



Original Research

Brands of War and Disruption

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Abstract: Much has been written over the years concerning the separate domains of conflict and branding. However, the combination of the two areas and the impact that one has over the other are relatively scarcer, especially from a British perspective. It can be argued that conflict and the well-documented effects of war can directly influence a brand's visual development and positioning during the Second World War. Furthermore, this can also be aligned with contemporary brand strategy and recent events concerning the COVID-19 pandemic, which impacted the world in early 2020 to 2022 and continues to have a considerable economic impact. This research offers an insight into how modern-day brands have evolved when referencing and adapting their brand's identity, influenced this time not only by wartime conflict but by an equally pernicious global event such as the recent COVID-19 pandemic, and identifies how they shared similar advertorial approaches from the early 1940s and 2020. The research will also discuss how modern-day brands leveraged and adapted their visual persona to reflect their new environment, brands that traditionally were unrelated to pharmaceuticals and healthcare, and the circumstances that enabled them to change their brand persona and tone of voice.

Keywords: *Branding, Graphic Design, Second World War, COVID-19, Advertising, Marketing, Conflict*

Introduction

The Second World War brought significant change to society and commerce, a total war that impacted every facet of life (Clampin 2014). This study addresses a knowledge gap and examines the parallels between the differing types of advertorial approaches (referred to here as “themes of approach”) used by commercial businesses during the Second World War. It questions whether these themes were replicated in more contemporary advertorial campaigns responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. The study highlights the visual and textual comparison between brands that adopted specific strategies (and what these were) when faced with dynamic changes to their commercial landscape. It also examines how their relationship with their audience was impacted during those periods.

Background Context

Advertising in the First World War

During this period of conflict, several vital figures helped convince the British government of the critical role that advertising could play in controlling opinions and attitudes (Nevett 1982).

A pivotable contributor and the first advertising individual to be knighted in 1916 was the prominent publisher and advertising executive Hedley Le Bas (Dod's Peerage 1917).

His work and impact are immortalized in the iconic recruitment poster "Your Country Needs You" (Figure 1), published in 1914 and featured the new Secretary of State at the time, Lord Kitchener.



Figure 1: Britons, Lord Kitchener Wants You, Alfred Leete
Source: Public Domain 1914

The appointment of Hedley Le Bas to head up the newly formed Parliamentary Recruitment Committee in 1914 began to establish formal advertising with government recruitment campaigns. In 1913, on a golf course, when asked by the Secretary of State for War, Colonel John Seeley, as to how he might find thirty-five thousand men for the Army? Le Bas replied that "publicity will find or create anything...I should advertise for them" (Hiley 1987). The relationship began to be forged, and Hedley Le Bas and his company, Caxton Advertising Agency, formed a committee to promote recruitment. Le Bas was involved in various government-directed campaigns until 1917.

At the outbreak of the First World War, a centralized government agency that was explicitly involved in strategic communications did not exist. During 1914 to 1916, it was the job of several government departments, including the War Office, the Foreign Office, the War Propaganda Bureau, and the Neutral Press Committee, to carry out news and censorship work (McLaine [1939] 1979). These government bodies merged in February 1917 to form the Department of Information, becoming a year later, the Ministry of Information under Lord Beaverbrook, whose

role was to impose some coherence to the confusion and often uncoordinated overlapping activities of the four government departments (McLaine [1939] 1979).

In November 1918, the Ministry was dissolved after the First World War, and the Foreign Office News Department took responsibility for overseas information dissemination and publicity.

One of the first indicators that advertising and its brands had matured into a “confidant with conflict” occurred in 1917, when the British government appealed to the already-beleaguered advertising and newspaper industry for free advertising space (Nevett 1982). War bonds were the primary reason for this request and would be issued to the public to finance the country’s military demands. Although the term “war bonds” had been used as far back as 1814 (Hickey 2012) in the “War of 1812” as a means to fund the conflict between the US and the British, the funding model differed in that it was based on borrowing monies from the Bonds market. One hundred years on, war bonds were aimed at the public, often appealing to a sense of patriotism and national pride, and promoted by the major advertisers of the time, thus helping to raise much-needed capital. Horatio Bottomley, the editor of *John Bull*, organized a special “Boom Week” edition in which many advertisers were encouraged to prepare specific war bond copy for the upcoming publication (Nevett 1982).

With Bottomley’s energy and foresight, *John Bull* was thrust into active duty. It assumed the role of a cheerleader for the military campaign against Germany (Cox 2016).

