

Advertising in the new reality: race, representation, and the pandemic

PSB Insights
March 2021



Seismic shifts have forced a reappraisal of everything

The **world has experienced seismic shifts** that are forcing us to re-appraise how we function as a society. The **COVID-19 pandemic** and **renewed calls for racial justice and representation** have caused us to reflect on how we live alongside one another. Each of these are a once-in-a-generation force, coming together to form a perfect storm that has had **a profound and game-changing impact on society.**

Amid this change and disruption, **brands have been forced to reconsider how they speak** with consumers. Brands need to ask a new set of questions: Is the campaign **appropriate given current events?** Whether and how are **diversity** and the **pandemic** addressed? Does the ad align with **evolving expectations of brands?** Do the **message and campaign** feel **authentic?**

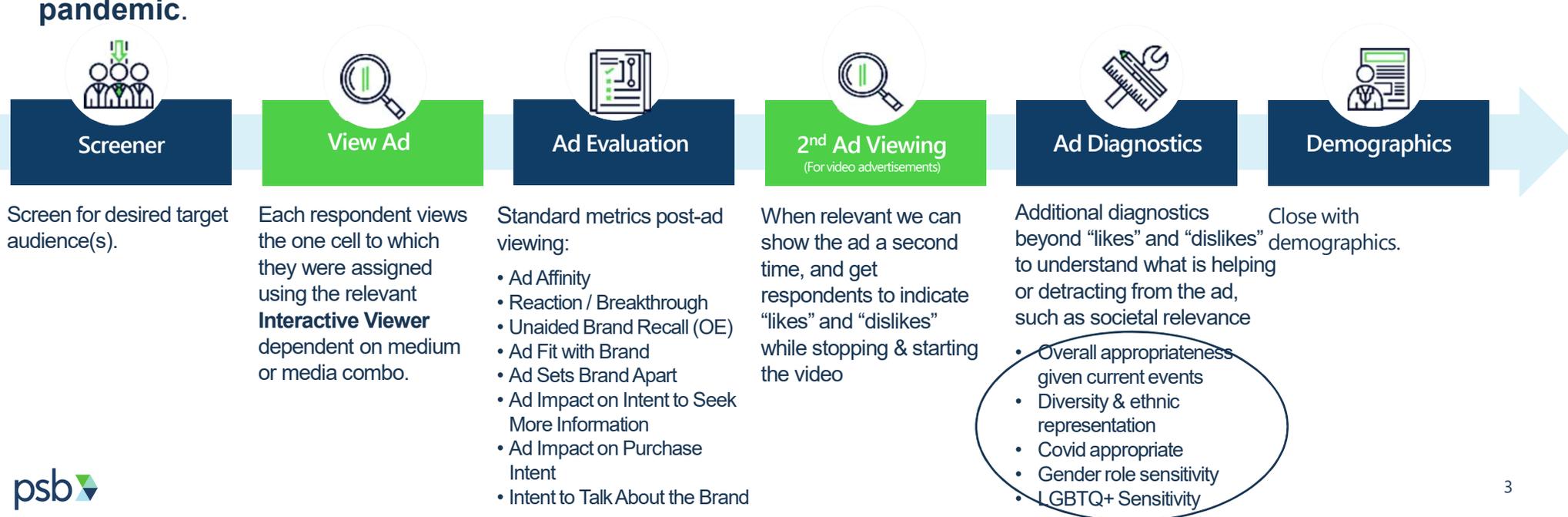
PSB Insights conducted research to **explore how brands are addressing these challenging topics**, what's working, not working and why? Leveraging **PSB's AdLab** system, we:

