

# The impact of positivity

OPINION

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Thinking positive not only makes us healthier, it also makes us more willing to act on brands' messages. Sue Unerman, Chief Transformation Officer at MediaCom UK, explains

We live in negative times. According to the [Gallup Global Emotions Report](#), 2017 was the world's most miserable year for more than a decade.

And it's true that between political upheavals, the rise of the far right, the effects of climate change, war, natural disasters, famine and terrorism, there's plenty to be worried about.

All of this is contributing to the fact that only 4% of the UK population believes that the world is improving while the most recent Edelman 'Trust Barometer' found that 19% of

people are actively avoiding news media altogether. Forty percent have made that decision because they find the news too depressing.

Then there's social media, which research has found 60% of users say has a negative impact on their self-esteem and 50% admit impacts on their relationships.

And yet for those of us who can ignore the pressures to go down the pit of despair, there are huge positives.

Our consulting team, Theobald's Road Consulting, recently addressed the impact of positivity, in a specially-commissioned study for Hearst. The report highlighted that:

- People who express gratitude on a regular basis have better physical health, optimism, progress toward goals, well-being, and help others more (Emmons & Crumpler, 2000).
- People who witness others perform good deeds experience an emotion called 'elevation' and this motivates them to perform their own good deeds (Haidt, 2000).
- Optimism can protect people from mental and physical illness (Taylor et al., 2000).
- People who are optimistic or happy have better performance in work, school and sports, are less depressed, have fewer physical health problems, and have better relationships with other people. Further, optimism can be measured, and it can be learned (Seligman, 1991; Lyubomirsky, King & Diener, 2005).
- People who report more positive emotions in young adulthood live longer and healthier lives (Danner, Snowdon, & Friesen, 2001).

Positive thinking also makes us more resourceful because the alternative constricts the mind and makes us reluctant to try something new. Being positive reduces stress by helping us recover from challenges (both physical and mental) faster and it makes us more productive.

This is all great at a personal level but professionally as communications experts too there are benefits. Positive attitudes change the mindset in which we absorb media messaging – both editorial and ads. In fact, media is as important as a close family network in influencing a positive outlook on life.

What this means is that brands can take advantage of the benefits of positivity by placing their ads in the most positive environments.

As our research for Hearst showed, people who have a positive outlook on life and feel positive about media are 15% more likely to take action after seeing a message than those who have a negative outlook but still feel positive about media.

What's more, positive people are more likely to try new things, 100% more likely to compare a product with competitors, 91% more likely to buy a product or service they have seen advertised and 167% more likely to make a change in their routine.

It's perhaps no surprise that the research found that self-help/improvement magazines are seen as the most positive media, or that magazines generally score better than newspapers for putting regular users into a positive mindset. But media such as music streaming services also score well as do TV brands.

It's too early to add right mood to our planning mantra of right time, right place and right context but it's a factor that brands looking to drive growth.

Happy people make happy, growing brands and, in these dark times, we could all do with more of both.

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