Commercial advertising and its relationship with war bonds proved to be a pivotal moment. Over the next few years, many other campaigns followed, beginning to reference the war effort, patriotism, and duty through the war bond initiative. This resulted in brands shifting their stance to accommodate the “new normal” by referencing the many morale-boosting enterprises of the campaign, such as endorsements by soldiers from the frontline—one of the most popular strategies (Clampin 2014).

Eventually, the inertia of the First World War in the advertising industry began to recede. During the great depression of 1929 and 1932, advertising in Great Britain plunged to an all-time low. Public spending was cut, and by the end of the 1920s, unemployment had reached 22% (Constantine 2014).

Advertising in the Second World War

It was in the mid-1930s that the government began to dominate the advertising scene again in the lead-up to the Second World War (Nevett 1982). However, this time, the efforts were more coordinated with the Ministry of Information, which was formed again in readiness for Britain’s declaration of war in September 1939. However, as early as 1935, the establishment of the Ministry of Information was seen as vital by the press attaché at the Air Ministry, C. P. Robertson; he insightfully stated in a memorandum that “we should not merely start in the case of a future conflict where we ended in the last” (Taylor 1981, 33). In October 1935, a

subcommittee was established to prepare for any future outbreak of war. Robertson believed it was essential that success would only come from one centralized government department controlling and developing the country's war campaign coherently (Taylor 1981).

Methodology and the Themes of Approach

The research identified three themes underpinning 15,048 commercial advertising examples in *Picture Post* magazine published during the Second World War (from an archive collection of over four hundred issues with an average of sixty advertisements per issue). During this research, using content analysis, specifically coding categories to “label” the advertisement as a methodology (Rose 2016), three distinct “themes of approach” became evident in what was communicated to the public during the conflict: we will return, public service, and opportunity through the situation. They relate to the observations from TR Nevett's study in the critical text *Advertising in Britain* 1982. Nevett describes advertising during the Second World War as “fulfilling three important roles.” Firstly, major advertisers endeavored to keep their names before the public, even though their goods might not be available (*we will return*). Secondly, classified advertising, especially births, marriages, and deaths in the local press, helped to preserve community links and togetherness (*public service*). Finally, the government spent considerable sums on communicating essential information, regulating and controlling public behavior while sustaining morale as life went on (*opportunity through the situation*) (Nevett 1982).

The study of advertisement classification is not extensive. Kevin Roberts' publication “Lovemarks” introduces a framework for identifying the brand “lovemarks” using measurements of love and respect (Roberts 2005), but it does not focus on advertisements. Judith Williamson's publication “Decoding Advertisements” analyses advertising from Great Britain in the mid-1970s, offering theories and tools to make sense of this complex social ideology (Williamson 1978). However, it also lacks a precise classification of advertisements. David Clampin's widely acknowledged study on wartime advertisements and how they shaped cultural life in Britain (Clampin 2014) does not formally classify the advertisements that form the focus of the study.

Notably, the three themes of approach, derived from Nevett's study, act as an overarching blueprint for contemporary campaigns witnessed during the COVID-19 pandemic. The research addresses a knowledge gap that refers to the close strategic relationship between modern-day examples using the “themes of approach” and comparing them alongside their wartime counterparts to understand how they shifted their advertorial approach when faced with a new protagonist, COVID-19.

Picture Post was a pioneering photo journal published in the United Kingdom between 1938 and 1957; it offered the widest selection of advertisements within a mass-market publication (Clampin 2009). When launched, Britain was on the brink of one of the most

devastating conflicts in modern history. Tom Hopkinson, the assistant editor at the time (1938–1940), was pivotal in using photography as “a journalistic weapon in its own right” (O’Brien, 2023).

It was a publication built around the significant events leading up to the onset of the Second World War; its commercial position was fittingly articulated by Hopkinson, later observing that “if war came, everyone would want war pictures, so the magazine would quickly find a public; and if there was peace, *Picture Post* could get away to a flying start on the general feeling of relief” (O’Brien 2023, 83).

These photojournalistic and editorial approaches were liberal and populist. They covered cultural issues, both local and international, and had broad appeal to the British public at the time. During the Second World War, their readership reached almost 80% of the British population (Clampin 2014).

The research examined archival sources from newspaper advertisements published in *Picture Post* magazine from 1939 to 1945. The contemporary COVID-19 examples were sourced from various online and broadcast platforms during 2020.