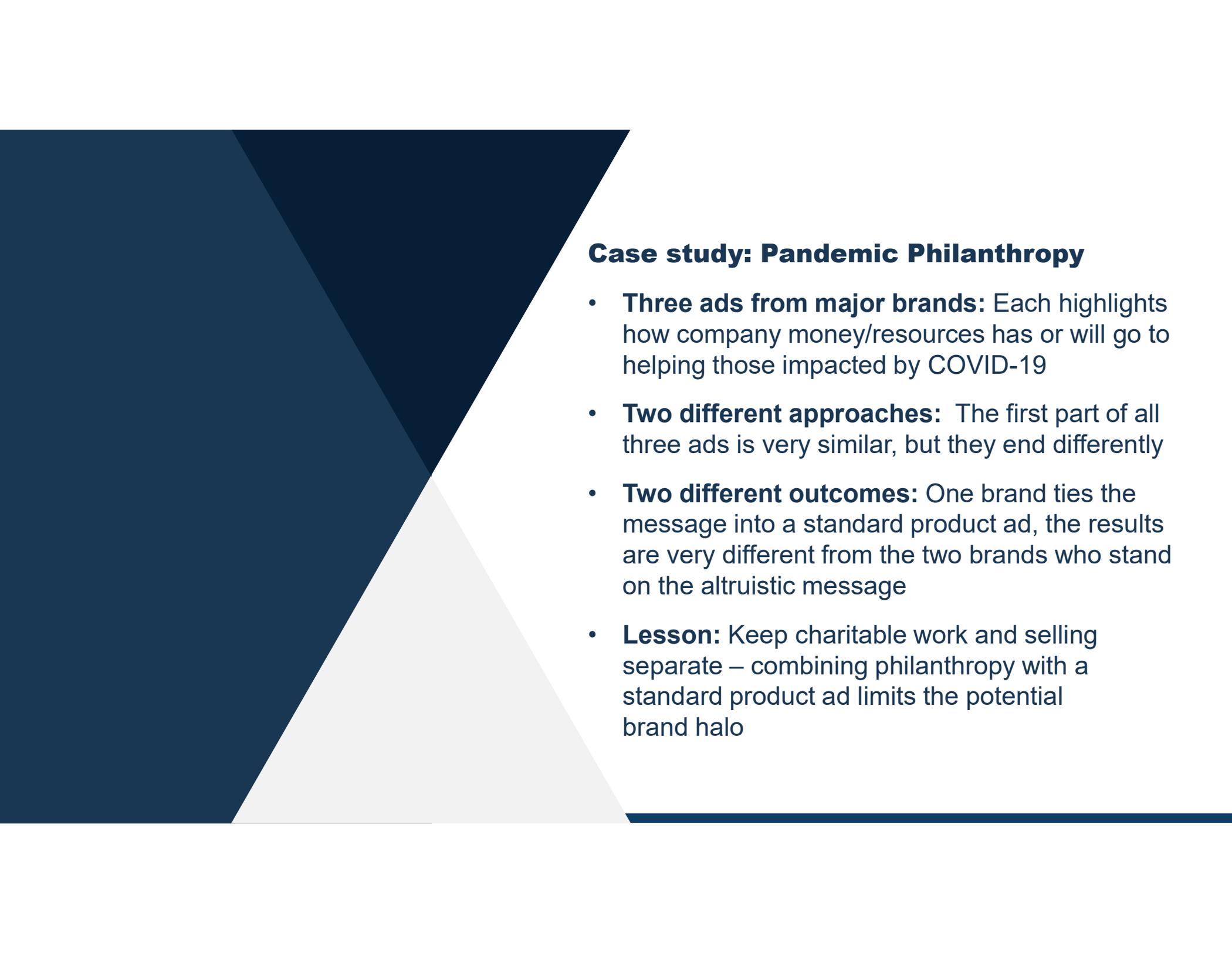
- Tested 30 US ads that aired late 2020/early 2021
- The ad covered a broad range of brands and industries
- All ads were tested among the general population, n=150/ad

PSB's AdLab – key measures of ad effectiveness in the new reality

The AdLab copy-testing system emphasizes measurement of the **skipping, sharing and learn more behaviors** that are critical factors in assessing the effectiveness of today's advertising.

AdLab measures the **social appropriateness** of ads and considers a range of factors including **perceived diversity, ethnic representation**, the role of **gender, LGBTQ+** representation and **sensitivity towards the pandemic**.

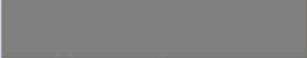
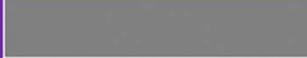




