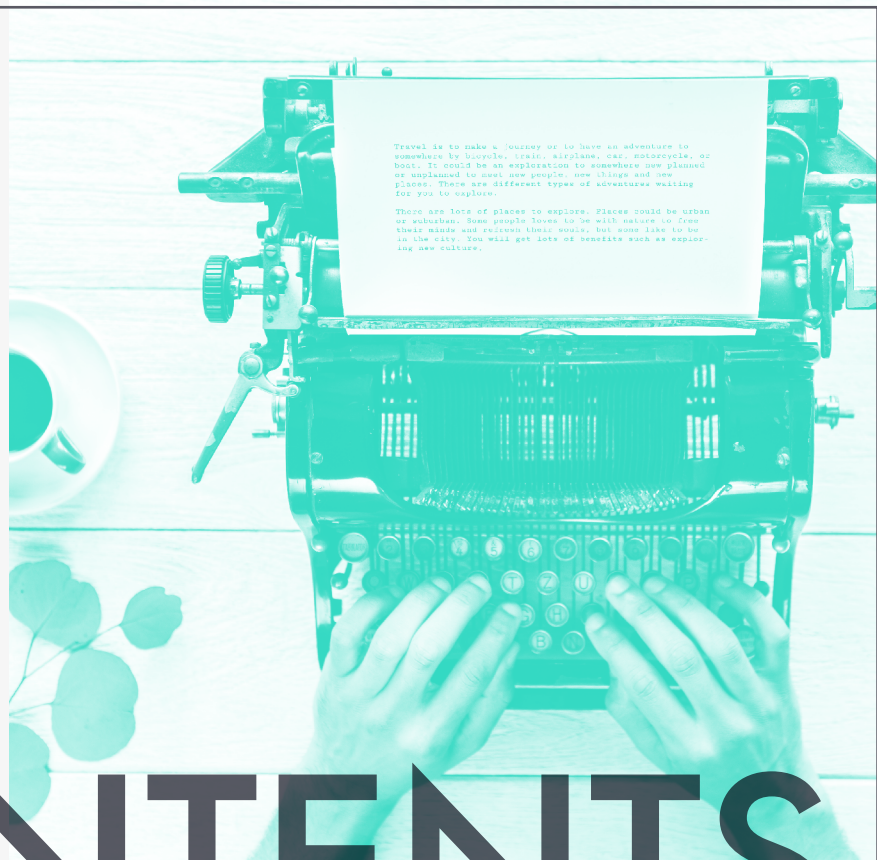The higher education marketers guide to:

IMPROVING YOUR BRAND RECALL

October 2018
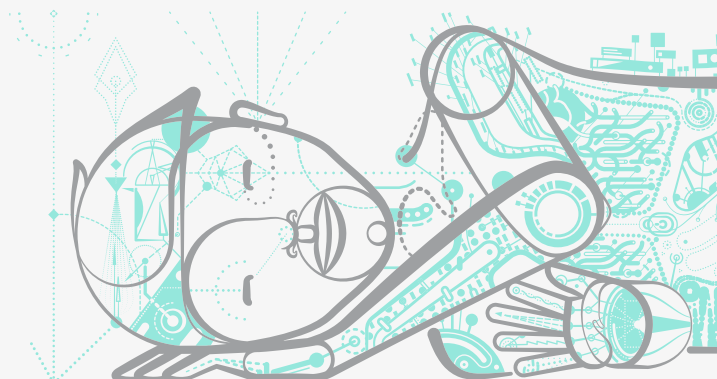
NATIVES GLOBAL CONSULTING
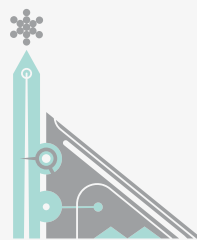
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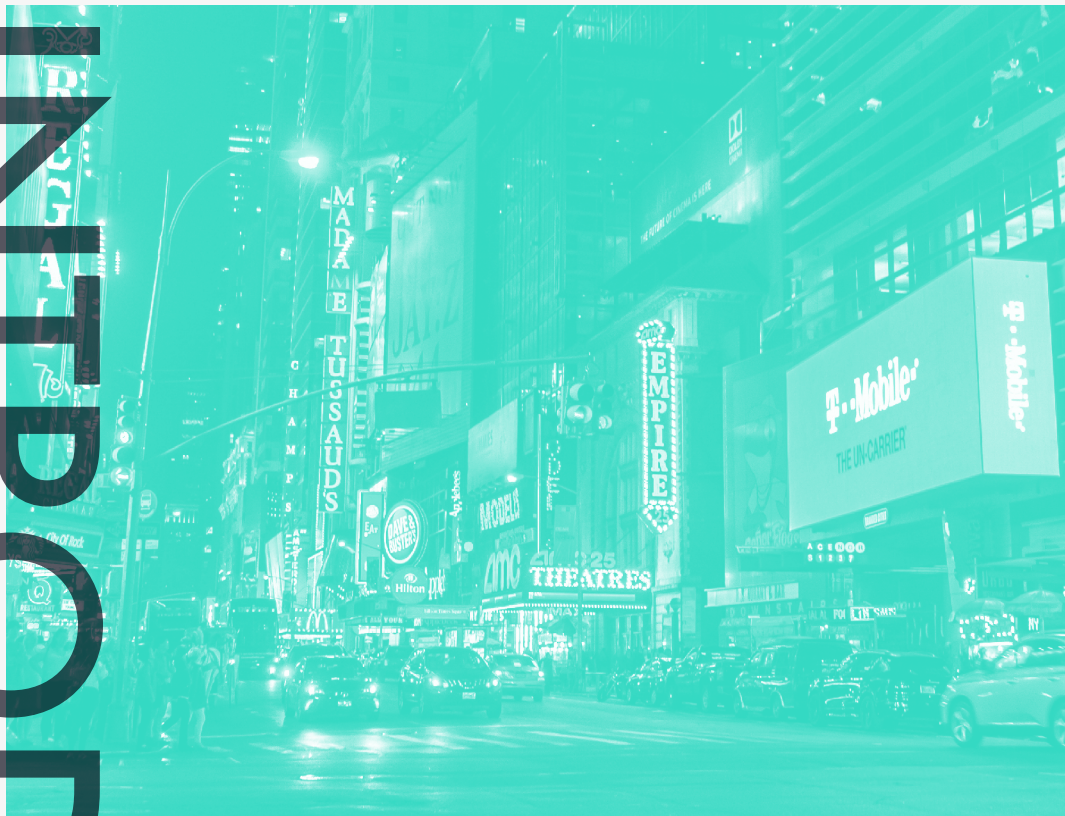
We've been talking a lot about brand at Natives Global Consulting. Our Natives Group annual conference in 2018 was themed around 'Being an Effective Brand'. And our flagship research project, the National Clearing Survey, found that having a solid brand presence is vital when it comes to hitting your Clearing targets (81% of Clearing students have already heard of the HEI they enrol with, and 69% have visited the HEI's website before A-level Results Day).