We Will Return



Figure 2: Golden Shred
Source: *Picture Post* 1943

A well-known proverb from the Roman poet Propertius states, “absence makes the heart grow fonder”; however, regarding the dynamic nature of commercial advertising, does it indeed prove that the promise within the proverb is overstated? Hence, this first theme, “we will return,” is a challenge because if a business has no product or cannot offer a service, it must still resonate with its audience (Roberts 2005). In many examples, they generated positives from the “forced downtime,” thus avoiding slipping into obscurity, which is the fundamental nemesis of any brand. However, the brand still needs to offer something to its customer base (Figure 2), and the new direction began referencing hope, reassurance, trust, and loyalty.

Public Service



Figure 3: Osram Lamps
 Source: Picture Post 1944

Many companies and organizations that exist through extraordinary times, whether a conflict or a global pandemic, will, to varying degrees, be required to adapt and modify their strategic approach. Presented with this scenario, their regular customer base may not be available, or they may have been forced to divert their manufacturing outputs elsewhere; perhaps the event's impact has changed the lives of their existing customers. Gaining leverage from an act like this can be a delicate journey for any brand. This second theme, "public service," aims to convey a selfless act, a generous position in which the business/brand has sacrificed and delivered for the nation's good (Figure 3) (Loxham 2016). They must not, however, look, feel or sound as though they have profited from the situation.

Opportunity Through the Situation



Rover curls up on

the chair . . . while you write to Master—he, too, always loved that deep leather seat. Keep it in good trim for him with an occasional quick rub-up with O-Cedar Polish. O-Cedar is as

successful with leather as it is with fine furniture; it protects and preserves as it polishes. You may need a little patience to get O-Cedar nowadays, but once you do, it will last you a very long time.

* Your O-Cedar Mop (now so very difficult to replace) can be made to last longer if you shake it well each time after using and occasionally moisten the pad with a little O-Cedar Polish.

STILL ACTIVE ON HOME SERVICE **O-Cedar**

Figure 4: O-Cedar
 Source: Picture Post 1944

This final theme, “opportunity through the situation,” can be seen as the antithesis of the previous theme, “public service.” H. G. Wells stated that “advertising is legalized lying” (Wells 2017), which might appear excessive when science is attributed to much of the advertising theory; however, in these instances, it holds some truth through the vagaries of the conflict/pandemic situation. This approach often disguised the message, and frequently, when referencing a particular issue in the advertisement, it highlighted the misfortune of the viewer (Figure 4), all the while still resonating and not alienating.

Comparing the Narrative

The following case studies have been identified from the methodology. They are taken from three wartime advertising responses (1940–1944) and compared against three COVID-19 pandemic strategies (all in 2020). Spanning almost eighty years apart, we compare the campaigns within those three “themes of approach” (we will return, public service, and opportunity through the situation), commenting on uniquely similar examples.

We Will Return

Schweppes (1943) vs. Guinness (2020)

Schweppes—Campaign/Advertisement Title: “When We Return”

In 1783, the soft drinks company Schweppes began trading from their Geneva factory after the founder Johann Jacob Schweppe discovered a process to produce carbonated water. Later, Schweppes relocated to London in 1792 to establish the business in Britain, where it achieved a British royal warrant in 1836 as a firm favorite of the British Royal Family.

Up until 1940, Schweppes, as a company, continued to produce their drink portfolio uninterrupted throughout the various conflicts over the previous 150-plus years (Simmons 1983); however, soon after April 1940, Britain entered into the darkest period of the conflict as the Nazis conquered Europe and the Battle of France (or the Western campaign) was beginning, the production of the company’s well-known product, Schweppes Tonic Water, was cut abruptly short. This was attributed to being in the nation’s interest due to the key ingredient in tonic water, Quinine, which was identified as a vital element required in the fight against malaria for the British troops in the Far East (Simmons 1983). Despite this, the British government determined that maintaining the nation’s morale was paramount, enabling soft drinks to be available to the public. The most significant impact on Schweppes was the British government’s “Concentration Scheme,” which occurred on February 1, 1943. Under the considerable powers granted to the Ministry of Food (Simmons 1983), the whole soft drinks industry (SDI) in the UK was consolidated into one association, the SDI. This controlled sugar usage as the Ministry reduced stocks to 20% of the pre-war level (Burnett 1999).

