



Receptivity to relatability...

TVNZ FORECAST 9

Strategic Consultant

dentsu

Independent Research Partner

One
Picture.
THE DISCOVERY COMPANY



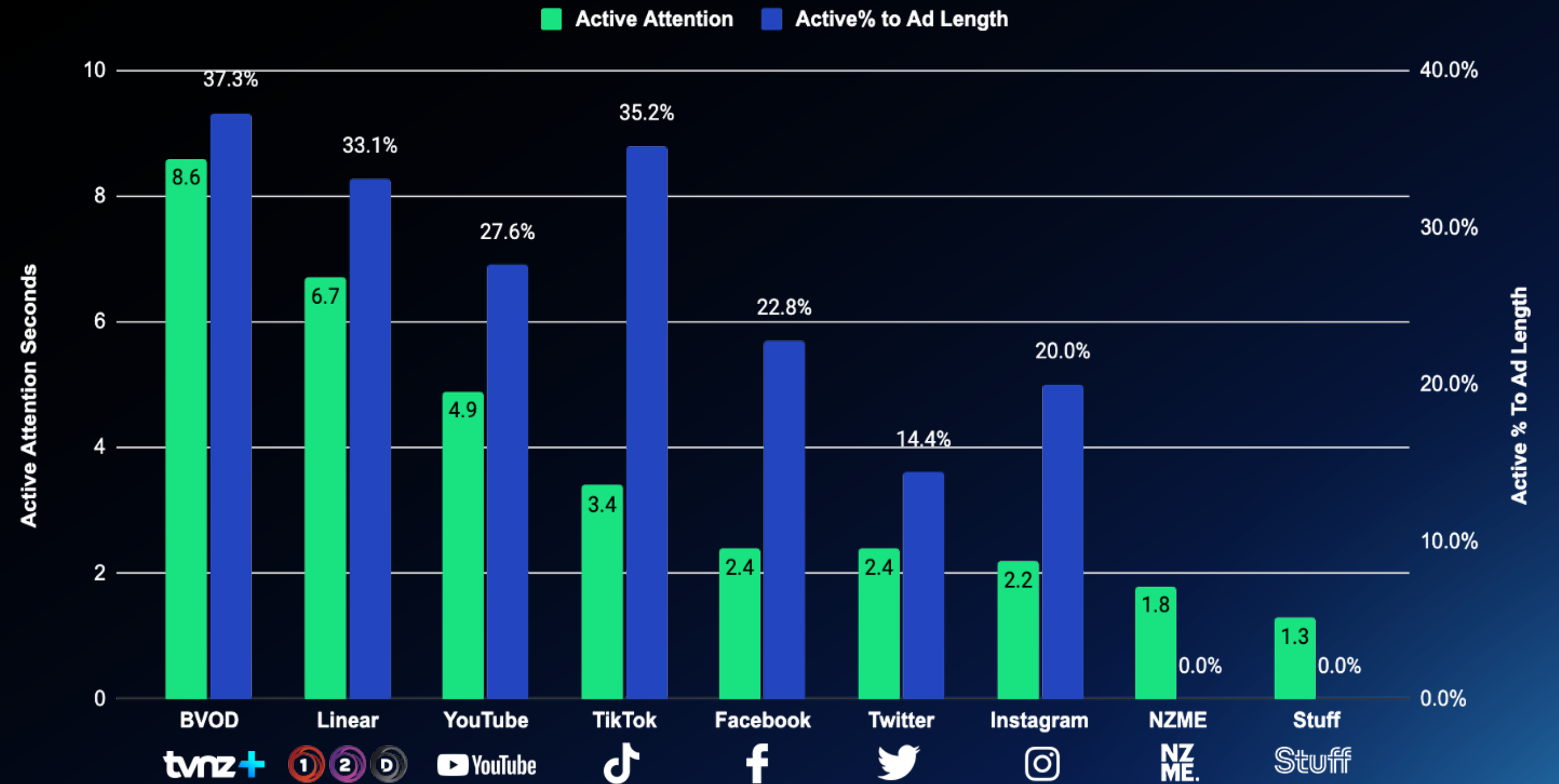
It started with attention...

We learned which platforms contribute the most attention, both passive and active.