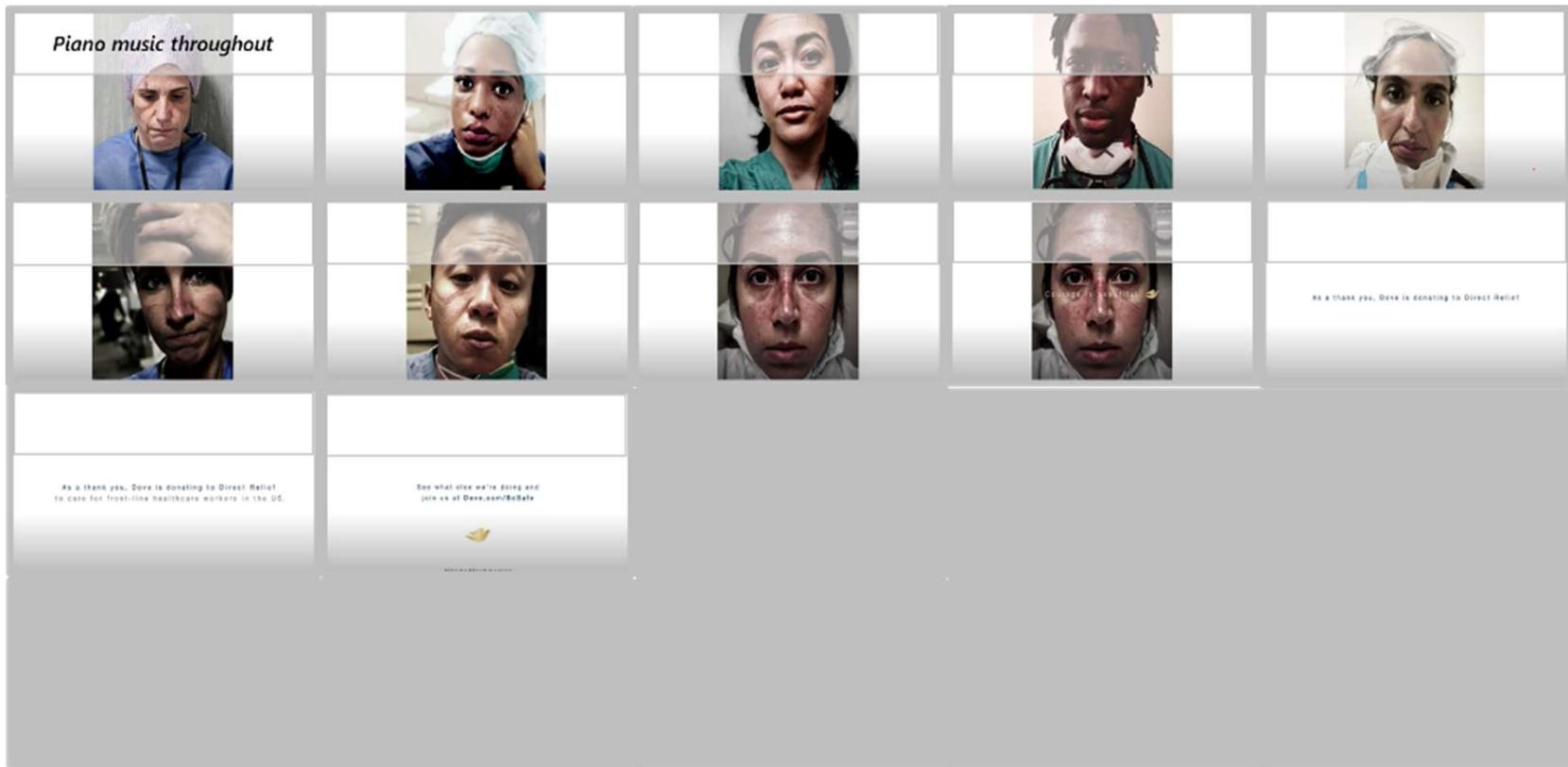
Case study: Pandemic Philanthropy

- **Three ads from major brands:** Each highlights how company money/resources has or will go to helping those impacted by COVID-19
- **Two different approaches:** The first part of all three ads is very similar, but they end differently
- **Two different outcomes:** One brand ties the message into a standard product ad, the results are very different from the two brands who stand on the altruistic message
- **Lesson:** Keep charitable work and selling separate – combining philanthropy with a standard product ad limits the potential brand halo

Budweiser ‘Bigger Picture’ (90”) Orchestral version of "Lean on Me" playing over a montage of diverse faces with Rashida Jones narrating. People singing "Lean on Me" as they wave from the windows of their apartments. Neighbors flip a fence into a socially-distant table. A scene of a drive-by parade to cheer up an elderly neighbor. People dancing. Medical professionals getting vaccinated. Text says that Budweiser is donating advertising money to a COVID vaccination education initiative.