This whitepaper is the first in a series designed to help higher education marketers understand the psychology behind the behaviours that impact brand performance. They will delve into the theory behind the behaviour, and provide insight into how you can use this to benefit your institution's brand.

81% of Clearing students have already heard of the HEI they enrol with, and **69%** have visited the HEI's website before A-level Results Day.

First off, why is brand recall important? Well, brand recall is part of brand awareness, and without awareness then no further brand relationship can be built (Keller, 1993): no brand engagement, no brand experience, no purchase (or, in the case of higher education, enrolment), and certainly no brand advocacy.

So we can agree that brand recall is important, or at least important amongst the people you want to engage with: prospective students and those influencing them - their parents, teachers and friends, employers, and prospective staff and researchers.

But what leads to good brand recall? And, perhaps more importantly, what can you do to improve the recall of your institution's brand?

THE THEORY

What do you think of when asked to name a university? Oxford and Cambridge (or maybe Harvard and Stanford if you're in the US)? It's obvious, right?

But why? Because the relationship between a brand and a product category can affect how readily the brand will be called to mind when prompted with that product category.

And there are a couple of theories underpinning this idea.

First, the prototype theory, which looks at the idea of what makes up a given product category - what are the features, and how many of those features does any given brand have. Developed in the field of semantics (the study of meaning), a prototype is:

'a cognitive reference point, i.e the proto-image of all representatives of the meaning of a word or of a category. Thus, a robin or a sparrow can be regarded as a prototype or a "good example" of the category bird, whereas a penguin or an ostrich is a rather "bad example" of this category.'

ELLO (English Language and Linguistics Online)

The idea is that the more features associated with a category an item has, the more it will be considered typical of that category. So perhaps Oxford and Cambridge have more features that we associate with the concept of a university: old, highly ranked, and have spires, cloisters and professors cycling around in formal academic dress.

ASSOCIATION

a cognitive reference point, i.e the proto-image of all representatives of the meaning of a word or of a category. Thus, a robin or a sparrow can be regarded as a prototype or a "good example" of the category bird, whereas a penguin or an ostrich is a rather "bad example" of this category.

THE ASSOCIATIVE NETWORK MODEL

This model postulates that memory comprises nodes (representing concepts) and links (Collins and Loftus, 1975).