AND TVNZ is the top of the stack, especially TVNZ+

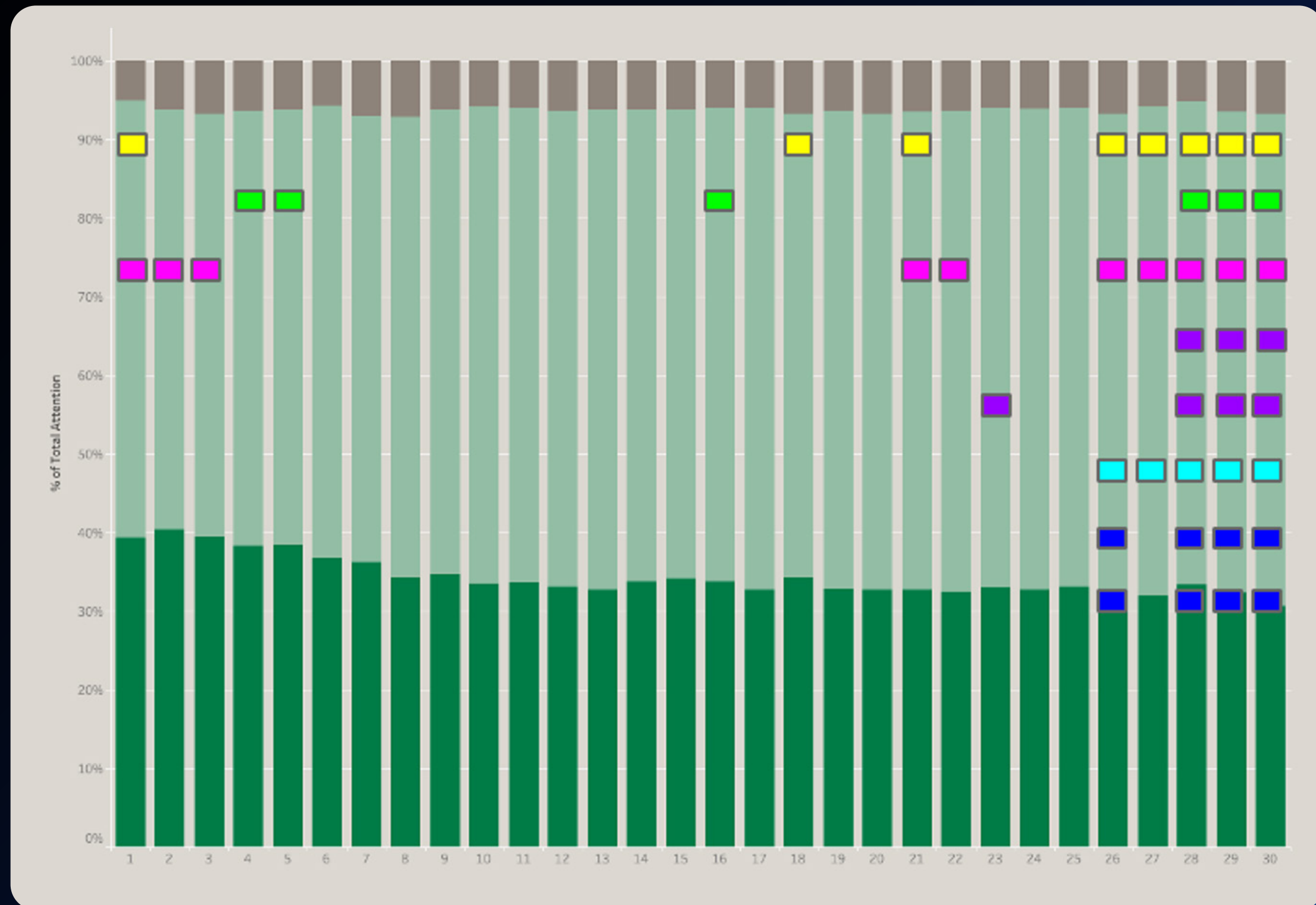
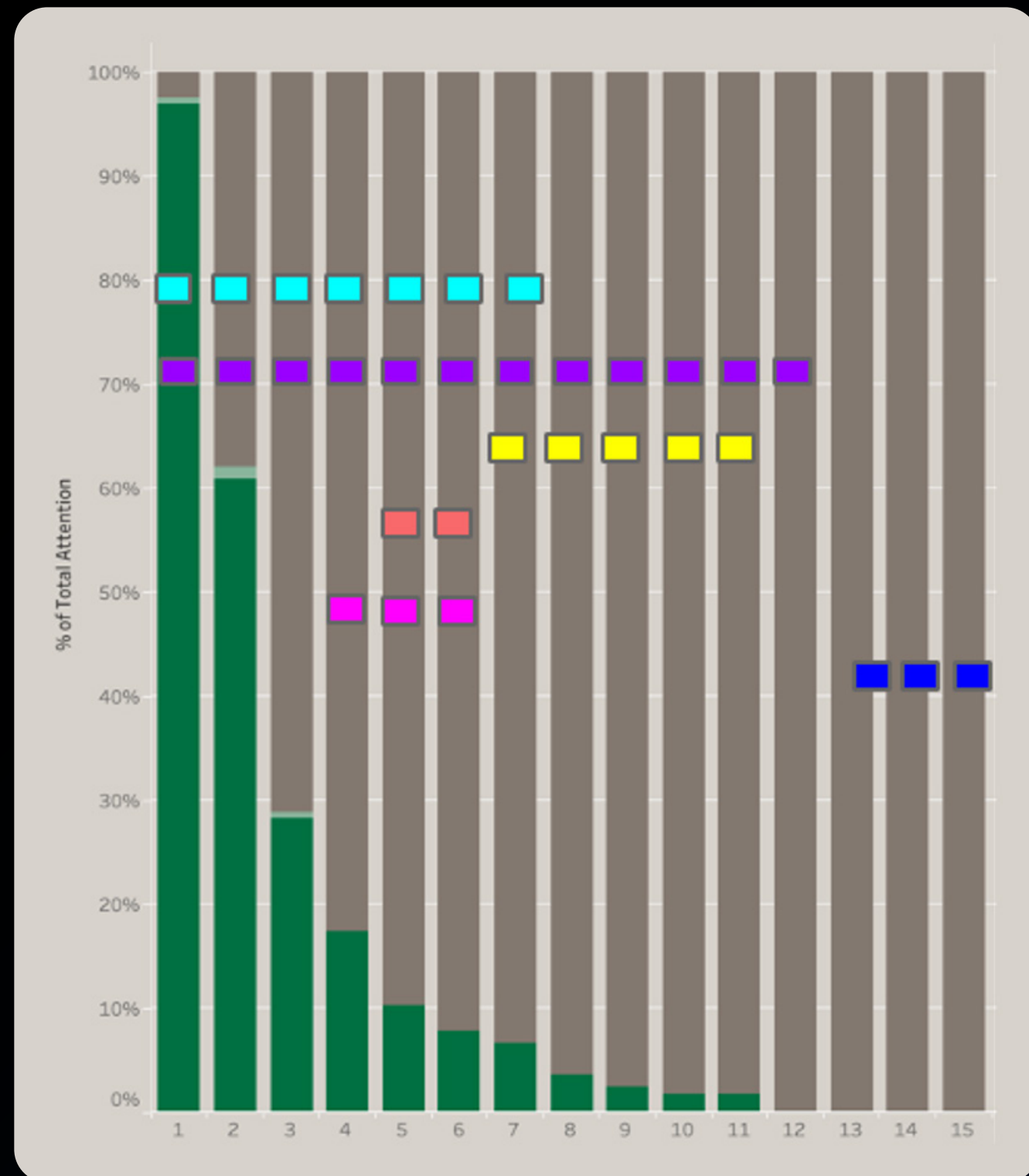
What platforms contribute the most attention?