	<i>The thing about America</i> 		<i>Is we can do anything</i> 	<i>We can turn rooftops into mountain tops</i> 
<i>We can turn boundaries into common ground</i> 	<i>We can turn solitude into closeness</i> 	<i>And screen time into playtime</i> 	<i>Silent stadiums, let them hear the roar of history being written</i> 	<i>We turn waiting and waiting and waiting</i> 
<i>Into dancing</i> 	<i>And dancing</i> 	<i>And whatever that is</i> 	<i>And together let's turn our strength into hope</i> 	
				
For the first time in 57 years, Budweiser will not air a Super Bowl ad	Instead, we are redirecting our advertising dollars to raise awareness of the COVID-19 vaccines	Beginning by joining forces with the Ad Council and COVID Collaborative	See you at the game next year.	 <small>© 2020 Anheuser-Busch, Inc.</small>

Dove 'Courage Is Beautiful' (30"") stirring music that is hopeful and a bit melancholy. Series of still images of medical professionals with marks on their faces from face masks. Text reads: "Courage is beautiful. As a thank you, Dove is donating to Direct Relief to care for front-line healthcare workers in the U.S. "



Ford ‘We Built’ (30”) Upbeat music accompanying short clips of people packing masks, ventilators and shields. Talks how when America needed Ford to build, they did, and they also helped frontline workers. Now, Ford is open and ready to serve, with special offers and financing deals.



COVID-relief efforts can generate a strongly positive brand halo, but this can be tempered by overt selling messages

All three ads score highly on social appropriateness, likely reflecting the messages around contributions towards pandemic relief. The Budweiser and Dove ads focus exclusively on pandemic relief, with the Ford ad starts the same way but switches to a sales ad.

Focusing clearly on COVID-relief or philanthropic efforts can help brands break through and extend how they are typically thought of.

- **Bud 'Bigger Picture'** includes relatable events of the pandemic coupled with Budweiser donating Super Bowl ad funds to COVID education efforts.
- **Dove 'Courage Is Beautiful'** focuses on the faces of nurse/doctors who are courageously working to save lives and ends with Dove highlighting they will be donating to help these workers.

Mixing pandemic relief with selling – not recommended. The Ford ad is two ads in one – it starts by highlighting how Ford stepped up to build what America needed early in the pandemic including masks, ventilators, shields, but then shifts into a very standard Ford ad with 0% financing, low monthly payments. Ford's juxtaposition of an overt selling message alongside charitable good deeds appears to have weakened the positive halo created by the ad's intro – both message impact and the emotional connection in the Ford ad may have been compromised by the overt sales message.

BUDWEISER / DOVE / FORD	'Bigger Picture' (90")	'Courage Is Beautiful' (30")	'We Built' (30")
Socially Appropriate	65	64	61
+ve – Diversity	65	68	47
+ve – COVID Pandemic	69	70	61
Linkage: Brand Association	60	68	73
Engagement: Watch/Skip	69	65	55
Advocacy: Share/Talk	27	24	19
Persuasion: Take Action	21	26	22
Breakthrough Potential	44	40	19
Affinity	58	50	36
Relevant	48	50	33
Think Differently	38	33	23

Dove 'Courage Is Beautiful' (30")



Budweiser 'Bigger Picture' (90")



Ford 'We Built' (30")

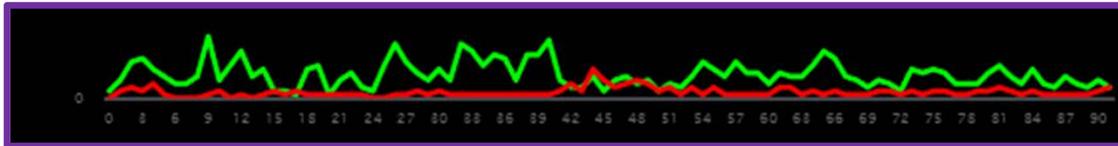


Celebrating Americans' positive response to the pandemic is well received but reminding people of reality can generate conflict

"I like the message of unity; I like to see different Americans."

"I like the guys turning the fence into a table and having beer together."

Budweiser 'Bigger Picture' (90")



"I like the sincerity of these health care workers. They have worked hard trying to conquer Covid-19. They have been down in the trenches and this is clearly shown here."

