**WFA research identifies Seven Deadly Sins of bad marketing**

**Social media analysis reveals what really riles consumers
Panel of experts seek to identify solutions**

**March 19, Marrakech:** New research conducted for the World Federation of Advertisers (WFA) has identified the seven key ways that brand marketing is most likely to annoy consumers.

Social media agency, We Are Social, conducted a detailed analysis of English language Twitter comments about ads over the course of six months in the context of [Project Reconnect](https://webmail.aba.com.br/exchweb/bin/redir.asp?URL=http://wfanet.us1.list-manage2.com/track/click?u=964b640864bbe803668818263%26id=3d1efef7ee%26e=5d91dd8b67), the WFA’s flagship initiative to better align brand and marketing strategy with people’s changing expectations in the digital age. The goal was to help marketers identify acceptable versus unacceptable behaviours with a view to identifying potential recommendations and solutions.

The findings are based on analysis of 670,000 English language Twitter mentions making negative reference to advertising in the six months between August 2014 and February 2015. A random sample of 5,000 tweets were analysed to identify key concerns.

The results are being presented today at a [Project Reconnect session](https://webmail.aba.com.br/exchweb/bin/redir.asp?URL=http://wfanet.us1.list-manage.com/track/click?u=964b640864bbe803668818263%26id=b7db3b5449%26e=5d91dd8b67) as part of the WFA’s[Global Marketer Week](https://webmail.aba.com.br/exchweb/bin/redir.asp?URL=http://wfanet.us1.list-manage1.com/track/click?u=964b640864bbe803668818263%26id=a1d63f03b7%26e=5d91dd8b67) in Marrakech. They will form the backdrop and context to a presentation by Jon Wilkins, Executive Chairman of Karmarama, on where he thinks the industry may be getting it wrong, a presentation by a group of African students on their views about what’s good and bad about brand marketing and an interactive panel session including high-profile industry experts focusing on potential solutions.

The research found:

* There were more than 2m negative tweets about advertising in the past year in all languages. There were however more than 3m positive comments about advertising during the same period.
* Just over half the tweets were original statements but 37% were retweets, meaning twitter users have retweeted negative comments almost 750,000 times. One in ten tweets were replies, usually agreeing with the negative sentiments of the original tweet.
* Men are more likely to complain about brand marketing by a ratio of 60:40 but both sexes are equally likely to be positive. Many of the comments reflected strong emotions and profanity was a common feature of the most negative comments.
* The average complainant had more than 1,000 followers, indicating each negative comment reached a significantly larger audience.
* TV adverts caused the greatest number of negative comments, followed by online and radio. Adverts on music streaming service Pandora appeared to annoy our sample the most but YouTube and Spotify interruptions were close behind.

From the research, Simon Kemp from We Are Social and Jon Wilkins, Executive Chairman of Karmarama picked out the seven most common triggers of consumer backlash against brand marketing messages:

1. **Ad malaise.** A very large number of tweets expressed a generic dislike of ads or commercials. More extrapolated tweets referenced the ubiquity and overall frequency of ads, the length of the ad break or the context in which the ad appeared.
2. **Interruption.** Consumers recognize that ads help pay for content but they expect marketers to make an effort to make their marketing less irritating. The tweets analysed showed that interruption was most annoying during high intensity content such as action and drama shows or live sporting events. Interruptions to *The Walking Dead*were the most common references to a specific piece of content. Marketers need to make more of an effort to add value to the context in which they appear rather than simply interrupting it.
3. **Incongruity.** Too many brands are choosing the wrong moment and the wrong audience for their messages. It might be the right time but the wrong place or the right time but the wrong audience. Tweets complained about inappropriate ads, those that appeared when they watched TV with their parents or ads that were simply irrelevant. Constant retargeting was also heavily criticized.
4. **Deception.**The truth will set you free. Claims that consumers feel to be exaggerated really rile people; they expect brands to tell the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth. Thanks to social media it doesn’t take long for people to call out false or deceptive claims and drive negative engagement around the brand. Brands will gain credibility if they are honest and don’t airbrush the challenges they know they face and consumers know they face.
5. **Overkill**. Too many ad breaks and often ad breaks that are too long. Frequent interruption to a particular piece of content or media channel can create irritation with all commercials, regardless how often any individual message appears. This is combined with a rage against high frequency advertising. Even the best stories lose something in the retelling, particularly if you’ve already heard it seven or eight times before.
6. **Getting personal.**Online targeting that’s meant to be clever but is actually annoying. Deficient algorithms might be the industry’s biggest challenge: ads inappropriate to the content alongside which they feature, consumers clumsily targeted without heed for personal circumstances and sensitivities and numerous cases where individuals were targeted by certain brands even though they had already expressed negative sentiments about the brand in question online.
7. **Dearth in quality.** Too many ads are just poor and end up annoying consumers. Brands need to prioritise quality over quantity, meaningful engagement over frequency of exposure and work harder to test whether the ads are engaging and add value before they expose them to consumers.

**Stephan Loerke, WFA Managing Director**, commenting on the results said: “*The good news is that there are 3m positive tweets compared to 2m negative ones. But it’s the latter we should focus on as an industry. We are not blind to the fact that ads can be annoying, intrusive and even be seen to contribute to social problems. Project Reconnect tries to help marketers identify these problems and propose solutions so that they can better align their strategies and executions with what people want and expect of brands.”*

The research builds on existing work in the context of Project Reconnect in collaboration with We Are Social on what makes [for great brand marketing in the digital age](https://webmail.aba.com.br/exchweb/bin/redir.asp?URL=http://wfanet.us1.list-manage.com/track/click?u=964b640864bbe803668818263%26id=a8dd8d4057%26e=5d91dd8b67) in 2014, which identifies the new 4 “P”s of successful marketing in the digital age (people, purpose, principles and participation) and by Firefly Millward Brown with parents and teens in 2011 on [rules for marketing in the digital age](https://webmail.aba.com.br/exchweb/bin/redir.asp?URL=http://wfanet.us1.list-manage1.com/track/click?u=964b640864bbe803668818263%26id=fa8118ffa8%26e=5d91dd8b67).

**About Project Reconnect:**

Marketing can be a dirty word. Too often marketing falls short of what people and society want and expect from companies. At the World Federation of Advertisers (WFA), Project Reconnect champions what’s good about marketing and showcases what an impact it can have on the lives of the people we serve. We hope to raise the bar just a little in terms of some people’s perceptions of our industry. Follow us [@WFAReconnect](https://webmail.aba.com.br/exchweb/bin/redir.asp?URL=http://wfanet.us1.list-manage1.com/track/click?u=964b640864bbe803668818263%26id=616d7c8650%26e=5d91dd8b67) and [www.project-reconnect.com](https://webmail.aba.com.br/exchweb/bin/redir.asp?URL=http://wfanet.us1.list-manage2.com/track/click?u=964b640864bbe803668818263%26id=67a001c6d4%26e=5d91dd8b67)