Active attention by platform



Message delivered AND message received?

Branded Moments



Active Passive Inactive


Getting people's
attention
is critical.

But we also need them to be receptive to the content they're looking at if we want to influence them.

We set out to understand just what it is that makes audiences **more receptive to some stories in video advertising over others.**

Our starting hypothesis...

Both context (the environment we are in) **and content** (the elements of a story) **influence how receptive people are to video stories in advertising.**



During our desk research phase, we found a strong connection between attention and receptivity.

“The more receptive people are, the more willing they are to listen or accept new ideas or information from a brand - and ultimately change the way they think, feel and act.”

**And, receptive viewers
increase the impact of
a campaign by**

7x

Relatability is one of our fundamental psychological needs – which is why we find ourselves being more receptive to something we can relate to.

Self-determination theory* proposes that humans have three basic psychological needs that help them grow and function optimally:

Competence

Autonomy

Relatedness (ie relatability)

Our methodology

4 X N = 6-8
focus groups

In a focus group setting, a mix of people were exposed to TV ads and short stories as a means of trying to understand and extract the key attributes of 'reliability' within and outside of an ad context.

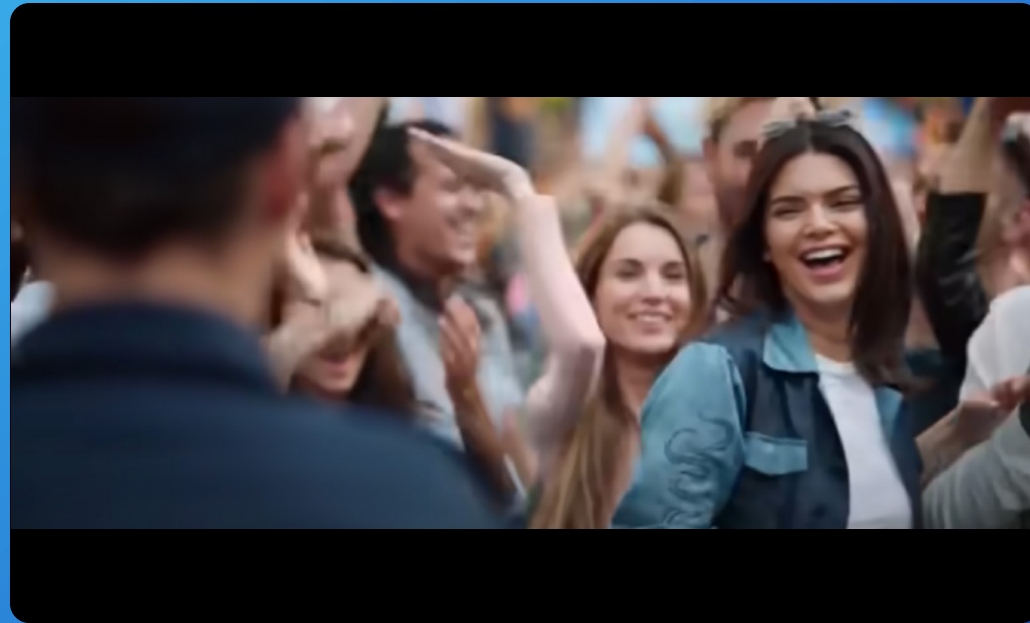
7 days digital
diaries N = 24

Delving into the context of people's lives and watching habits on our online platform to see what effect context has on receptivity and reliability.

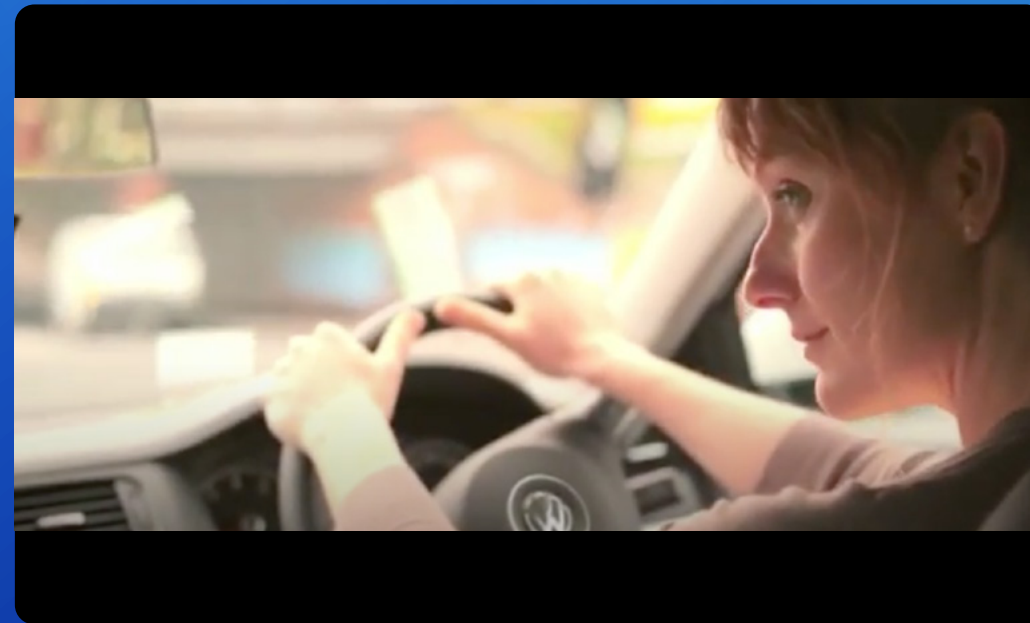
Quantitative
phase

15-minute online survey with n=300 NZers who watch TV at least once a week. The sample was nationally representative by age 18-65 years, gender, region and ethnicity. We sought to validate our newly defined attributes of reliability and understand the influence of them on receptivity.

The ads we showed participants.