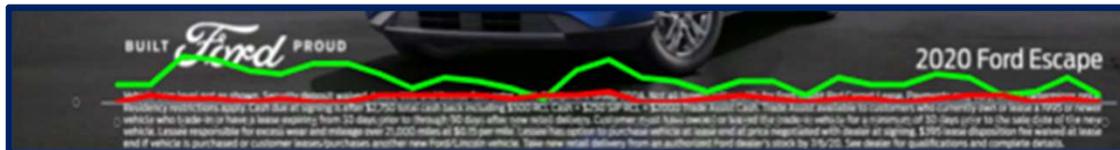
Dove 'Courage Is Beautiful' (30")



"When America needed support Ford was there to help!"

"It makes me want to purchase a ford for myself."

Ford 'We Built' (30")



Celebrating our resourcefulness to stay connected resonates strongly with viewers in the first half of this ad, somewhat overshadowing the donation of funds message which comes after a tie to the unrelated BLM.

Viewers are conflicted by the shocking images of embattled front-line workers, liking and disliking in equal measure. Dislikes fall away with the donation of funds message later in the ad.

The positive response to Ford's pandemic contributions initially dissipates with the switch to the showroom, but the attractive offer still garners likes despite the change in tonality.

Ford is unable to translate the goodwill of the beginning segments beyond a standard 'buy Ford' spot

Ford 'We Built' (30")



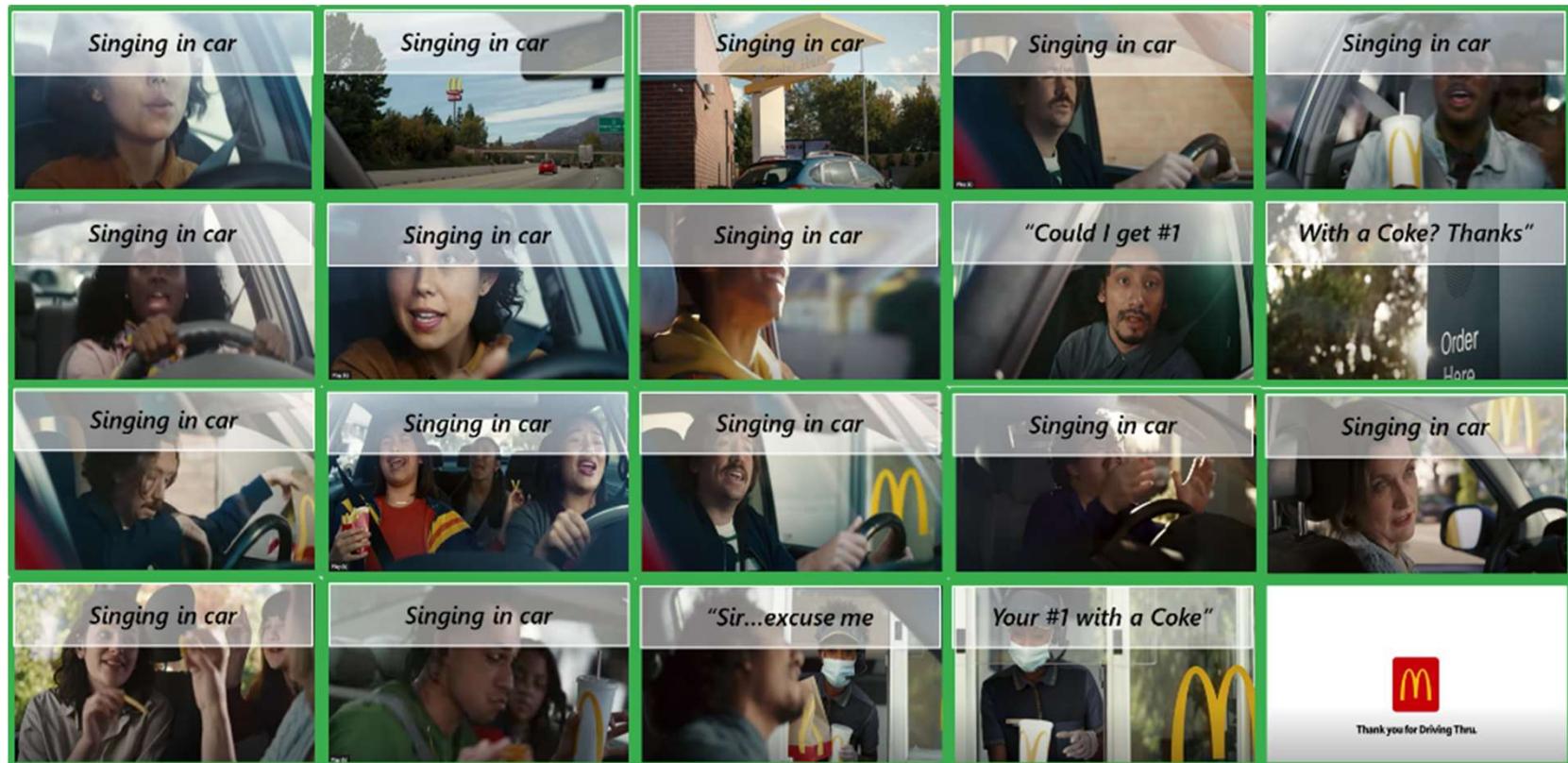
The second half of the ad dominates recall of the message for the ad.



