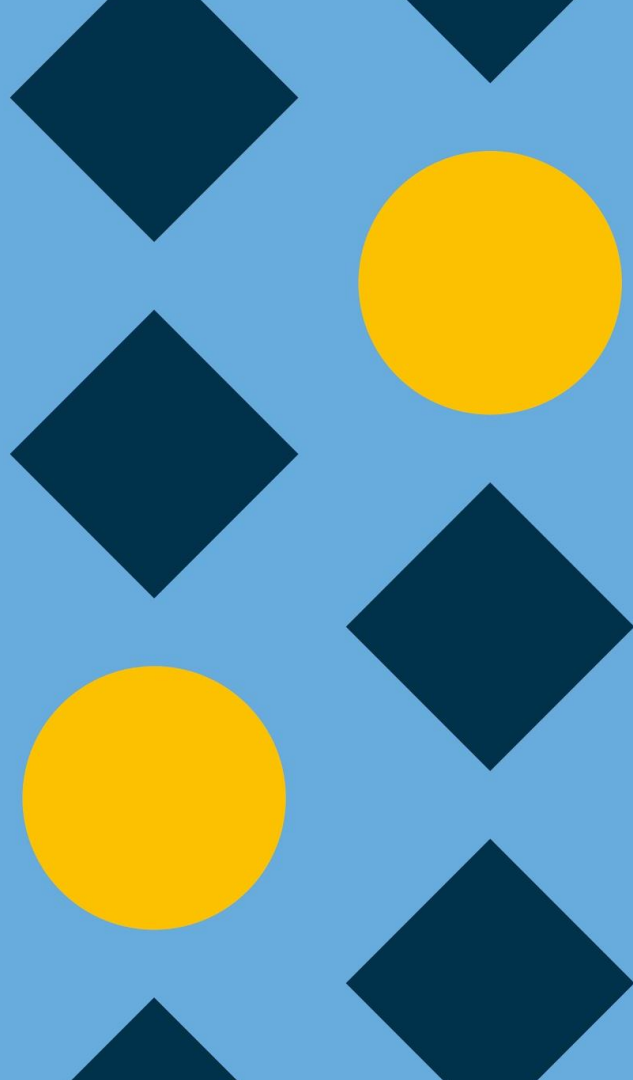


JANUARY 2021

# The Congruence Effect

How aligning ad messaging to  
content sentiment impacts  
consumer preference

**IAS** Integral  
Ad Science

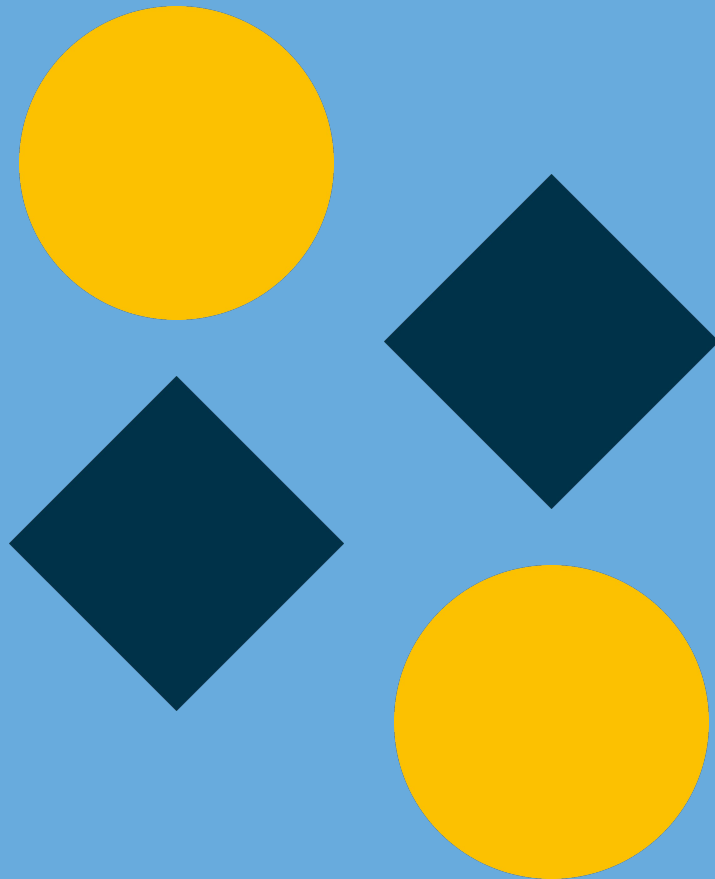


# Introduction

IAS research has shown that **context is critical**. In *The Power of Context*, we explored how the sentiment of an advertising environment influences the way consumers perceive ads and associated brands. The results showed that consumers were more receptive toward brands that advertised in environments with positive sentiment, and were also more likely to remember such ads.

**But what about negative sentiment?** By simply avoiding all content with negative sentiment, advertisers would lose scale and valuable impressions. Furthermore, negative sentiment does not always indicate whether an environment is brand suitable. So, how can advertisers navigate varying content sentiment in order to create favorable associations with their brand?

IAS asked consumers to weigh-in on whether ad messaging related to the surrounding content impacts their perception of a given brand.



# The Congruence Effect

## Study objectives and design

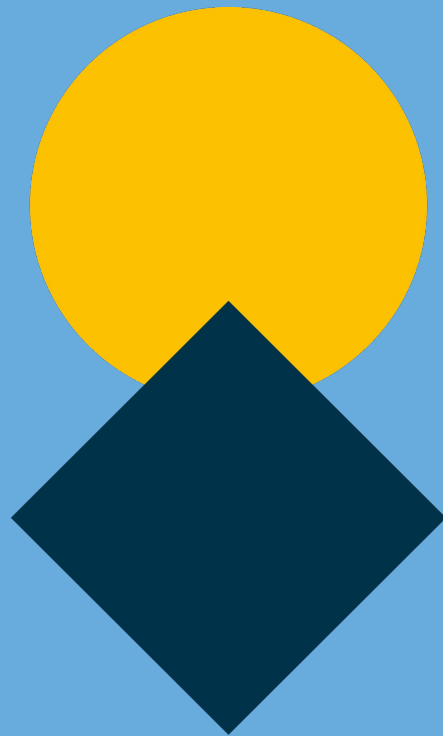
### Field date

November  
2020

### Participation

n=1,028 U.S.  
Internet users

IAS commissioned an online survey to understand how consumers feel about ads that appear alongside content with positive, negative, and neutral sentiment. The goal was to determine whether aligning the ad messaging with the surrounding content would impact how consumers felt about the ads and associated brands.



Statistically significant differences are calculated at 95% confidence interval.

# Key Terms

**Congruence** refers to an aligned relationship between the message of an ad and the content surrounding it

**Receptivity** refers to how receptive consumers are to an advertisement or brand

**Favorability** refers to how favorable consumers find a brand in a given environment

**Memorability** refers to how memorable consumers find an advertisement

**Sentiment** refers to whether an article conveys a positive, neutral, or negative tone to the consumer reading it

**"Negative" sentiment** means a page conveys a negative tone, but **does not** indicate whether the page is brand safe

**'Unsuitable' content** is a distinction that varies by brand, but denotes content that is generally interpreted by consumers to be controversial for brands to appear alongside

# Content adjacency affects consumer perception of a brand

The majority of consumers say that the content environment of an ad influences their opinion of the associated brand. In other words, consumers recognize if advertisements appropriately align with the surrounding content.



80%

of consumers say ads related to the content they are viewing impact their perception of the brand

# Consumers find ads that align to surrounding content more memorable and favorable

Content adjacencies have the power to influence how consumers feel about a given brand. Most consumers say that they not only feel more favorable toward a brand whose ads are related to the adjacent content, but they're also more likely to remember the ad.