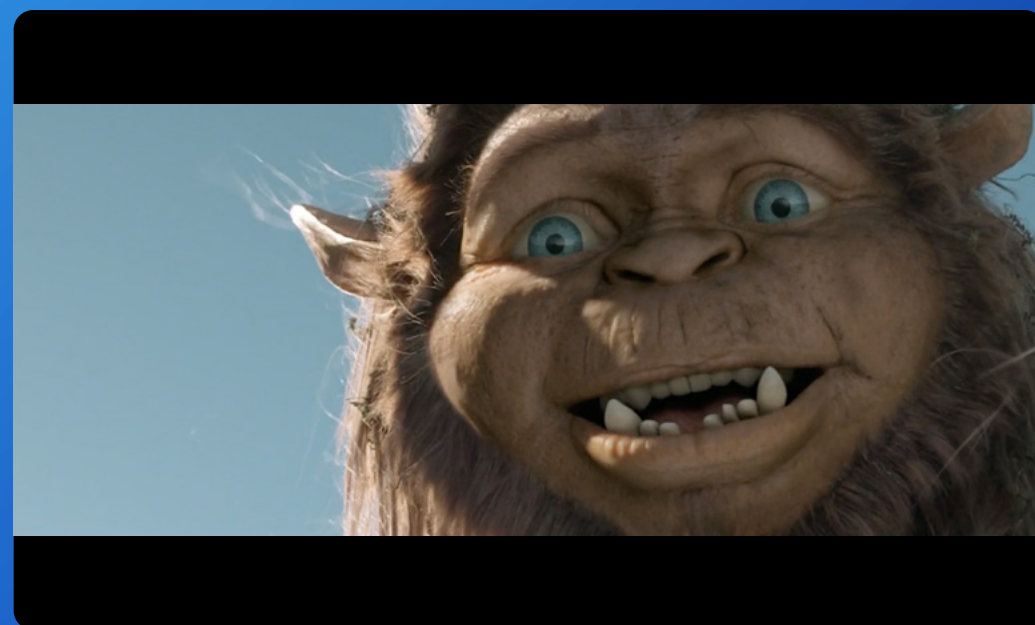
Pepsi 'Live for Now'



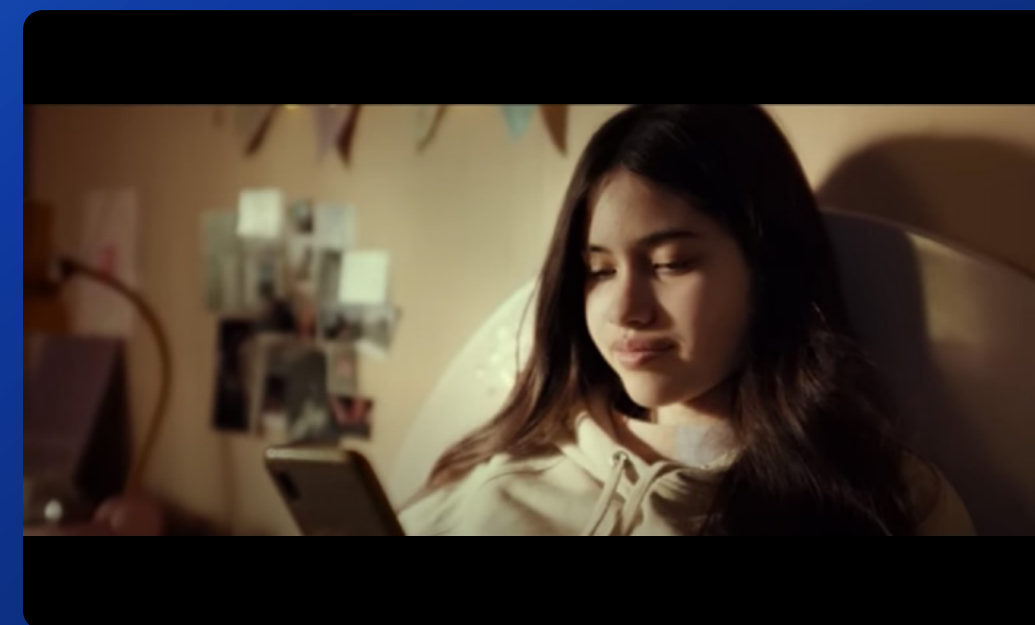
Volkswagen 'Jetta Memories'



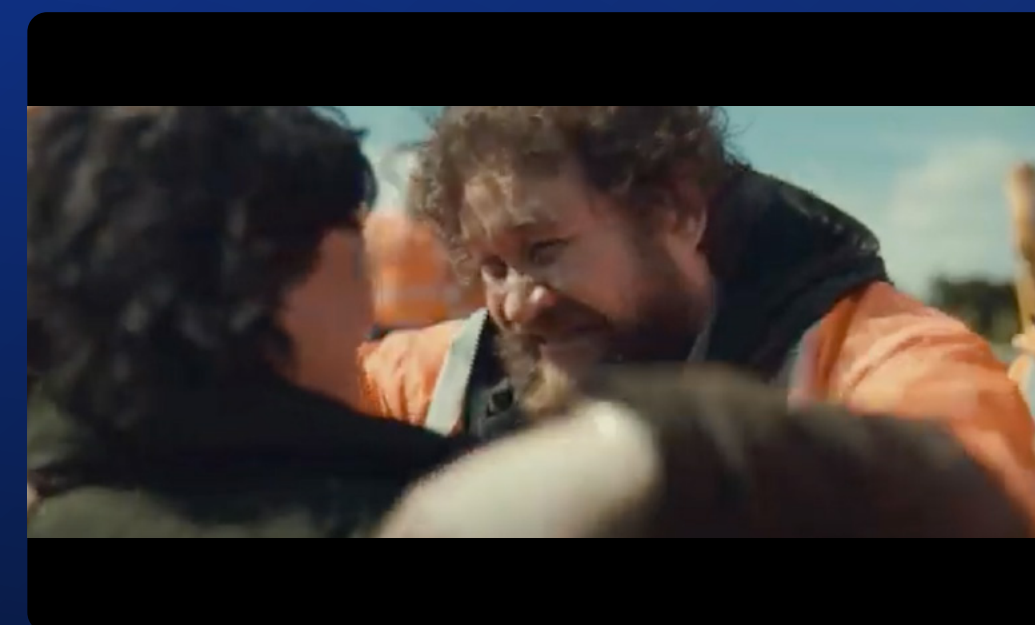
Domino's 'Get the Wallet'