The network model for the University of Oxford may have similar linked concepts to that of the broader category 'university', while other university brands have fewer of these matching links, meaning the University of Oxford triggers a stronger response when prompted with the category 'university'. Put simply, the associative network memory model predicts that consumers are more likely to recall a brand if they strongly associate it with a product category (Keller, 1993).
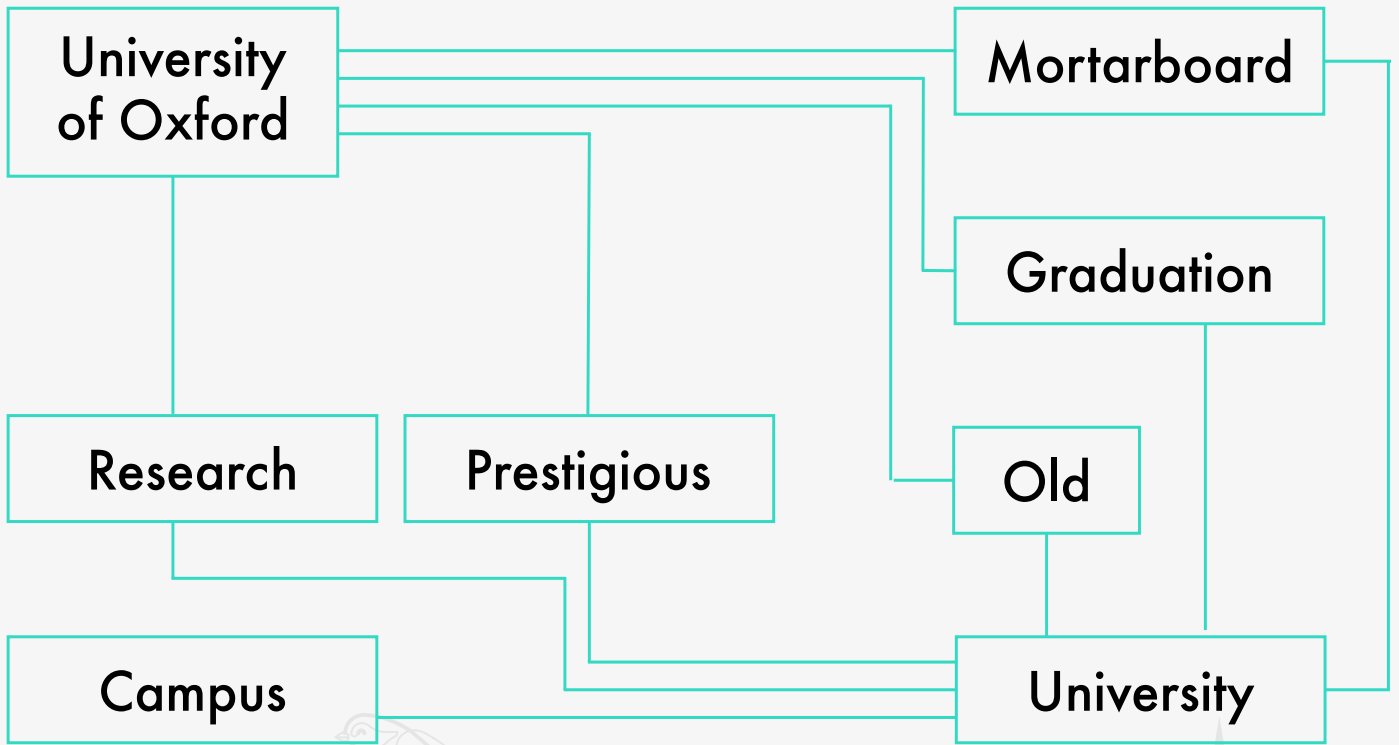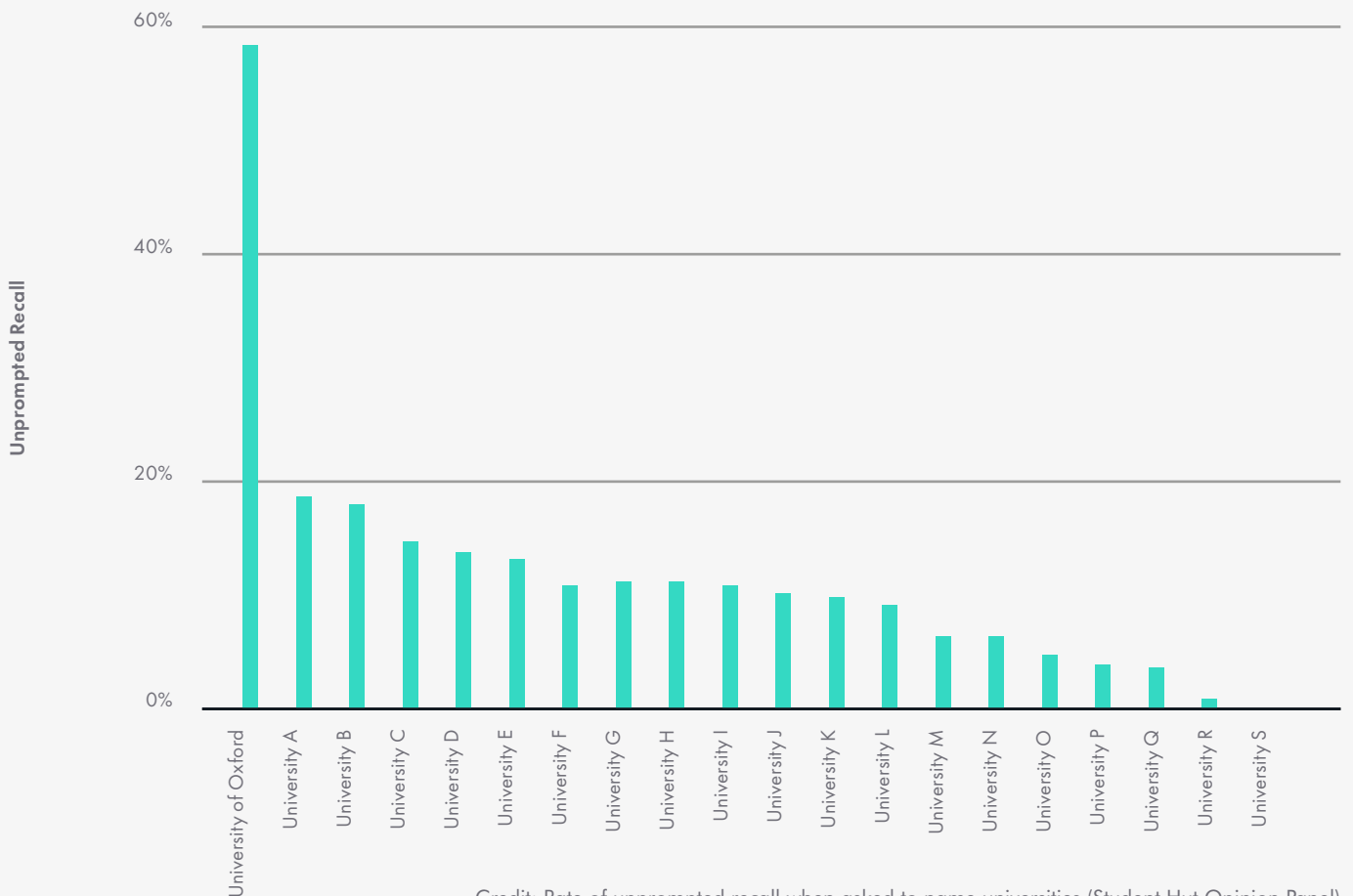
University of Oxford