**51%**

of consumers have a favorable perception of brands whose ad messages relate to the adjacent content

**74%**

of consumers are likely to remember an ad if its message relates to the content around it

**The IAS Power of Context study showed that consumers prefer ads that appear alongside content with positive or neutral sentiment**

### Power of Context Study Results

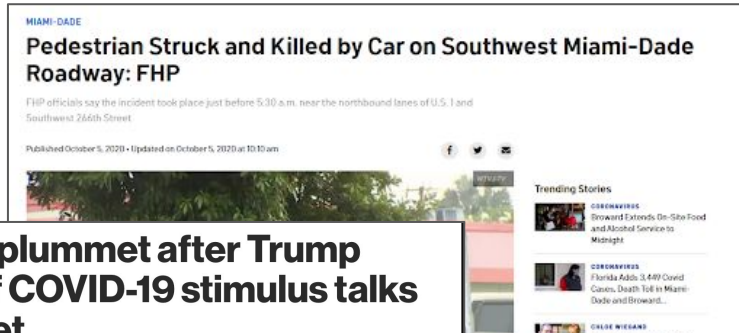
Content Type	Receptivity	Favorability	Memorability
Positive/ Neutral Sentiment	+80%	+93%	+24%
Average (across all headlines)	28%	24%	43%

Q. How receptive will you be to this ad if it appears alongside the following content headlines; How would you feel toward the brand if this ad displayed above appears alongside the following content headlines; How likely is it that you will remember seeing the ad displayed above if this ad appears alongside the following content headlines:

# So what about content with negative sentiment?

It would be unrealistic—and problematic—for brands to avoid all content with negative sentiment. Still, advertisers want to create favorable associations with their brands through both ad messaging and placement.

How can brands optimize consumer perception in environments with negative sentiment?



## Stocks plummet after Trump calls off COVID-19 stimulus talks via tweet

By Thornton McEnery



## No one knows what “back-to-school shopping” means this year

Terry Nguyen - 8/31/2020

Jasmine Nakasoni has put aside about \$40 to \$50 every month since last August for her daughter's back-to-school shopping expenses. As members of the debt-free community, she and her wife don't rely on credit cards, so instead, they budget out for nearly every occasion or event they expect to spend on. This year, the initial plan was to spend \$500 on school supplies and new clothes for their 14-year-old, Hayley.





# IAS showed consumers two ads alongside content with negative sentiment

In order to help brands navigate content with varying sentiment, IAS showed consumers articles with negative sentiment and asked them to select their preferred ad.

One ad featured messaging related to the content; the second ad featured standard, generic messaging.

## EXAMPLE

Pedestrian Struck and Killed by Car on Roadway

Four horizontal gray bars representing a selection interface for choosing an ad.

AUTO AD #1

New model  
with pedestrian  
detection



AUTO AD #2

Trunk space for  
all your gear



# Consumers selected their preferred ad adjacencies across three verticals

Pedestrian Struck and Killed by Car on Roadway

Stocks plummet after Trump calls off COVID-19 stimulus talks

No one knows what “back-to-school shopping” means this year

AUTO AD #1

New model with pedestrian detection



AUTO AD #2

Trunk space for all your gear



FINANCE AD #1

A financial advisor can help



FINANCE AD #2

Enjoy \$0 online stock, ETF, and option trades



RETAIL AD #1

No matter how we school, let's be ready.



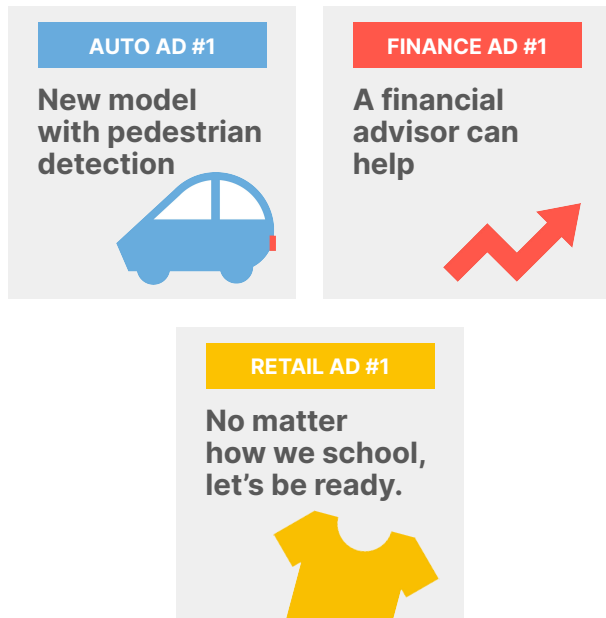
RETAIL AD #2

Extra 20% off select styles!