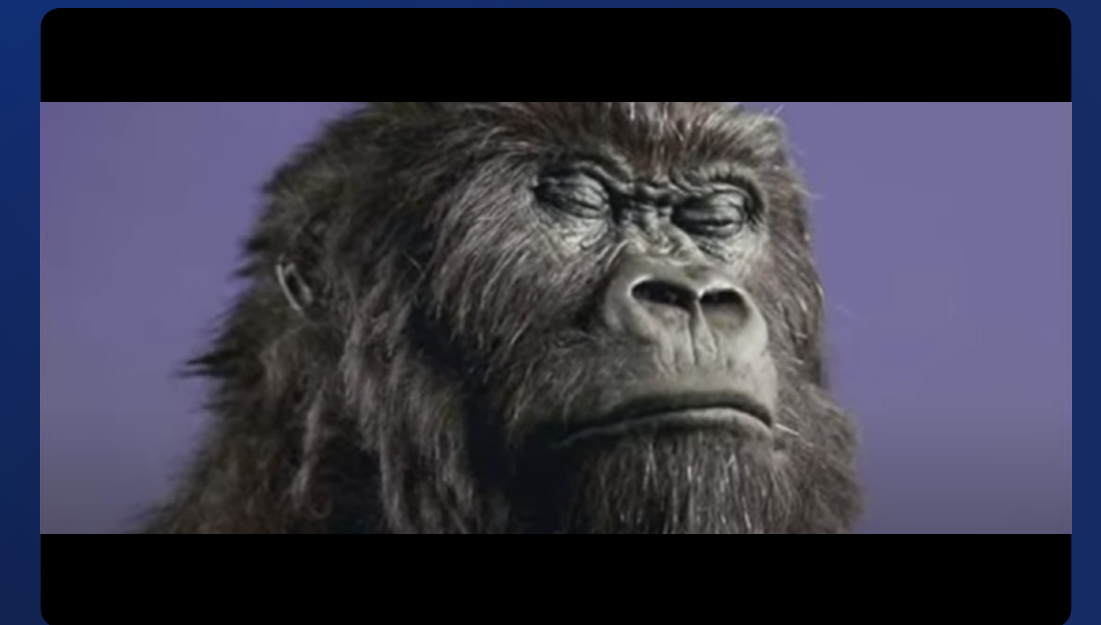
Westpac 'Together Greater'



ASB Youthline



Southern Cross 'Sweet Caroline'



Cadbury 'Gorilla'

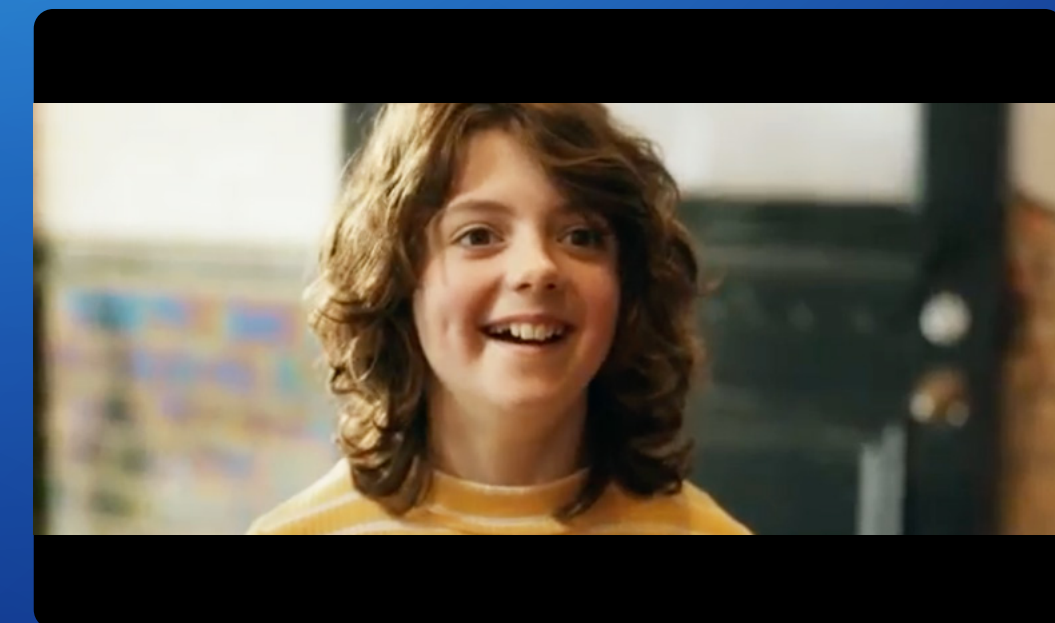
The ads we showed participants.



Waka Kotahi 'Never Have I Ever'



Speights 'The Dance'



ASB's 'Ben & Amy's Little Window Shopper'



Waka Kotahi 'Toll Booth'



Lotto 'Imagine on Ice'



Volvo Trucks 'Van Damme Split'

**So, is the way forward
through relatability?**

There are limited studies that have explored the various attributes of relatability in advertising stories, and whether 'relatability' can drive receptivity.

We validated our hypothesis and found that there are indeed two major factors when it comes to influencing receptivity when you're delivering video stories:

context and content.

The aspect of **context** you can control is through the platform you use to tell your video story.