Like others in the SDI, Schweppes was prohibited from using their associated brand names and sold under one “SDI” label at fixed prices. For reasons of efficiency and equity, the ministry took control of the Schweppes distribution structure and their vehicles, with four factories and

fourteen depots closing (Simmons 1983). As the leading company in the industry, they suffered the most losses in terms of their brand's relationship with the nation; after all, they had been a consistent brand in the UK since 1792. Along with their competitors, they operated in these new times with the best interests of the SDI and the nation as their focus.

It is easy to assume that a return to normality would be forthcoming after the Second World War. However, with the country's poor economic state, the concentration scheme ended on February 1, 1948, over two years after the war's end, with the welcome return to individual labels and brand names (Simmons 1983).

During the concentration scheme in 1943, the Schweppes board decided that given the considerable loss of brand recognition through the products themselves, the Schweppes name would be maintained by a series of advertisements (Simmons 1983). Graphically, these advertisements were a departure from the often-rich exuberance and the colorful glamor depicted in the pre-war period. The overall design was one of visual restraint, with no photography, no tonal elements, and lacking decoration. They often featured two silhouetted "gentlemen" embarking on a celebratory dialogue, raising a toast to the future. This was accompanied by an overtly informal, upbeat, italicized phrase referencing a time for celebration when we will return to normal. This tone was intended to reassure the public, hinting at the promise of victory and their old friend Schweppes' return into the celebratory facets of our everyday life; the Schweppes typographic-based identity finally punctuated this.

This was all contained in a straightforward, single-line border to frame the advertisement, as demonstrated in Figure 5.



Figure 5: Schweppes
 Source: *Picture Post* 1943

Guinness–Campaign/Advertisement Title: "We Will Toast Again"

The Irish entrepreneur and brewer Arthur Guinness purchased St. James Gate, the now familiar home of the Guinness brewery, in 1759, and by the end of the eighteenth century, they were

one of the largest employers in Dublin and by 1810, they were the leading Dublin brewery (Hughes 2006). By 1825, Guinness was being exported to the United States of America and the West Indies on the newly established merchant sea routes. As the Industrial Revolution began to flourish in continental Europe and the US, the growing transport links enabled the Guinness brewery to develop their worldwide dominance of the dark beverage that is evident today. It seems unusual to accept now, but for the first 170 years, Guinness never advertised and in 1929, the first advertisement appeared with the recognizable slogan of “Guinness is Good for You” in the British newspaper *The Daily Chronicle*, with the Guinness family setting a proviso that any advertising needed to be as good as the beer (Guinness, n.d.).

Tuesday, March 17, 2020, was a catalyst for a different focus for the Irish dry stout. Better known as St. Patrick’s Day worldwide, Guinness has always been the brand associated with the feast of Saint Patrick. However, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, despite being in their early but zealous stages, it was clear that a different approach would be required by the 260-year-old brand, especially given that all public houses were closed in the UK on the March 20, 2020. The US agency Quaker City Mercantile created a somewhat uplifting and wholesome advertisement to capture the essence of community, kindness, and looking after each other in their tone of voice (Figure 6). The ad relies heavily on tradition and sets this tone by featuring archival footage, an upbeat stereotypical Irish musical score and narration that speaks of togetherness, support, and a positive outlook.

It finishes with one final message: “We are committing \$500,000 through our Guinness Gives Back Fund to help the communities where we live, work, and celebrate.” The overarching feel is one of an upbeat future and that Guinness will very much be part of it; “don’t worry, we will march again,” states the self-assured voiceover.

However, perhaps the most vital and most resonating element in this sixty-five-second advertisement was the final narrated message framed by the memorable and much photographed “Guinness gates”: “as for us, we have signed a 9,000-year lease on our brewery a while back, so we are not going anywhere.” This is a highly robust and emotionally charged statement and places their commitment to return very much to the bricks and mortar of their historical roots, and who can argue with a nine-thousand-year pledge?



Figure 6: Guinness

Source: *Quaker City Mercantile 2020*

The name of this Guinness campaign, “We will toast again,” is strikingly reminiscent of the Schweppes newspaper advertisements from eighty years ago, “When we return.” Indeed, they both follow the “we will return” ethos. Whether it is a pint of Guinness or a glass of Schweppes Tonic Water, the focus for both shared a strategic, self-assuring tone of togetherness and hope.