Q. How receptive will you be to this ad if it appears alongside the following content headlines; How would you feel toward the brand if this ad displayed above appears alongside the following content headlines; How likely is it that you will remember seeing the ad displayed above if this ad appears alongside the following content headlines:

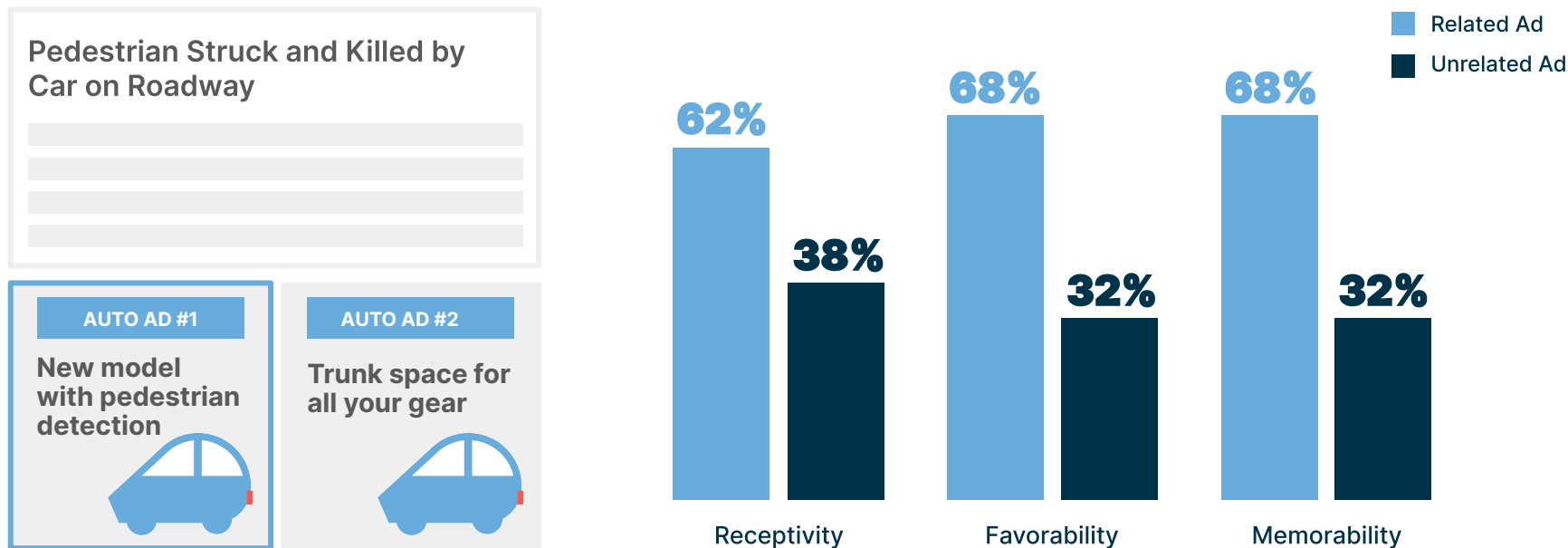
# Receptivity, favorability, and memorability were all greater for the ads related to the surrounding content



Ad Type	Receptivity	Favorability	Memorability
Related Message Average	61%	68%	65%
Unrelated Message Average	39%	32%	35%
% Difference	+57%	+107%	+76%

Q. Which of these ads would you be more receptive to when it appears alongside the content below?; Which of these ads would make you feel more favorable toward the brand when it appears alongside the content below?; Which of these ads are you more likely to remember when it appears alongside the content below?

# Consumer receptivity, favorability, and memorability were higher for the related ads across all verticals



Q. Which of these ads would you be more receptive to when it appears alongside the content below?; Which of these ads would make you feel more favorable toward the brand when it appears alongside the content below?; Which of these ads are you more likely to remember when it appears alongside the content below?