Case study: McDonald's

- **Two challenging topics:** Racial justice and the pandemic
- **Two distinctly different approaches:** Stark versus whimsical
- **One good outcome:** Complementary paths to socially appropriateness
- **Lesson:** There is no single right way to deal with challenging topics such as race and the pandemic

McDonald's 'Thank You' (30'') A series of vignettes of a highly diverse set of McDonald's female and male customers visiting/leaving a McDonald's Drive Thru, each singing first The Proclaimers' "I'm Gonna Be (500 Miles)" and then Celine Dion's "It's All Coming Back to Me Now" in their cars, interwoven to form a harmonious mash up.



McDonalds ‘One Of Us’ (60”) A quiet, stark ad with no music. The first screen shows the names seven black people who have been killed by police or others, then says "He was one of us. She was one of us. They were all one of us." followed by text stating that McDonald's sees its customers and employees in these victims. The next screen says McDonalds stands with black communities and is donating to the National Urban League and the NAACP. The closing screen simply states: "Black Lives Matter."



There is no single right way to deal with challenging topics such as race and the pandemic

Despite radically different approaches, both ads score highly on being appropriate given current events, but for very different and complementary reasons.

- **'Thank you' delivers for the brand by successfully imbuing existing associations with a socially appropriate halo.** Upbeat music, diverse talent, and a focused story centered around the Drive Thru results in largely positive reactions to the diversity and pandemic sensitivity apparent in the ad. While never mentioning the pandemic, the ad brought together standard McDonald's imagery of people enjoying McDonald's food and drink while highlighting the increased use of drive thrus.
- **'One of Us' connects the brand with a movement without co-opting or being tone deaf.** No sound, no music, no close-ups of McDonald's food, yet 'One of Us' is readily recalled as a McDonald's ad, intentionally disrupting existing brand associations and clearly registering McDonald's support of the Black Lives Matter movement in a thought-provoking way. McDonald's gained a strongly positive re-appraisal of the brand.

Both of the McDonald's ads scored highly for ethnic representation, one for its focus on racial justice and the other for its highly-diverse cast. While the singular focus of 'One Of Us' was racial justice, 'Thank You' was more multi-dimensional, with talent of various races all enjoying their McDonald's food and drink.

McDonald's	'One of US' (60')	'Thank You' (30')
Socially Appropriate	55	55
+ve - Ethnic/Cultural Represent	62	61
+ve - COVID 19 Pandemic	25	37
Linkage: Brand Association	59	66
Engagement: Watch/Skip	61	63
Advocacy: Share/Talk	22	19
Persuasion: Take Action	24	20
Brand Fit	35	58
Relevant	44	19
Think Differently	37	21

'One of Us' (60")



'Thank You' (30")

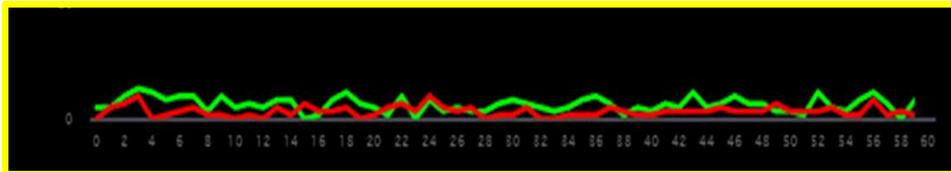


Contrasting tonalities between McDonalds BLM support ad and contemporaneous brand-building creative

“It’s a powerful statement. These people that were killed were humans, they were Americans. They were one of us.”