Mortarboard

Research

Prestigious

Graduation

Old

Campus

University

ASSOCIATION

RATE OF UNPROMPTED BRAND RECALL

Credit: Rate of unprompted recall when asked to name universities (Student Hut Opinion Panel)

But how do we develop these associations? Associations, and how we learn these, play an interesting role in brand recall.

Think back to school days, when we repeatedly hear how the 'top' universities are Oxford and Cambridge, with the highest performing students encouraged to apply, and those who are not in that group still repeatedly hear about Oxford and Cambridge. This is likely to mean that we learn to readily associate the concept of a university with Oxford or Cambridge. In fact, this could be happening regardless of the prototypicality of Oxford or Cambridge, or could mean that this repeated exposure to these brands actually creates the university prototype for us.

Does this mean that only university brands that are more strongly associated with the concept of 'university' can achieve strong brand recall?

A survey that we ran with our in-house panel did show Oxford having the strongest unprompted brand recall, so it seems that to a certain extent, this is true. But respondents were readily able to name many more universities than this, so there are clearly other factors at play.

Nedungadi (1990) explored the hypothesis that when making purchase decisions, consumers have 'consideration sets' in mind - a limited set of options within a product category - and that this choice set is variable across 'choice occasions'.

There are three factors influencing how accessible a brand will be on any given occasion:

> **Recency** - based on how recently you have been exposed to the brand

> **Frequency** - the number of times you have been exposed to the brand

> **Saliency** - how important the brand is to the occasion - higher relevance = higher salience
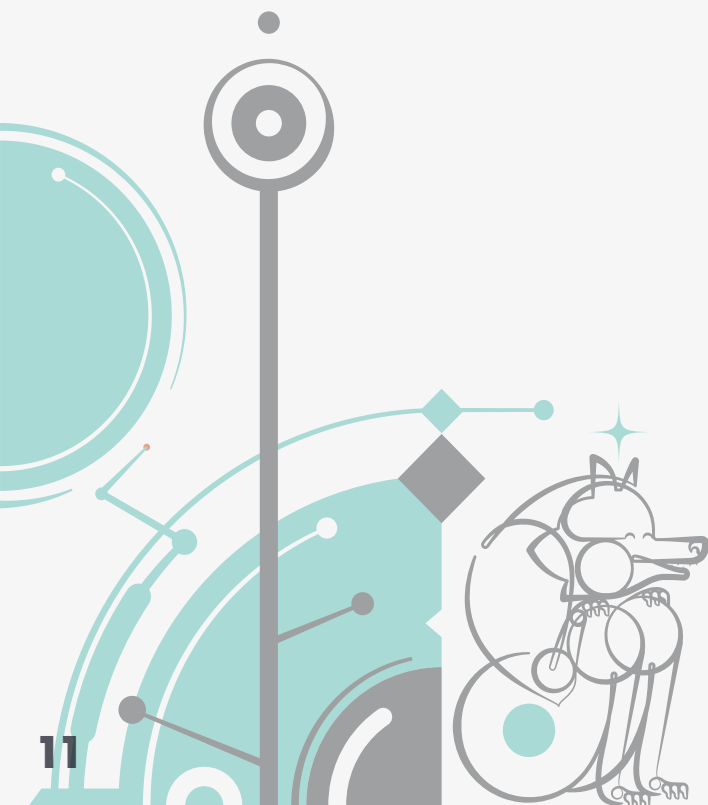
"It is, by now, a truism of marketing, and brand awareness is a precondition for choice.

However, when a brand choice is memory-based, **it is brand accessibility** or salience on that occasion that will determine consideration of the competition set."

– Nedungadi (1990)

This means there are factors within your control as a marketer which can help your brand increase its probability of being recalled in response to a question such as 'Name some universities that you have heard of'. When this question is posed, the node for 'university' product category will be fired. The brands with the strongest link can be a combination of those most recently and frequently seen (for example via an advert) or those the individual has some kind of relationship with.

For example if this question is posed to someone who is in the process of considering which university to attend they are likely to name universities they have looked into, or if the individual lives near a university's campus they are likely to name that university.

There is also evidence that a retrieval cue for one brand within a set can also prompt retrieval of others within that set.

When it comes to recall, this is not necessarily a problem; people can recall multiple brands.

But for student recruitment?

Not so much the desired state of affairs. The key therefore is to make it into the consideration set of your audiences, but to minimise the likelihood of one of the other institutions in the set being selected as the preferred option for enrolment. How can this be achieved?