This creative direction continued for Guinness in 2021 as the world began tentatively returning to normality. The “#LooksLikeGuinness” campaign in May 2021 expanded on their brand message central to the pandemic one year earlier. Similar in tone of voice to the “We Will Toast Again” approach, the “#LooksLikeGuinness” campaign embodied hope with a strong nostalgic nod to the physical return of the reopening of public houses in the UK. This was demonstrated in the TV commercial released in May 2021 titled “Welcome back” (Figures 7 and 8), which was full of anticipation with clever imagery that resembled and symbolized the famous black pint with the frothy white head. The popular slogan “Good things come to those that wait” made a solid return to sign off on the narrative.



Figures 7 and 8: Guinness
 Source: AMV BBDO 2021

Public Service

Hoover (1944) vs. Admiral Insurance (2020)
Hoover–Campaign/Advertisement Title “Salute!”

The Hoover Corporation is undoubtedly one of the most familiar brands from the last century since it was founded by William Henry Hoover in Ohio in 1908. They developed a solid customer base during the twentieth century due to their revolutionary design and technological innovations, enabling the product to become the dominant electric vacuum cleaner in the industry (Scott 2019). Along with this success, the brand became the most famous of all genericizations, along with Google, Sellotape, and Jacuzzi, and with that, they embodied themselves in the everyday domestic voice and psyche of the twentieth-century housewife. This allowed the company to have a strong foothold in popular culture, with the relatively subtle realignment of their brand positioning during the Second World War demonstrating a consistent, flexible, and strategic approach to their public persona.

During the conflict, Hoover switched from producing vacuum cleaners to items such as helmet liners and bomb fuses (Investor's Business Daily 2013), and a communication shift through their advertising was required (and occurred) when production and supply of their traditional product were impossible.

The Hoover brand was perfectly positioned to adopt their storytelling narrative structure, which was introduced and established in the 1930s. The Hoover Corporation leveraged the already “established relationship” with the housewife at the time, and this flexing of the established advertorial approach was a relatively seamless event. Hoover often played the “housewife champion” and advocated for their hard work and toil, as evidenced in a 1944 advertisement from *Picture Post* that builds on this rhetoric.

She's out in all weathers and all hours. She's always got to be smiling and polite to her passengers, though she's on her feet for hours on end. When she's finished her spell of duty, her day's work is not over; she has a house to run with all the hundred and one jobs a housewife can't neglect. There's shopping, cooking, and cleaning. Her pre-war Hoover comes in useful there. There are millions like her doing a “double job” in this war. To them we all say—Salute! From Hoover.



Figure 9: Hoover

Source: *Picture Post* 1944

At the time, this foundation of trust and understanding became fundamental in how the Hoover brand communicated throughout this conflict with their “Salute” campaign. Once again, the voice of support, encouragement, and recognition of hard work triumphed more than ever in this *Picture Post* advertisement from 1944 (Figure 9).

The hand that held the Hoover welds the Steel!

Not many of our housewives are doing jobs of war work like this! The great majority of those in the factories and workshops are plugging away on far less spectacular tasks. However, whatever the job, these “Housewives 1944” also stick it and run their

homes! Many of them, now more than ever, must bless the day they bought a Hoover to save their sorely needed time and energy! We're proud to have helped them do a "Double Job" in war-time, and in admiration say—Salute! From Hoover (Figure 9).

The public service mantra was at the core of the message in wartime communications. The "Salute" phrase successfully galvanized the general spirit and morale of the period and continued as Hoover's key advertising theme consistently in *Picture Post* throughout the Second World War.

Admiral Insurance—Campaign/Advertisement Title; "Stay at Home Refund"

One of the positive brand perception winners during the COVID-19 pandemic was undoubtedly Admiral Insurance (Smith 2021), which returned £110 million directly back to their customer base.

Admiral Insurance, since starting in 1993 with just over fifty employees, has grown steadily over the past three decades into one of the UK's largest and most well-established insurance companies, consistently scoring well in customer satisfaction surveys. Recognizing and highlighting these plaudits are essential in this context as they were perfectly positioned, like Hoover, seventy years earlier to leverage the earned trust already established among their audience (Chan 2023). They needed to take a sensitive stance, with their voice being one of "Well, why wouldn't you do this?"