Beyond your control are the external variables that can either heighten or detract from receptivity, such as:



**Solus viewing
vs co-viewing**



Viewer's mood



**Appointment viewing
or distraction viewing**



**What you can
control is content
– through the plot
and characters of
your ad's story.**

We found

8

**attributes of relatability that drive
receptivity in video advertising.**

These are the 8 attributes of relatability.

CHARACTERS:

IMPERFECT

MULTIDIMENSIONAL

PLOT:

CONFLICT

CURIOSITY

PERSPECTIVE:

EMPATHY

ASPIRATION

REALITY:

VALIDATION

OPENNESS

When an audience connects with one or more of these attributes,
it strengthens connections with your ad.

1

IMPERFECT

We're not in adland anymore, Toto.

WHAT IT MEANS

Life isn't neat or perfect, but adland often is. Viewers want nuanced characters that feel real and authentic – with struggles and obstacles we recognise and relate to.

HOW IT MAKES IT RELATABLE

The more real, raw and authentic characters are, the more viewers could place them in their lives or see themselves in the character. Being real is not about being perfect; it's about characters that embrace the un-airbrushed versions of themselves in a brave, genuine way.

Characters don't always need to be human, let alone 'close to real-life' to have the same effect. Animations can stir the same 'realness' if the characters are imbued with the same depth of authenticity and self-awareness. Homer Simpson is one of the most relatable characters ever created.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

'Real' characters give us more feels – because they talk to us – not at us. Whilst it can be hard to put our flaws on display, seeing imperfect characters on screen help us be OK with it.



1

IMPERFECT

We're not in adland anymore, Toto.

“I always warm to characters who try to do the right thing – even if they often get it wrong.”

(In reference to Land Rover ‘Pathological Liar’)

“When characters are overdone intentionally – it’s fine. But when an everyday character is glammed up it feels unrealistic. Almost makes me a bit grumpy.”

(In reference to Pepsi ‘Live for Now’)



1

IMPERFECT

“When I tell my story, you hear your story.”

Asger Lindholdt

FOR BRANDS

Characters need to be ‘fit for purpose’ – true to themselves and the story. It’s also an opportunity for brands to own their own flaws and mistakes.

CONSIDERATIONS

- Strip back some of the glamour. Messy imperfection hits harder than sanitised perfection. We live lives full of unsigned school notices, expired WOFs and forgotten anniversaries. It’s powerful for brands to reflect that.
- There’s interesting in the mundane – the wait for the kettle to boil can be profound or tedious.
- Consider the true believability of a character. Does the sum of their actions hit credibly?



2

MULTI-DIMENSIONAL

We all contain multitudes. There are lots of sides to all our stories and the more characters represent this richness, the more they resonate.

WHAT IT MEANS

Viewers are more interested in characters when they have layers because that's how they see themselves; there's a richness and 'intelligence' to having depth. Cookie-cutter tropes and lazy stereotypes make us switch off.

HOW IT MAKES IT RELATABLE

Viewers respond well and are more receptive to characters who display a range of emotions. Similarly, the demonstration of competing or conflicting traits; vulnerability vs egotistical; reactive vs considered, etc, allows viewers to more easily identify themselves in these characters. Peeling back the layers of a character on screen allows viewers to forget about actors and scripts and instead relate to characters as people.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

It allows a more profound understanding of the person, which fosters more interest and engagement.



2

MULTI-DIMENSIONAL

We all contain multitudes. There are lots of sides to all our stories and the more characters represent this richness, the more they resonate.

“It’s good to see characters who are impacted in ways you wouldn’t think they would be. It shows depth - and makes you want to know what happened.”

(In reference to Speights ‘The Dance’)

“You need to stick to your lane. Kendall in the Pepsi ad - what a joke. You don’t have to always be ‘doing the right thing’ to be a good person.”

(In reference to Pepsi ‘Live for Now’)



2

MULTI-DIMENSIONAL

FOR BRANDS

Multi-dimensional characters allow more hooks on which to hang our understanding of characters' motivations.

CONSIDERATIONS

- Highlight conflicting values that give characters richness.
- Create intrigue with characters who change and evolve.
- Adaptability – it's interesting to see how characters adapt to different scenarios, environments and other people. It makes us question how we'd react and gets us more invested in their stories.



3

CONFLICT

WHAT IT MEANS

A frictionless existence is boring to watch – we like to see people rub up against obstacles. To struggle on the way to getting what they want. The best storytellers put their characters in hard situations then see how they get out of them.

HOW IT MAKES IT RELATABLE

We like watching people's trials and tribulations. Without a story plot building a tension, characters would merely be going through the motions. Instead, a sequence of events works to 'unfold' a story where people root for the character to resolve their problem, just like they have to in their own lives. Whilst these narrative arcs work to surprise and provide revelation they also ground the story back to reality.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

Witnessing how characters deal with complex situations and adversity provides viewers with insight and perspectives on how they can navigate their own.



3

CONFLICT

“In the Pursuit of Happiness, it’s about a single parent that overcomes challenges, I relate to that as a single parent.”

“I think everyone goes through challenges, even something small. Every situation has something that’s not 100% positive. Although it’s not an issue I experience, I can understand how people would go through it.”

(In reference to Westpac ‘Together Greater’)

“Show me how you can help me overcome things in ways I haven’t necessarily thought about. That’s more interesting.”

(In reference to Waka Kotahi ‘Never Have I Ever’)



3

CONFLICT

FOR BRANDS

Stories that let complexities come through (and don't downplay them) are more likely to be effective in persuading people. Consider how you can legitimately associate your brand with different challenges people face and work to identify tensions you can help resolve, and/or help people resolve.

CONSIDERATIONS

- Think of 'adversity' along a continuum – sometimes the more trivial issues provide equally fertile territory as the heavier issues.
- Let the messiness of life come through because it's interesting and what people relate to.
- Allow the complexity of issues to come through to fully engage audiences.
- Introduce lessons as a second step, after acknowledging that the issue is complicated, when dealing with potentially resistant audiences.
- Build on the productive aspects of an audience's existing thinking to help people see their connection to new ideas.