AWARENESS

CONSIDERATION

INTENT

DECISION

ENROLMENT
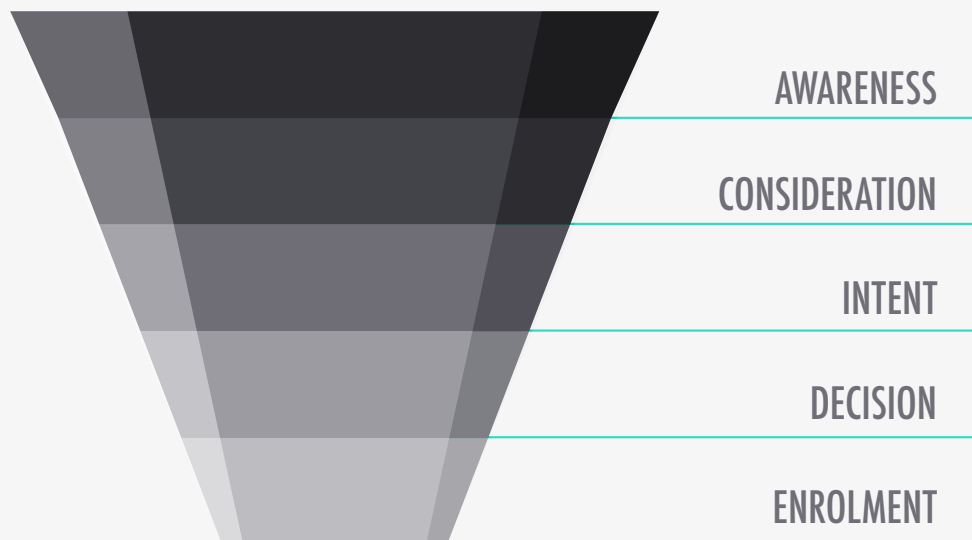
"Advertising cues that help the consumer retrieve and consider a target brand could simultaneously increase the likelihood of considering other (similar) competitors. If the consumer prefers any of these competiting brands, the target may not be chosen.

– Nedungadi (1990)

REPETITION

There have been multiple studies that show that the more someone is exposed to a brand, the more likely they are to recall it. Tsuji et al (2009) cite a number of studies on print, television and online advertising, and sponsorship, which show increased recall rates with repeated exposures.

Thinking back to our example above, where we learn early on that Oxford and Cambridge are associated with being the 'top' universities, the more exposure we have to this message, the more likely we are to learn that 'university' = Oxford or Cambridge (known as the mere exposure effect, Zajonc, 1968).
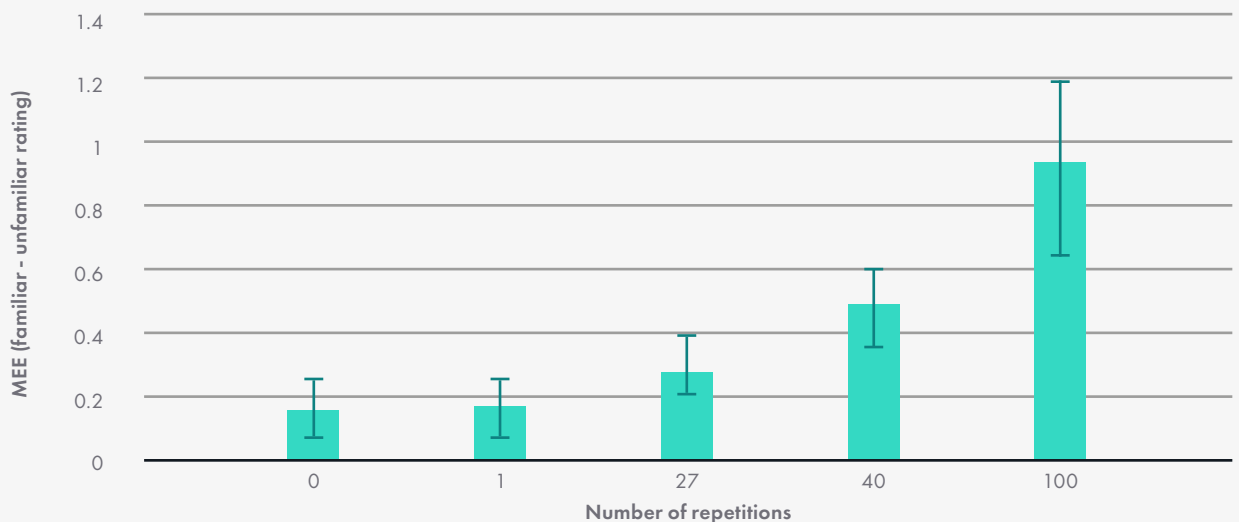
Image credit: The mere exposure effect (MEE) (Zajonc, 1968)

REPETITION

But what about over-exposure?

Studies have shown that after four to six exposures, recall plateaus (Tsuji et al, 2009). In fact, Tsuji et al's own study on brand recall in virtual advertising in sport showed some decrease in recall with six exposures versus four.

Why would this be?

There's an advertising theory called wear-in and wear-out: the idea that the persuasive power of an advertisement (and its associated brand awareness and recall) take a while to build (wear-in) and eventually reach a point where the persuasive power begins to fade (wear-out). A comprehensive investigation by Blair (2000) shows that brand recall in particular is subject to the wear-in phenomenon - the need for multiple exposures - and that the time taken to increase recall will depend on expenditure, which impacts on the reach of the advertising, and when the advertising is more memorable.