“I like that a famous brand like McDonalds is standing for justice.”

McDonald’s
‘One of Us’
(60”)



The stark BLM message, delivered in silence was appropriately somber and intentionally eschewed entertainment value at the expense of moments of likeability

“I It shouldn’t be that Black Lives Matter it should be All Lives Matter.”

“How everyone is just happy singing and in sync -- it’s catchy.”

“I like the diversity of the actors and I enjoy the singing.”

McDonald’s
‘Thank You’
(30”)



By contrast, the continuous singing in ‘Thank You’ garnered likes throughout, reflecting its much more upbeat tonality

“Regular people singing as they drive we’ve all done that before, its very relatable”

McDonald's support of BLM is strongly communicated and is tied to the brand, and the upbeat message of 'Thank You' shines through

McDonald's
'One of Us'
(60")



Black Lives Matter comes through, but the McDonald's brand is not forgotten

McDonald's
'Thank You'
(30")

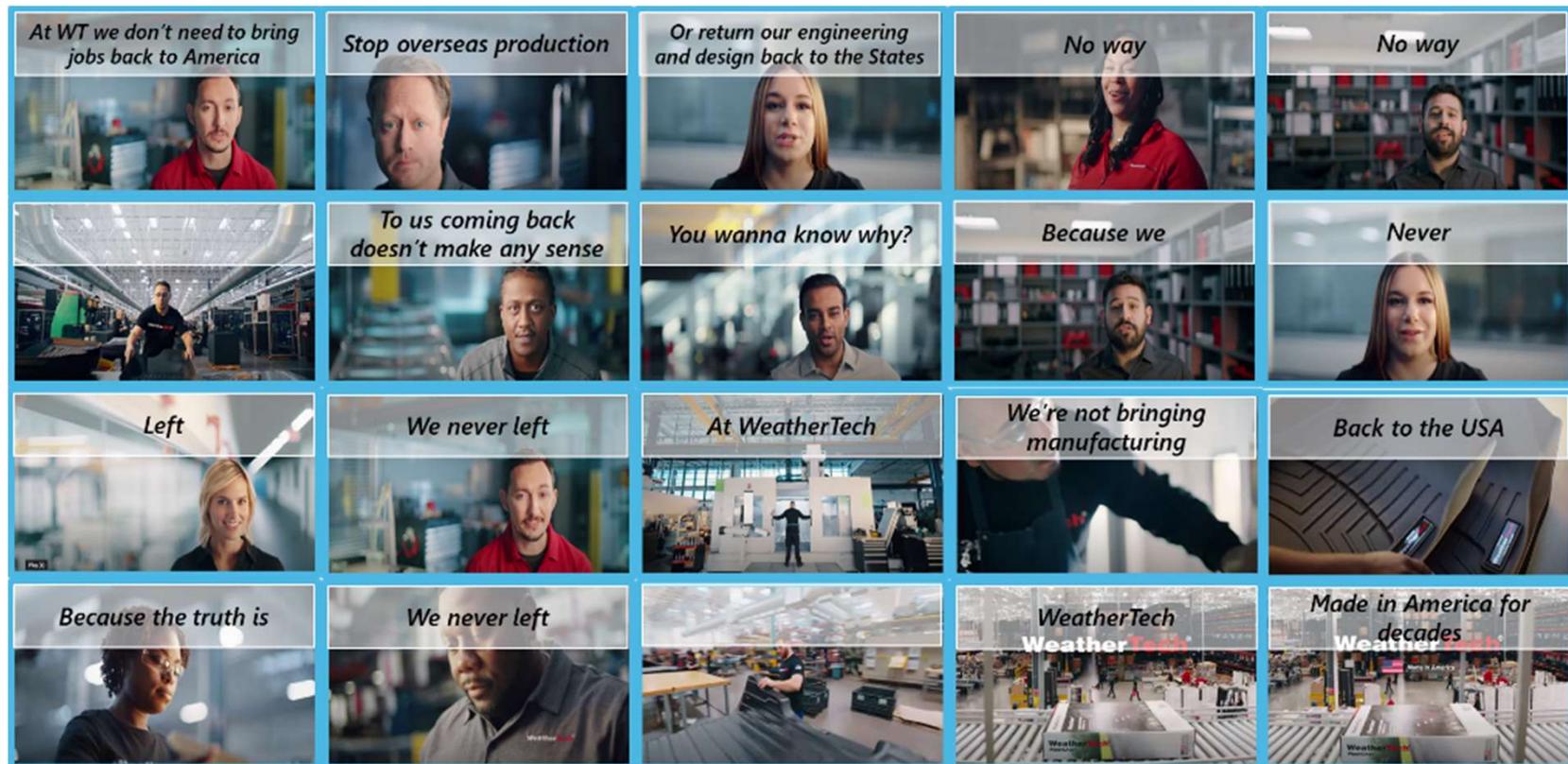


By contrast, the takeaway for 'Thank You' connects McDonald's with fun, reflecting it ad's much more upbeat tonality