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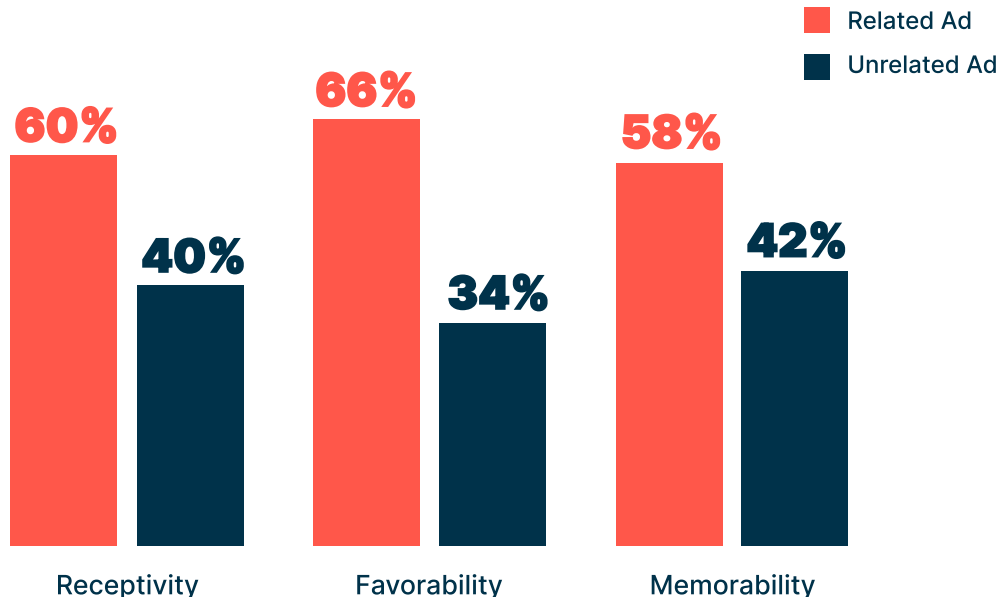
Stocks plummet after Trump calls off COVID-19 stimulus talks

FINANCE AD #1

A financial advisor can help

FINANCE AD #2

Enjoy \$0 online stock, ETF, and option trades



Q. Which of these ads would you be more receptive to when it appears alongside the content below?; Which of these ads would make you feel more favorable toward the brand when it appears alongside the content below?; Which of these ads are you more likely to remember when it appears alongside the content below?

# Consumer receptivity, favorability, and memorability were higher for the related ads across all verticals

No one knows what “back-to-school shopping” means this year

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\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

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RETAIL AD #1

No matter how we school, let's be ready.

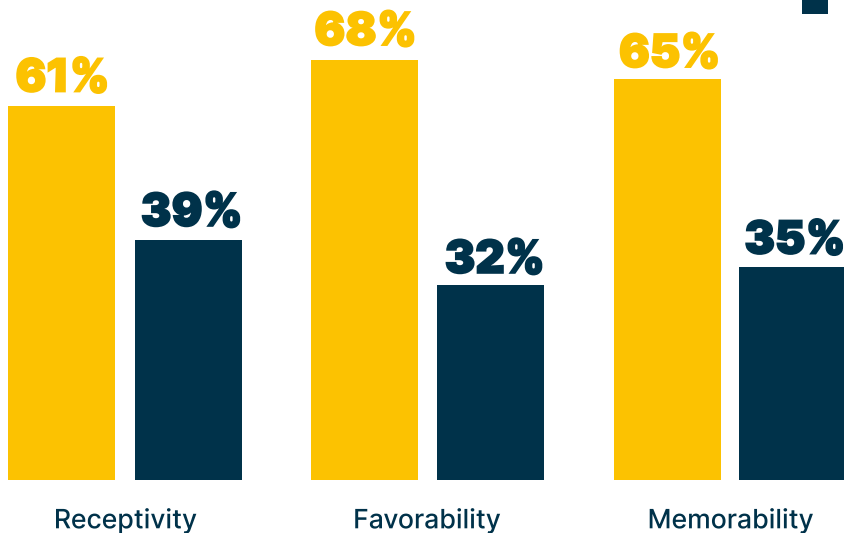


RETAIL AD #2

Extra 20% off select styles!