Cristina Nestares, CEO of UK Insurance at Admiral, stated:

The Admiral Stay at Home Refund was launched to recognize the considerable efforts people make by staying home as much as possible and, as a result, driving less. Customers do not have to contact us to receive this, and we will contact them in the coming weeks to explain how we will refund them. (Allan 2020)

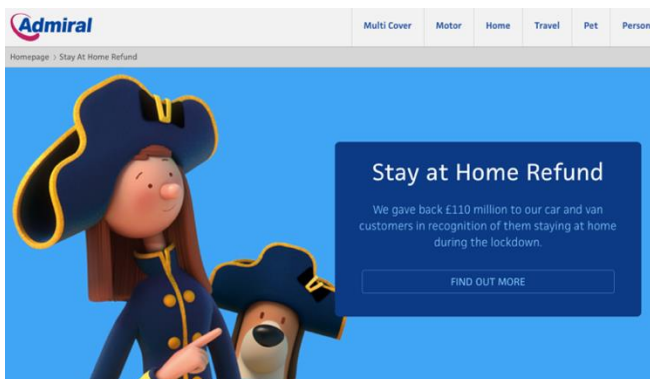


Figure 10: Stay at Home Refund

Source: Admiral 2020

The legacy behind this strategy (Figure 10) can be summed up in a Financial Times (FT) editorial in 2021 (Smith 2021) that stated that the positive interim results from the FTSE 100 insurer were in part driven by the company's decision to return money to their locked down customers. This decision resulted in a double-digit growth of their customer base. The resulting FT headline, "Admiral cites COVID-19 refunds for buoyant data," demonstrated that the "Public service" approach to their customers in times of real hardship and uncertainty did pay dividends. At the time, others took a far more conservative and less tangible approach to their pandemic marketing strategy, such as fee reductions (Muvija and Cruise 2020).

Their tagline, "Rewardingly Simple," steered the decision to return funds as straightforwardly as possible. Alex Murphy, the head of marketing at Admiral Group, stated at a recent webinar that the semantics surrounding the brand position statement did govern the decision to offer the refund "rewardingly" and how they would do that process "simply." They refunded the £25 back to each covered vehicle; the customer had to do nothing, and the refund was automatically credited to their account (Admiral, n.d.).

Much like the consolidation of Hoover's reputation and public voice established during the 1940s, Admiral's "Public Service" persona has allowed the brand to become an engaging and humanistic entity within the often vacuous and impersonal insurance sector.

Opportunity Through the Situation

Odo-ro-no (1940) vs. Wickes (2020)

Odo-ro-no –Campaign/Advertisement Title: "Remember, for Absolute Certainty of Personal Freshness, It Is Essential You Get Odo-ro-no"

For thousands of years, humankind has used various sweet-smelling and occasionally not-so-sweet concoctions to mask body odor, from scented wax on the forehead to wigs impregnated with animal fats (Everts 2016). The birth of Odo-ro-no is like many products in that it was derived initially from another use. In 1910, Edna Murphey, while at high school in Cincinnati, noticed that her surgeon father used a product to prevent his hands from sweating in the theater (Sivulka 2008). This observation ultimately established the deodorant brand Odo-ro-no with a "straight to the point" tagline, "For Extreme Perspiration," and 1927 sales hit one million dollars.

The copywriting within the Odo-ro-no advertisements followed an exciting premise that hinted at the threat of gossip (although never directly mentioned) and personal hygiene.

The copywriting made some bold statements, although not unusual with wartime advertisements at the time, which more directly reflected the character of the conflict (Clampin 2009); the advertisements stated that "this quick, safe deodorant gives complete protection from underarm odour" (Figure 11). The "complete protection" statement gave little or no ambiguity to the product's perceived effectiveness. After all, you were doing your bit for "King and Country" and deserve confidence in your workplace, where others may

judge your hygiene! It concluded with a statement that underlined the authenticity of Odo-ro-no again as a final sign-off, stating that “for absolute *certainty* of personal freshness,” it was essential that you used the original deodorant Odo-ro-no. The word “certainty” was the only body copy typographically emphasized using italics.

Using a copywriting approach that was centered around the subject of “gossip,” it resulted in a convincing message that was subsequently called “whispering copy” developed by a young advertising copywriter at the time, James Webb Young, an employee of John Walter Thompson, Odo-ro-no’s advertising agents at the time (Everts 2012). This “disruptive” approach to persuasion was compelling by informing the consumer of an embarrassing problem they might not be aware of and that others might be too polite to bring up in conversation.



Figure 11: Odo-ro-no
Source: Picture Post 1944

Although the subject of personal hygiene had been well established in Odo-ro-no’s advertising strategy since 1912, in 1919, the advertising shifted to informing (primarily women) that perspiration was an embarrassing issue that should be addressed (Simmonds 2019).