4

CURIOSITY

“I see you shiver with antici.....pation”,

Dr Frank-N-Furter

WHAT IT MEANS

We relate to stories and content that indulge our need ‘to know more’ and play on our desire to know ‘what happens next’ in a story.

We all crave the dopamine hit of solving a mystery

HOW IT MAKES IT RELATABLE

We are drawn to storylines with momentum – those that leave a small door open, an unanswered question, or deliver an unexpected twist. It’s what keeps viewers engaged and motivated to keep listening. Creating curiosity provides the viewer an opportunity to draw on their lived experiences to develop an interpretation or conclusion.

WHY IT’S IMPORTANT

Leaving that door open a crack means viewers connect or pair unrelated themes together as a way of understanding their own experiences. Our brains are trained to predict the shape of stories –

Which is why rug pulls and misdirects like Lotto ‘Armoured Truck’ are so satisfying to watch.



4

CURIOSITY

“I see you shiver with antici.....pation”,

Dr Frank-N-Furter

“I love the continuation ads (e.g., kittens in the garage ad). It builds my interest and I want to see what happens next; I’m emotionally invested.”

(In reference to NZ Post ad)

“I like ads you feel all the emotions and then have a twist.”

(In reference to Lotto ‘Imagine’)

“I am happy and emotionally invested in this chicken-and-the-egg short story. It’s a quirky journey, I want to see what happens.”



4

CURIOSITY

FOR BRANDS

Curiosity and momentum can build desire among an audience to get involved in a narrative themselves. Once viewers hear about a problem, they need to know that there's something they can do about it.

CONSIDERATIONS

- Leave the door open – but not too far.
- Consider how you might build anticipation.
- Resistance to premature closure.
- Build momentum in a narrative by providing action steps and showing clear consequences so that the audience stays invested in the story.
- Provide participatory action steps on what needs to be done or how to get involved that fit with the narrative, such as voting, looking out for a neighbour, showing up to a protest, or reposting an image or message on social media.



5

EMPATHY

“They May Forget What You Said, But They Will Never Forget How You Made Them Feel.”

Maya Angelou

WHAT IT MEANS

Viewers relate to stories where they can put themselves in the characters' shoes.

HOW IT MAKES IT RELATABLE

Relatability could be seeing yourself or imagining yourself in similar situations, similar environments, or having similar motivations to characters on screen. Viewers don't have to have experienced the situation to see themselves in it and imagine how they would feel or respond. Empathy is crucial in storytelling because it allows audiences to emotionally connect with characters, understand their struggles, and relate to their experiences.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

When people can relate to characters who are different from themselves, it can shift and broaden their perspective. From this, people can learn that they can relate to people from different social groups.



5

EMPATHY

“They May Forget What You Said, But They Will Never Forget How You Made Them Feel.”

Maya Angelou

“I don’t have kids, but they made the characters human so I was able to relate.”

(In reference to Westpac ‘Together Greater’)

“Wasn’t relatable to me personally, but it made me sad (people dying, old lady by herself after losing partner). It made me think about it and puts me in their shoes.”

“It’s about people in their house who haven’t visited neighbours (there’s two outcomes where they’re okay and one where they’re not) - I’m super invested because it was super Kiwi. I interact like that with my neighbours.”

(In reference to the Home Project ad)

“For me to relate, it has to be more humanised and down to earth. Family situations, etc.”



5

EMPATHY

FOR BRANDS

Creating this emotional resonance enhances the impact of the narrative, making it more compelling, memorable, and capable of evoking profound insights and personal growth in the audience.

CONSIDERATIONS

- Explore different perspectives in storytelling.
- Music and facial expressions help us adopt empathy because they trigger emotions and nostalgic experiences in us.
- Well-written characters – these characters do not necessarily need to share all, or even many traits with the audience. They just need to feel authentic for audiences to empathise.
- Embrace difference by letting a character’s distinctiveness shine — this will lead to a feeling of authenticity in a character and story and result in greater engagement.
- Situate individual stories in context to help people see characters’ problems and aspirations as emblematic of broader social issues.



6

ASPIRATION

What would it be like if....

WHAT IT MEANS

We relate to stories that reflect something aspirational or important in the viewer's life. Everyone has something they're striving for. These aspirations resonate more when the goal is value-based. We prefer the character that aspires to a closer relationship with their children, to the character that covets a new Ferrari. The Rosebud scene at the end of Citizen Kane forgives all his egregious actions up to that point.

HOW IT MAKES IT RELATABLE

The stories are particularly relatable when they envision a different and better – (but 'within reach') alternate reality. Presenting 'what could be' (or 'who I want to be') helps to mobilise people to work toward this ideal reality. The reflection of values also enhances relatability. Having 'idealised' values surfaced and challenged in stories also creates motivation for viewers to want to reach their potential.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

Stories that reflect existing and desired values are more relatable because they reinforce a viewer's beliefs, creating a sense of resonance and alignment with their own principles.



6

ASPIRATION

What would it be like if....

“My favourite show is about three young females who are building new careers. I can feel their motivations and strive to do well. It’s easy to see myself in their shoes.”

“The ASB mental health ad, makes me feel like the brand is doing something that actually matters. Rather than being a money-making machine. It reflects my values.”



6

ASPIRATION

FOR BRANDS

Creating alignment of values fosters a stronger emotional connection to the narrative, making it easier to engage deeply with the story's theme.

CONSIDERATIONS

- Focus on a vision of 'what could be' to inspire people to invest in change.
- Show what change looks like so people have an aspirational goal in mind.



7

VALIDATION

WHAT IT MEANS

Stories that validate viewers' experiences or actions are more relatable because they acknowledge and affirm people's own life's challenges, choices and emotions.

HOW IT MAKES IT RELATABLE

We often defer to scenarios in stories to explain or justify our own behaviours and make sense of our decisions and experiences. Effective narratives can be unifying and have the power to create a shared experience among a specific audience and foster a feeling of belonging.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

Feeling validated makes people feel seen and heard by brands and in their own lives. It also provides opportunities for introspection and self-reflection.