Related Ad  
Unrelated Ad



Q. Which of these ads would you be more receptive to when it appears alongside the content below?; Which of these ads would make you feel more favorable toward the brand when it appears alongside the content below?; Which of these ads are you more likely to remember when it appears alongside the content below?

# How did the same tailored ad messaging perform across positive and neutral content?

When shown articles with negative sentiment, consumers selected the ad messages that were most aligned to the negative headlines. In this case, the use of ads with messaging tailored to these headlines helped to offset possible unfavorable associations with the brand.

IAS also showed consumers the same three sets of ads alongside positive and neutral content. Consumers were similarly or less favorable to the 'tailored' ads—the ones with messaging most aligned to negative headlines—in positive or neutral environments.

In other words, consumer preferences are strongest toward ads which are best suited for a specific content environment.

Content Type	Receptivity	Favorability	Memorability
Negative Content Average	61%	68%	68%
Positive Content Average	61%	66%	58%
Neutral Content Average	58%	68%	65%

Q. Which of these ads would you be more receptive to when it appears alongside the content below?; Which of these ads would make you feel more favorable toward the brand when it appears alongside the content below?; Which of these ads are you more likely to remember when it appears alongside the content below?

# What do consumers say?

*"Tell us in a few words what criteria were used to determine your selections."*

**Message alignment  
and relevance  
results in ads that  
consumers prefer  
and remember**

“ The ads had to match the tone of the article in some way. Sometimes, in the pairing of the ad to the article, one of the ads seemed more abrasive or "off" compared to the other. (The car ad for the pedestrian death for instance... having a car ad for that article at all was tough, and then to have one talking about all the room in the car just seemed wrong and tone deaf)



# 1

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

### Consumers prefer ads to be **RELEVANT** to the surrounding content

Consumers are more favorable toward brands whose ads are relevant to the adjacent content, and also find relevant ads to be more memorable.

80%

of consumers say ad messages related to adjacent content impact brand perceptions

74%

of consumers are likely to remember an ad if its message relates to the content around it

51%

of consumers are favorable toward brands whose ad messages relate to the adjacent content

# 2

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

### Ad message alignment **IMPROVES** consumer perception

Consumer favorability, memorability, and receptivity increases toward ads with messaging related to the surrounding content, regardless of negative sentiment.

**107%**

increase in favorability toward the brand for ad messaging aligned with content

**76%**

increase in memorability for ad messaging aligned with content

**57%**

increase in receptivity for ad messaging aligned with content

# 3

## KEY TAKEAWAYS

Consumers prefer ad messaging that's

# BEST SUITED

to the surrounding content environment

On average, consumers preferred the ad messages that aligned to the negative content headlines. However, they were similarly or less favorable to the same ads in positive or neutral environments. This demonstrates that one set of ads doesn't always fit all content environments.

# Context Control

## MAXIMIZE CAMPAIGN IMPACT

IAS offers multiple solutions to provide customizable control that scales across direct and programmatic buys. In addition to our standard brand safety solutions, our patented cognitive semantic technology uses natural language processing (NLP) to dynamically comprehend the nuances of context and sentiment for the most precise content classification at scale.

### EXTENDED CONTEXTUAL

100+ off-the-shelf segments curated by IAS for vertical & topical content avoidance

100+ off-the-shelf segments curated by IAS for vertical, topical, & seasonal contextual targeting

### BRAND-SPECIFIC CONTROL

Avoid negative content associated with your brand

## WHAT YOU GET

**Page-level analysis** using machine learning and patented semantic technology for accuracy and precision

**Sentiment and emotion analysis:** The only solution in market that can simultaneously detect page sentiment and identify the associated emotion

**Proactive protection:** pre-bid filtering and post-bid blocking of content that falls outside your brand guidelines

**Comprehensive global coverage** across languages, environments, and platforms like YouTube

**Semantic network** built on 350k+ concepts (plus their synonyms) linked by 2.8M connections

GET STARTED

# Thank you