The concept of wear-out has been specifically tested in relation to advertising, and looks at multiple exposures over the life of a campaign - so relatively short timeframes. So the mere exposure effect - the idea that people prefer brands simply because they are familiar - will continue to be built as the number of exposures increases over time (think back to that early exposure to Oxford and Cambridge), but the effect of an advertising campaign over the short-term may plateau.

However, these studies do highlight the role of another factor in brand recall: stand-out.
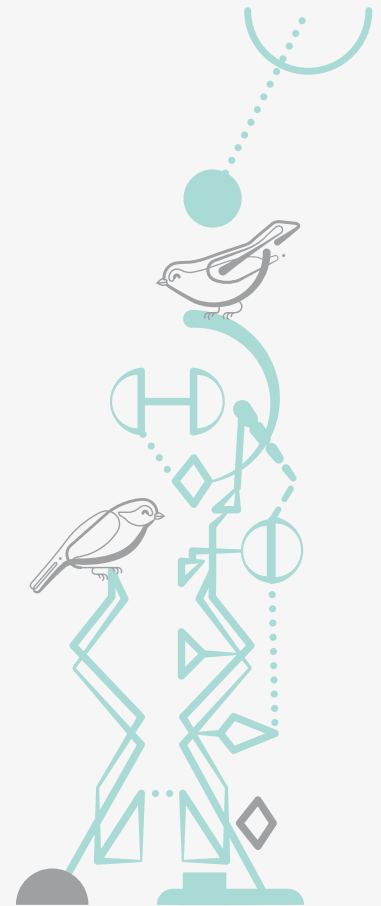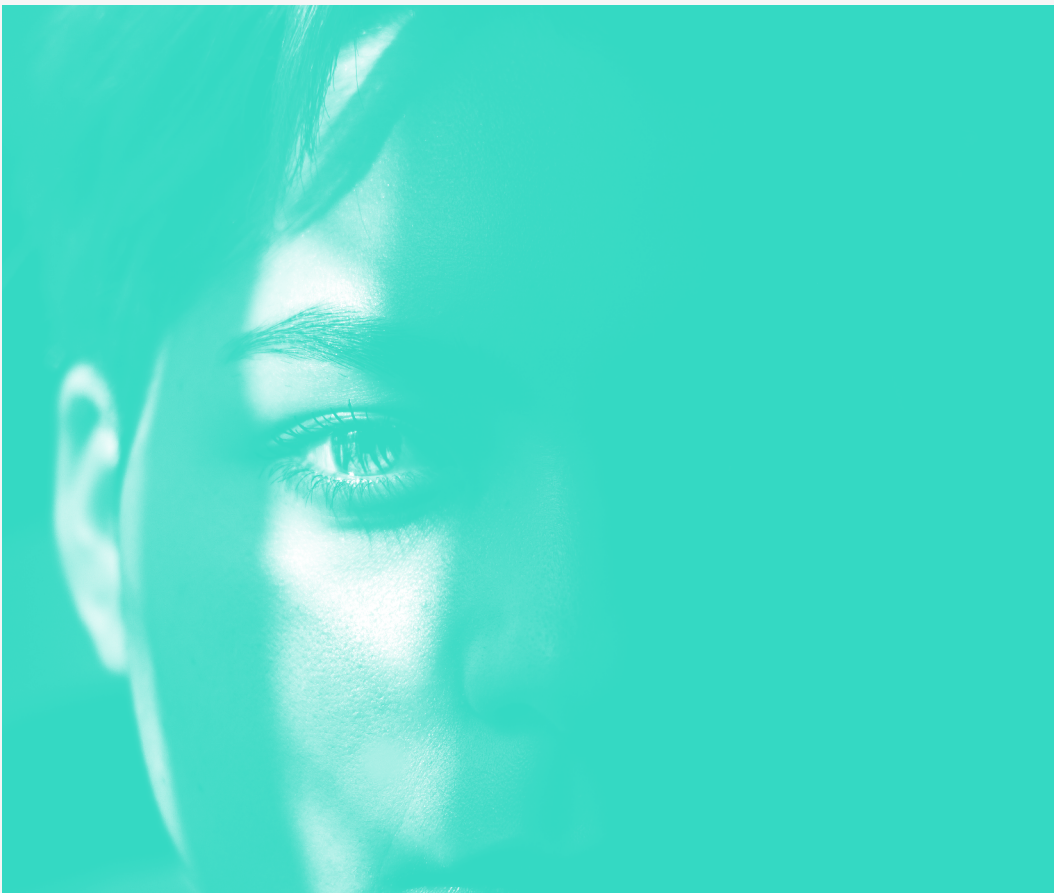
Being confident and proud of your identity is something we talk about a lot at Natives Global Consulting. And with good reason. Till and Baack (2005) looked at the impact of creativity in TV ads on recall, and found a correlation between creativity and unprompted recall.

But why should 'stand-out creative' affect brand recall?

Psychological experiments by Reicher, Snyder, & Richards (1976) and Johnston, Hawley, Plewe, Elliott, & DeWitt (1990) indicated that unfamiliar, novel or unexpected stimuli capture attention. This means that something that stands out from the crowd is more likely to be noticed. A brand needs to be noticed if the effects of repetition and association are to be felt, and standing out will help with this.

STAND OUT

"The first 36 hours was an **absolute flood**. It was surprising. We would never swear on the uni accounts but we all felt that jog on was pretty safe. I think it's the unexpectedness of it.

– Tim Watkins, Social Media Manager, University of Reading

STAND OUT

Tweeted as a way for the University to stand up for something it believes in, a side effect was intensive reporting, retweeting and responding, thus getting the University of Reading's brand name - and something of its values and personality - out to a global audience.