7

VALIDATION

“I love the ad about Mother’s Day that shows how mums are everyday superheroes. I can’t help but get emotional. I related because they love their mums and I love my mum.”

“It’s my favourite TV show because it’s relatable. It’s a reflection of something that happened to me.”

“Watched the Dungeons and Dragons movie and the story triggers personal memories as I used to play it growing up. I did that!”

“The Westpac ad tells a story which I like... My daughter was bullied, so this brings up negative emotions.”



7

VALIDATION

FOR BRANDS

Stories that validate viewers' feelings, actions and beliefs can help foster a sense of connection, making the story feel more personal and impactful.

CONSIDERATIONS

- Consider how stories can create a common experience that can connect viewers to one another.
- Curate in-person group experiences such as film screenings to create shared meaning among a group of individuals.
- Create virtual experiences such as online talks or mission-driven performances that can create shared meaning among a dispersed group of individuals.
- Develop direct action asks that enable individuals to participate in a narrative but with the knowledge that others are doing the same to foster a sense of shared experience. Direct actions like posting yard signs or creating social media posts involve a public commitment that can create a feeling of shared experience.



8

OPENNESS

WHAT IT MEANS

We look to content and stories to tell people something about us.

HOW IT MAKES IT RELATABLE

Stories are filtered through our own experiences and our own perceptions of 'who we are'. We are selective in the stories we interpret, and often they are the perfect catalyst for sharing something personal in a way that feels less confrontational or uncomfortable. The motivations for sharing may stretch from wanting to brag about something 'similar that happened to me' to using the story as a relatable way to prompt a conversation or share something more sensitive.

WHY IT'S IMPORTANT

As we engage with diverse narratives, we can draw parallels between their experiences and our own, allowing us to share common feelings, experiences or struggles, thus shaping and revealing aspects of our own identity and perspective to others.



8

OPENNESS

“It’s relatable because it’s a reflection of something that happened to me.”

(In reference to ASB’s ‘Ben & Amy Summer Job’)

“I love advertising stories that I can talk about with my friends as they are similar to how I feel or what I’ve experienced.”

(In reference to Speights ‘The Dance’)

“Sometimes stories can help me talk about stuff that’s going on in my life in an indirect way.”

(In reference to Southern Cross ‘Sweet Caroline’)



8

OPENNESS

FOR BRANDS

Encourage viewers to use brand stories as vehicles for sharing their own.

This two-way dialogue and participation only serves to strengthen connections to brands.

CONSIDERATIONS

- Distinguish between past actions and identity. In telling stories about past mistakes or harms, talk about what was done without ascribing this to people's character or identity. This can help create the distance for people to reflect critically.
- Introduce new narratives as alternative storylines to help people see themselves in change.
- Reach community members who might help multiply the narrative through their own community networks.
- Encourage people to share stories with others to increase their sense of investment in an issue and to ensure repetition.



**Putting
reliability
to the test.**

Our quantitative study confirmed there is
a strong statistical relationship between
reliability and receptiveness:

77%

r² of .77

So, reliability **does** influence
receptiveness.

We were also able to prioritise which attributes enhance receptivity – dial them up in your stories!

Relatability attribute ranked by respondents in order of importance:

- 1 MULTI-DIMENSIONAL**
- 2 IMPERFECT**
- 3 ASPIRATIONAL**
- 4 CONFLICT**
- 5 CURIOSITY**
- 6 VALIDATION**
- 7 EMPATHY**
- 8 OPENNESS**

The fact that attributes more closely linked to characters came out on top proves that relatability largely comes down to viewing people who can help us better understand ourselves in different contexts.

**What can you take
out of this when telling
stories for your brands**



To achieve relatability, shift how you approach your brand stories.

ONE-DIMENSIONAL

REFLECTS PEOPLE

LEVERAGES THE CONSCIOUS

MEETS A NEED

BUILDS CLARITY

MULTI-DIMENSIONAL

UNDERSTANDS PEOPLE

LEVERAGES THE SUBCONSCIOUS

MAKES MEANING/SENSE OF THINGS

BUILDS TRUST AND CONNECTION

Make the 8 attributes of relatability work for your brand.

DRIVER	TAKEOUT	OPPORTUNITY FOR YOUR BRAND
IMPERFECT	Ensure characters are authentic and 'fit for purpose'.	Champion the flawed (and don't be afraid to be open about being one ourselves). Builds brand trust.
MULTI-DIMENSIONAL	Multi-dimensional characters provide more hooks on which a viewer can hang their understanding.	Drives more versatile connections with various people. Strengthens brand connection.
CONFLICT	Stories that let complexities come through (and don't downplay them) are more effective in persuading people.	Help resolve tensions or help people to find ways to resolve theirs. Builds brand trust.
CURIOSITY	Keep people on their toes – viewers love stories that interrupt predictable patterns.	Enable participation by giving viewers the benefit of 'closing the loop'. Strengthens brand connection.

Make the 8 attributes of relatability work for your brand.

DRIVER	TAKEOUT	OPPORTUNITY FOR YOUR BRAND
EMPATHY	Having diversity in perspective creates emotional resonance and increases the impact of a narrative.	Help viewers personal growth by exposing them to different points of view. Strengthens brand connection.
ASPIRATION	Aspirations resonate more when the goal is value-based and idealistic, but within reach.	Increase audiences' motivation by showing them 'what could be'. Strengthens brand connection.
VALIDATION	Use stories to unify and create shared experiences and help viewers make sense of the world.	Provide sense of belonging and reassurance. Strengthens brand connection.
OPENNESS	Create easy ways of sharing and talkability.	Create a sense of permissibility and acceptance. Builds brand trust.

So, be relatable.

Everyone wants to see others in themselves.
Look through this lens when creating video stories for your brand and give yourself the best chance of connecting with your audience.

Thank you.

FORECAST 9