Case study: WeatherTech

- **Two very similar ads:** Same 'cast' (employees), similar music and visuals
- **Two related messages:** Focusing on who WeatherTech is as a company
- **Two different outcomes:** One scoring much higher for social appropriateness
- **Lesson:** Diversity is not a box to be checked – it's about the message as well as the messenger

WeatherTech ‘We Never Left’ (30’’) Inspiring, upbeat orchestral music plays while a series of WeatherTech employees (male, female, racially diverse) tells how the company does not have to bring design and production of their products back to the US because they never left.



WeatherTech ‘Family’ (30”) Same upbeat music and diverse set of employees as the other WeatherTech ad. The message focuses on how proud the employees are of the work they do and that they love being part of a team and love the family mentality at the company. Working hard still means something in America.



Diversity is not just a box to be checked – it's about the message as well as the messenger

Major differences in social appropriateness scores despite being very similar. The two WeatherTech ads have significant similarities, including many of the same workers and the same music yet 'We Never Left' scores over twenty points higher than 'Family' on social appropriateness.

- **'We Never Left' scores higher because of the power and resonance of its message.** The message of 'we never left' is simple, direct, and is a winner, particularly in an economic downturn and when manufacturing jobs are commonly mentioned as leaving the country and/or not coming back.
- **'Family' has a positive, well-received message but it is more limited and inward focused.** While it's nice to know the employees are proud of where they work and feel valued, it seems more like a recruiting or public relations message.

Both ads scored highly for ethnic representation which makes sense given that they have the same cast of employees. While the 'Family' story is about how proud each worker feels to have a job at WeatherTech, in 'We Never Left' there is a much stronger sense of the collective 'we'. 'We Never Left' carries more weight in building a deeper connection – and more likely to stimulate fresh interest in WeatherTech.

	WeatherTech	'We Never Left' (30')	'Family' (30')
Socially Appropriate		73	52
+ve - Ethnic/Cultural Represent		61	62
Linkage: Brand Association		68	68
Engagement: Watch/Skip		60	56
Advocacy: Share/Talk		20	18
Persuasion: Take Action		25	21
Distinct to Brand		53	41
Credible		69	48
Think Differently		31	21



Strong positive response to the ‘We Never left’ message

“I like that this company never left United States and it helped build the economy locally”

“I like the message! I very much support small local businesses, so a company that operates in the states, I can totally get behind!”

WeatherTech ‘We Never Left’ (30”)



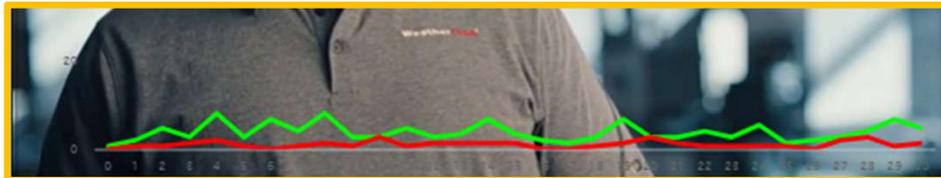
The impact of the ‘We Never Left’ message is apparent in how much that sequence dominates what viewers like about the ad

“It’s great to see a company that believes in this country enough to keep it’s manufacturing facilities in the United States.”

“I like that they use real employees that have pride in their jobs.”

“I like companies that appreciate their employees!”

WeatherTech ‘Family’ (30”)



By contrast, while the ‘proud to work here’ message in ‘Family’ garners many likes across its 30 secs, it lacks a real focal point

The central messages of both ads break through – jobs in America and WeatherTech as a good place to work

WeatherTech 'We Never Left' (30")



Jobs in America is the takeaway for 'We Never Left'

WeatherTech 'Family' (30")



Viewers get that WeatherTech is a good place to work with happy employees

Thank you