During the Second World War, the deodorant capitalized on two situations to establish a strong position within the competitive personal hygiene market. Their advertising strategy shifted focus to incorporate a new set of social norms driven directly by conflict.

Firstly, there was a shortage of “dress shields” due to the wartime restrictions on cloth to construct the undergarment; dress shields were small linen garments worn under the dress or blouse that not only prevented underarm wetness from showing and staining but also reduced odor. It was this specific “personal odor” situation resulting in the lack of a “dress

shield” that the second opportunity, body odor, presented itself. This embarrassing by-product could only add to the drama of the message; women were now embarking on new physical roles in proximity to others, and as the advertisements suggested, it was only fitting that they were made aware of their hygiene (Figure 11).

However, it was not the first product to employ such un-subtle approaches in its advertising strategy; the most well known was the Listerine mouthwash campaign in 1925. Until then, Listerine had been used for many antiseptic purposes, such as bad breath or, more precisely, halitosis, which had previously not been highlighted as an essential medical or social problem. Listerine adopted the word “halitosis” and the phrase “often a bridesmaid but never a bride,” and in 1927, sales hit \$4 million from \$112,000 in 1921 (Lippert 2017).

Wickes–Campaign/Advertisement Title: “Let Wickes Cure Your Housebarrassment”

Wickes’ core business has always been focused on the home improvement sector, with the brand being formed in 1854 in the pine-laden state of Michigan in the US. This location offered a perfect base to start a business that repaired and reconditioned metal parts used in the area’s prevalent logging and lumber businesses at the time. Diversification was critical to the company’s early successes, and the founders, brothers Henry Dunn Wickes and Edward Noyes Wickes, were keen to expand and seek new business opportunities. Wickes even developed steam saws powered by their boiler designs that were more efficient than existing models. During the Second World War, they were offered an opportunity to fit the boilers into the US Liberty ships, with the US Maritime Commission ordering 360 units (FundingUniverse, n.d.). The post–World War period offered yet another diversification for the Wickes brand as lack of housing required timber to be supplied for the US property boom; once again, they seized the opportunity and opened stores in 1952 that offered a one-stop shop for all essential building supplies. It can be argued that the company has survived through some insightful diversifications, as seen in the contemporary response to COVID-19 with their bold and original “Housebarrassment” campaign. Their success can be judged to a certain degree through a phrase that has become part of popular culture vernacular. On the January 5, 2021, the term “Housebarrassment” was added to the “Urban Dictionary” catalogue, defining the condition as embarrassment and unease at others (primarily colleagues), judging your surroundings during online meetings.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the use of the Zoom video web chat application increased from ten million users in March 2020 to three hundred million in April 2020, just under a 3,000% increase in one month. The application was downloaded 485 million times in 2020, and in October 2020, the meeting minutes totaled 3.3 trillion, an increase of 3,300% from the following year (Backlinko 2021).

It is these crucial facts that inspired and shaped the development of the “Housebarrassment” campaign strategy, responding to the needs of the nation as they adapted to new working conditions that centered around their homelife, especially in their studies, dining rooms, and (in Wickes case) primarily their kitchens.



Figure 12: Unicorn, Housebarrassment
 Source: Campaign 2020

The initial campaign, however, was released on December 20, 2019, almost four months before the COVID-19 lockdown; the Agency VCCP responded to Wickes’ research stating that 61% of Britons were embarrassed by at least one aspect of their home.

This creative (and flexible) direction became the perfect platform for developing their campaign strategy into a message resonating with a much wider audience all experiencing the national pandemic conditions. The campaign “Unicorn” was launched in December 2020 and featured four work colleagues on a Zoom call, one of which had a multicolored unicorn fantasy-derived digital background; when confronted by her colleagues to turn it off, she looked around at a very tired, untidy kitchen and made an excuse. The voiceover then states, “Let Wickes cure your housebarrassment; we’ll create your dream kitchen from design to show off ready...cure your housebarrassment with Wickes” (McGonagle 2021). After her makeover, she proudly shows her kitchen, forcing the other embarrassed colleagues to turn their digital backgrounds on immediately (Figure 12).

Like the Odo-ro-no campaign, they both employed an old advertising adage that stated “you are not selling the product but selling the solution”; a similar but more contemporary quotation by Steve Jobs when launching the first Apple retail store in May 2001 stated, “Great communicators do not sell products. They sell benefits” (Gallo 2020).

