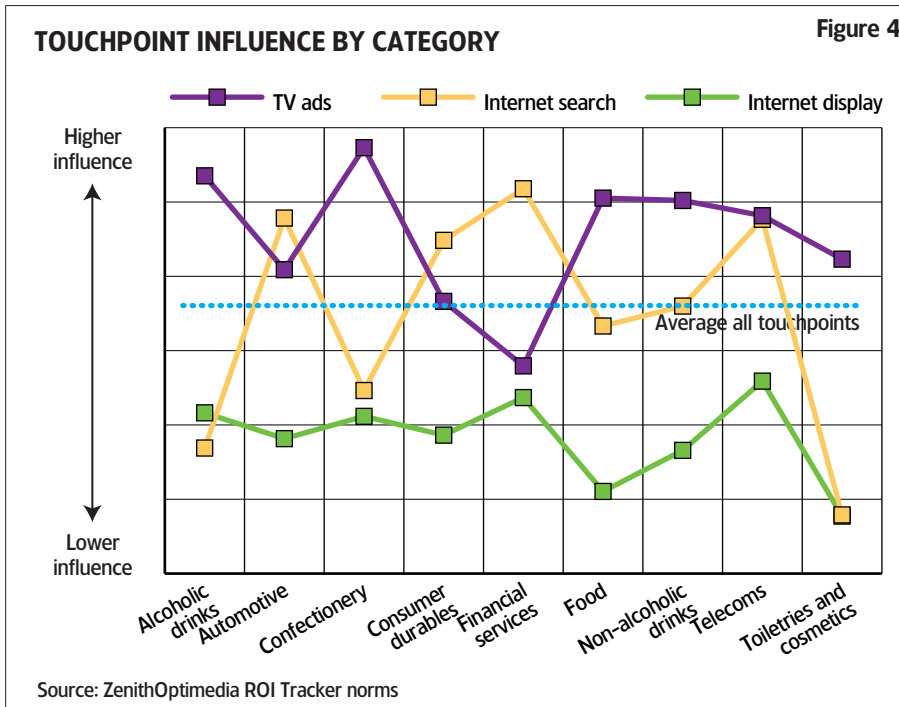
Figure 4 shows how contact influence for TV advertising, internet search and internet display varies across nine categories. Figure 5 shows average levels of brand association for the same media and categories. There are some interesting take-outs.

Internet search has higher influence than TV advertising for the financial services, consumer durables (e.g. electronics, home appliances, computers etc.) and automotive categories. For consumer durables, internet search also delivers the same level of brand association as TV advertising. This means that the average consumer durables brand attracts a higher level of brand experience from internet search than from TV advertising (7% higher). Conversely, TV advertising is much more influential than online search for alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks, confectionery, food, and toiletries and cosmetics.

Telecoms marketers should consider themselves fortunate. The telecoms category is unique in that it achieves the highest levels of brand association and the highest level of

Universal brand contact insights

- Advice and recommendations from close and trusted personal contacts have the greatest influence on what consumers choose to buy.
- Sampling is an underexploited opportunity for most brands. Done right, sampling can convert habitual consumers of rival brands, breaking their habit and turning them into advocates.
- Unlike most other mass media, TV advertising typically has above-average influence on brand choice when compared with all other touchpoints. For many categories, TV is an essential and large part of the marketing mix. However, the data reveals that spend levels are often well into diminishing returns.
- Radio and newspaper ads are good for tactical use but exhibit swift diminishing returns at higher spend levels. This suggests that these mass media are often best used for tactical advertising and are less cost effective for brand building.



contact influence across analogue and digital touchpoints. Internet display brand association is higher for telecoms brands than internet search. On the other hand, consumer durables advertisers are relatively disadvantaged when it comes to TV advertising: they suffer from the combination of relatively low influence and brand association. This leads to an average level of brand experience from TV

advertising that is 25% below the all-category average.

Companies must plan their media holistically

One of the greatest challenges that we originally encountered in successfully implementing the ROI Tracker research programme was not related to the research method or the data it

revealed. Our challenge, and that of our clients, was to break down barriers that existed due to culture, corporate structures and working processes. If companies are structured in silos, with each silo competing for separate pockets of the marketing budget, it can be hard to take decisions (based on direction from consumer research) that require significant budget shifts across silos. We have found that the ROI Tracker helps to highlight the need to operate more holistically while providing the data and the means to do so.

We have developed a process around the research that involves a holistic team of relevant stakeholders working together. We pull in contact experts across creative agencies and client company departments, ensuring that all parties are united in pursuing the best interests of the brand and not their particular specialism. We get everyone to think holistically about brand contact choices, putting insight from category consumers at the heart of the contact decision process. This is not rocket science, it is common sense.

Holistic marketing communications has long been the subject of discussion and debate, and many companies have changed their ways of working to smooth contact choice decisions across a wider spectrum of contacts. However, decision makers also need comparative data across touchpoints to inform their contact selections. Without these data, decisions remain risky and largely subjective.

Unfortunately, most industry audience measurement is medium specific in most countries, with no comparative data available to planners. The ROI Tracker allows us to fill this essential piece of the marketing communications jigsaw, providing the data and insight with which to make well-informed brand contact decisions. 🍷

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