Yes, the University of Reading's tweet courted controversy and was not universally applauded, even by those who support the values behind it. But we are talking about brand recall here - the ability for your audiences to name your institution when asked about universities - and that tweet can't have harmed awareness of the University of Reading.

And what of the interaction between repetition and stand-out?

Are the ideas of familiarity and originality at odds here? Not necessarily.

Uni of Reading @UniofReading

We've had feedback over the last week that some people are unhappy with our plan to offer up to 14 scholarships to refugees living in the local area. To these people, we would like to say: Tough. Jog on. rdg.ac/2Mlc7PZ

14:13 - 2 Jul 2018

University of Reading
The University of Reading is a global university that enjoys a world-class reputation for teaching, research and enterprise.
reading.ac.uk

♡ 74.5K 💬 25.8K people are talking about this

Take the University of Reading's 'Jog on' tweet, in response to negative comments about their scholarship programme for refugees.

STAND OUT

Earlier we introduced the key concept of association. Research suggests we can strengthen associations, and determine whether these are good or bad, by pairing the stimulus (i.e. the university brand) with something positive or negative.

A way to easily visualise this is thinking about how we learn about foods. We are born to prefer sweet flavours, and so learn to recognise the foods that give us that sweet flavour, and we are likely to choose that food again in the future (e.g. Berridge 2000). However, if we taste a food and later become sick, we readily associate that food with sickness and are likely to avoid it, even if the sickness itself was unrelated to the food (Garcia & Koelling, 1966), and this effect has been demonstrated for both positive and negative consequences (e.g. Yeomans, 2006). So, for universities, finding that positive aspect to associate with, and repeatedly demonstrating a relationship will help people learn that University X is associated with Y and be more likely to remember that university. And if that aspect is unique or stands out, the association will be more specific to that particular brand, rather than associated across a whole product category or multiple brands.

So, as the Reading example shows, a tweet that stands out can both attract attention and cause associations to be formed, which contributes to increased brand recall. But be warned: any associations formed must align with your 'brand truth' and must be defendable.

One study, which looked at a smear campaign resulting in a 'doppelganger brand' for Starbucks, showed that it was the disconnect between Starbucks' positioning as a local, artisan coffee shop, and its reputation as a multi-national, profit-led capitalist company which enabled an alternative brand narrative to be created and adopted into the public consciousness (Thompson et al, 2006). Reading's tweet 'worked' because they were defending their position on scholarships for refugees, and therefore highlighting how strongly they feel about supporting this group of people to gain an education and open up opportunities.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR EDUCATION MARKETERS?

1. Make sure people see your brand more than once. The easiest way for you to control this is through advertising, particularly digital advertising, as you can choose who your advert is served to and how many times someone sees your campaign. However, you can also achieve this through other channels - or a combination of channels - for example prospectuses, posters or presentations in schools and colleges, shareable organic content on social media, or stands at relevant exhibitions across the world.

2. Ensure consistency in this repetition. Including your logo and using consistent design are no-brainers, but also think about the role that association has in brand building. What can you say or do that will enable strong associations to be built in the minds of those who are exposed to your brand? Again, you can control this to a certain extent through your advertising messages or the messages that your staff give out at events. However, you cannot fully control what is said about your brand (think about the Oxford and Cambridge examples, where people may talk about these in schools from an early age, without the universities needing to do

anything themselves). This means that whatever you use as the association needs to have truth to it, otherwise alternative brand associations may spring up.

3. If possible, choose an association which will enable you to stand out. 'Jog on' is certainly different. Think about what is really unique, personal or special about your institution and how you can turn this into a concept that those who come into contact with your brand will easily pick up on and associate with your brand.

4. Don't worry about competing with Oxford. You need to focus on raising brand awareness and unprompted recall amongst the people who matter to you. Recruit locally? Make sure local schools, pupils and parents have you front of mind. Offer flexible learning options that support those working and studying simultaneously? Make sure you're one of the first brands people in the workplace and their employers think about. Offer great foundation programmes for international students? Go for awareness amongst school pupils, teachers and agents in target markets.