These examples, which fall within the final theme, “opportunity through the situation,” all use the “fear appeal” model in varying compelling tones. In this model, an audience is presented with a persuasive tone suggesting that a negative impact on their lives will occur if they do not respond to the advertising message (Bartikowski et al. 2019).

More recent examples are Gillette razors, which created the five o’clock shadow; Head and Shoulders shampoo, where the evil to conquer is the ubiquitous dandruff; and the iconic

Wisk laundry detergent soap with its specific reference to the “ring around the collar” and the resulting embarrassment.

Conclusion

During the wartime period, not all businesses changed their advertising strategies. According to the author’s advertorial research in *Picture Post*, out of 15,048 advertisements, 7% (1,053) did not directly mention the war. The industries that made no direct reference to the war were wide-ranging and included beauty, tobacco, and food. However, some businesses within the same sectors did mention the conflict; tobacco brands like Players Navy Cut embraced the wartime narrative, and Embassy Mild avoided referencing it. These advertisements were from businesses not significantly affected by the conflict and government restrictions or wanted to convey a message unrelated to the war. This presents an exciting avenue for future research.

Considering the six examples within the “three themes of approach,” it is significant to note that they all embrace one similar attribute that allowed them to acknowledge and respond successfully to the current situation, be it a wartime conflict or a global pandemic.

They are (and were) all successful, well-known brands with an established and coherent brand strategy before the change of circumstances forced a re-evaluation of their brand strategy.

Gary Kibble, chief marketing and digital officer for Wickes, describes this approach to their campaign as:

The customer truth that created housebarrassment was amplified, as rather than just having close friends or family to dinner, we suddenly had work colleagues staring at our homes, albeit through the lens of a camera...be that on Zoom, Hangout or Teams calls. It was fortuitous that the path we had carved with housebarrassment was exaggerated thanks to external circumstances; we had the right creative idea at the right time. (Kibble 2023)

Understanding their audience was the critical factor in the ability to adapt to the unpredictable pandemic conditions at the time. The research identifies that Schweppes and Guinness faced the difficult task of temporarily leaving their established market. However, they were able to return to their previous status in 1945 and 2021, respectively. Despite the challenges, they developed their brands relatively unscathed and enriched by the experiences. All six brands had to deal with extreme conditions outside their control, but they had already built and established a loyal and stable customer base. This offered the brands a degree of knowledge, insight, and confidence to adapt and flex successfully to their new situation, evidenced by the contemporary examples of Guinness, Admiral Insurance, and Wickes.

To further test the research question’s hypothesis, a contemporary example was selected to observe the use of the “themes of approach” from a “modern” warfare scenario.

The “Be Brave Like Ukraine” campaign, initiated in April 2022, represents a distinctive approach to advertising strategy, emphasizing bravery as a fundamental Ukrainian characteristic that fosters solidarity and resilience. It can be viewed as a worldwide expansion of the instances highlighted in this research based on the shared principles of comprehending your target audience. The approach was unreservedly bold and unapologetic yet offered positives for the future (Kaneva 2023). Engaging with social media networks enabled the message of the conflict to remain very much in the public eye, outside of the traditional news coverage. A campaign website offered additional brand assets to share and distribute. Uniquely, it relied almost entirely on advertising and social media rather than the traditional diplomatic channels to seek support from the rest of the world (Kaneva 2022).



Figure 13: Be Brave Like Ukraine
 Source: <https://brave.ua/en.html> 2022

The “Be Brave Like Ukraine” campaign was successful; Campaign magazine named it “Ukraine’s biggest cultural export” (Watson 2022). It implemented the themes of approach (we will return, public service, and opportunity through the situation) alongside its modern brand strategy. The campaign fully embraced the “opportunity through the situation,” leveraging the dynamic circumstances they were experiencing to drive the narrative.

It represents a significant milestone in the history of brand communication, marking the incorporation of branding into a nation’s war effort. This development potentially indicates the emergence of a new form of war propaganda—wartime branding—whose implications and effects are yet to be thoroughly explored and understood. Using brand communication in the context of war introduces intriguing questions about the intersection of marketing, communication, and warfare, highlighting the need for further examination and analysis of this evolving phenomenon.

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Informed Consent

The author has obtained informed consent from all participants.

Conflict of Interest

The author declares that there is no conflict of interest.

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