We've shown in this whitepaper that, while brand recall may depend to a certain extent on factors beyond your control. There are other factors that you can totally own as a higher education marketer and work towards increasing brand recall amongst your target audiences.
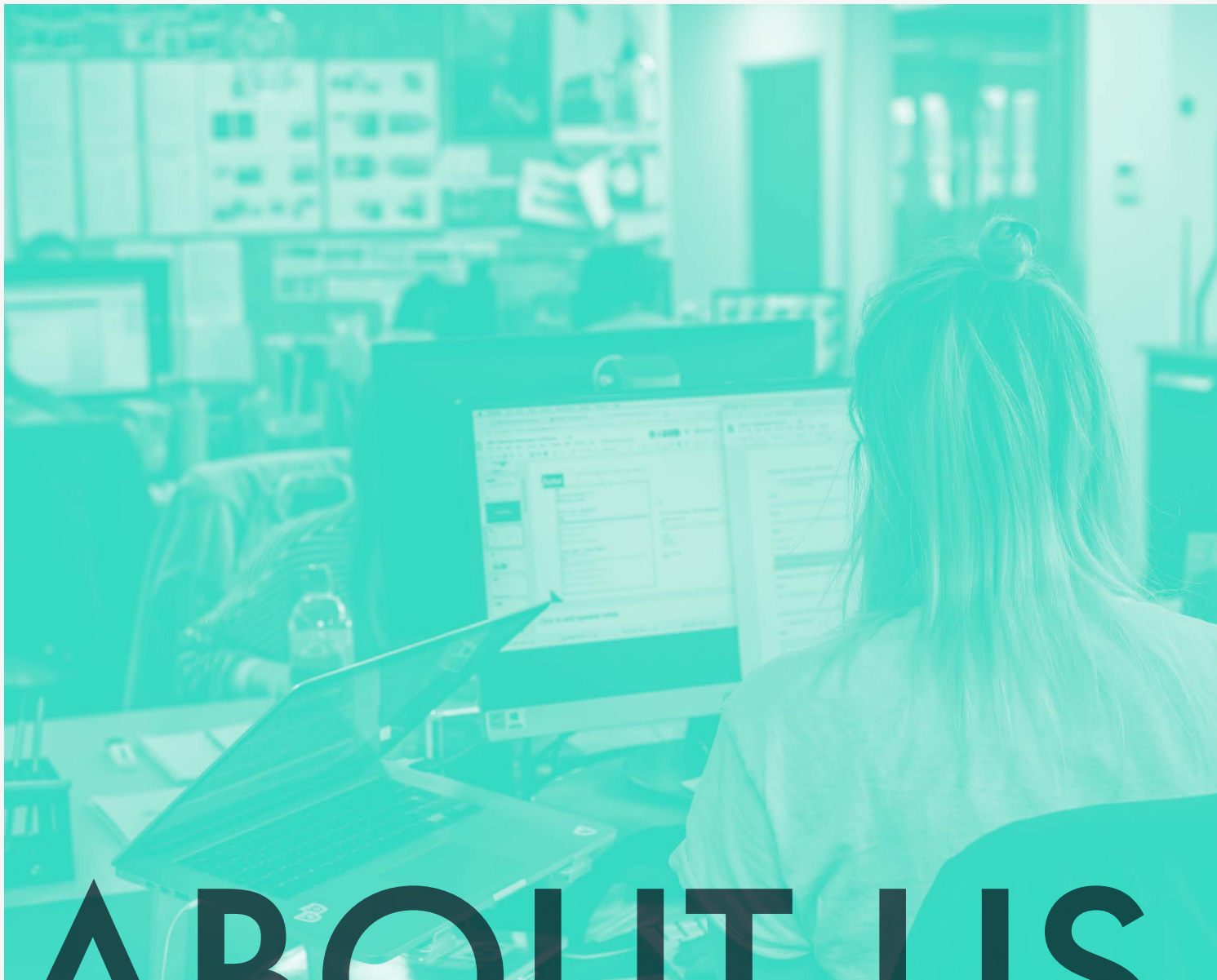
ABOUT US

Natives Global Consultancy and our expert practitioners blend technology and expertise to help education institutions make better decisions through understanding their data. Trusted globally by over 250 institutions, Natives GC helps them understand and solve unique challenges.

We are the leading audience insights and conversion strategy consultancy. We specialise in student and global recruitment and marketing for the education sector. We help you understand your data and make better decisions.

Natives Group is a collection of specialist brands who can either solve individual problems or work collectively as partners to their clients.

www.nativesgc.com

@NativesGC // hello@nativesgc.com

HOLLY CARTLIDGE

Holly joined Natives Group after more than 8 years in senior marketing, recruitment and market research roles in the higher education sector. Her experience in developing marketing strategies and plans to support student recruitment enables her to turn Natives' data into valuable insights for the higher education sector.
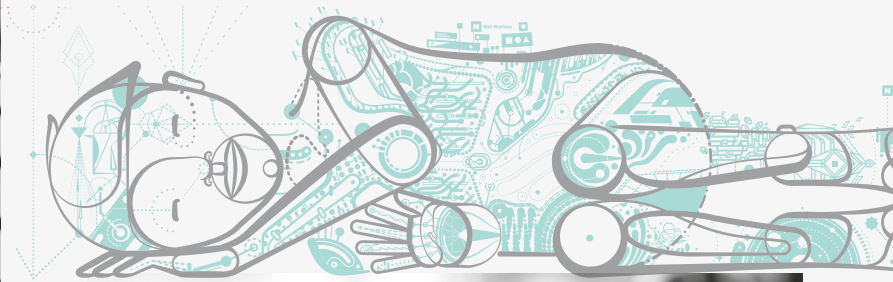
DR NAT GOULD

Nat holds a PhD in psychology and has over 10 years experience working on academic research projects focused on health, eating behaviour, wellbeing and behaviour change. Nat's extensive research experience helps to shape our methodologies and approaches here at Natives Global Consulting. She is the research lead on various projects at Natives Group, including the Online Study Survey and the National Clearing Survey.

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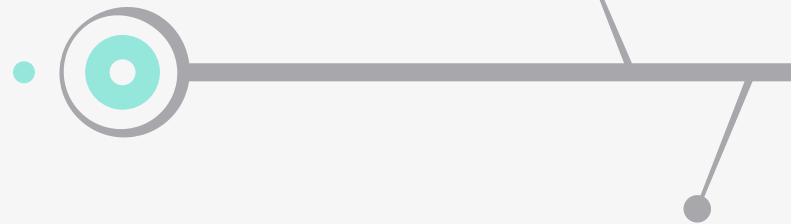
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