



PRE-TESTING OF THE 2018 REMEMBRANCE ADVERTISING CREATIVE CONCEPTS

- Summary -

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Veterans Affairs Canada**

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SUMMARY

Commemoration is a key pillar of the Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC) mandate. In 2018, the sacrifices of Canada's Veterans will be honoured through commemorative events to highlight military milestones such as the 65th anniversary of the Korean War Armistice, the 10th anniversary of National Peacekeepers Day and the centennial of the end of the First World War - Canada's Hundred Days and its numerous battles (August 8–November 11).

A centerpiece for the upcoming Remembrance campaign is a new ad. The campaign will strategically apply a mix of traditional and digital marketing and advertising tactics, including video, to engage Canadians.

The goals of the 2018 campaign are to:

- Increase the perceived relevance of the message to Canadians about Canada's Veterans
- Increase awareness among Canadians of the contribution of Canada's Veterans in general and linked specifically to the 2018 military milestones
- Increase the number of Canadians engaged in remembrance activities

Three alternative conceptual approaches for a 30-second ad were developed in animatic format – *Our Freedom*, *Step up*, and *The Torch*.

Focus group research was undertaken to test the three alternative conceptual approaches for the ad, in order to:

- Assess the communication effectiveness of each alternative concept
- Identify which of the concepts is strongest overall in communicating the intended messages
- Identify possible revisions to each concept that might improve its communication effectiveness

Eight focus groups were conducted March 13-15, 2018, in Halifax, Toronto, Montreal and Calgary. In each city, the groups were split by age, with an 18-34 group and a 35 and over group.

This research was qualitative in nature, not quantitative. As such, the results provide an indication of participants' views about the topics explored, but cannot be statistically generalized to the full population. Qualitative research does, however, produce a richness and depth of response not readily available through other methods of research. It is the insight and direction provided by qualitative research that makes it an appropriate tool for exploring reactions to the Remembrance Campaign ad concepts.

Each of the three ad concepts had some positive features, and all three conveyed the message that it is important to continue to remember and honour Veterans and their sacrifices on Remembrance Day. That said, there were differences in other aspects of the ads that affect the overall communication effectiveness of each ad concept.

The Torch: Among participants who recognized the poem *In Flanders Fields*, this was emotionally powerful. The opening scene showing a poppy appearing on screen conveyed right away that the ad is about Remembrance Day. In Montreal, participants felt that the ad fit with their preexisting perceptions of "anciens combattants" as being those who served in the FWW and SWW.

There were several issues with *The Torch*, including:

- At least half the participants in the English sessions did not recognize *In Flanders Fields*, nor did any of the Montreal participants. For these participants, the ad concept had less emotional impact, and the link between the narration and the visuals was unclear: the voice-over was perceived to be sad and somber while the images were of smiling people and seemed unrelated to what was being said.
- While some felt the serious tone was appropriate for an ad about Veterans and Remembrance Day, others felt it was too sad, dark and gloomy.
- Some participants said that the ad made them feel guilty, which they found off-putting.

Step Up: This ad concept did fairly well among the older participants 35 and over, but less well among 18-34 year-olds. Many appreciated that the ad focused single mindedly on Veterans, and there was positive emotional connection to these images. Participants like that it showed not only FWW and SWW Veterans, but also Veterans of more recent conflicts.

Some issues with the ad concept included:

- There were a few participants in the English cities and in Montreal who perceived the ad to be more of a recruiting ad than an ad about remembrance.
- Quite a few participants, including those who generally favoured the ad concept, objected to the phrase “*We owe them everything we have as Canadians*”. There was a strong feeling that this was an overstatement: that is, unquestionably we owe Veterans a great deal but not “everything” – there have been many other forces at play that make Canada what it is today.
- The ad was perceived to underrepresent women who have served.
- Generally, the ad concept was perceived to be a traditional sort of ad for Remembrance Day and as a result it was not perceived as really conveying anything new.

Our Freedom: This ad concept did fairly well among both the younger age group (18-34), and the older age group. Through the theme of “freedom”, the concept was seen as making a direct connection to why we as individuals should appreciate and honour Veterans – it connects the present and future with their past actions. The message was perceived to be positive and uplifting. While Remembrance Day is in some ways a sad day, the message of this ad concept was also that it should be a day on which Canadians are not only thankful but also celebrate the choices and privileges we have. Participants in the 18-34 age group were more likely to perceive this ad as more relevant to them and more modern. Of the three ad concepts, *Our Freedom* seemed to be the one most likely to increase involvement in Remembrance Day activities, particularly among the younger 18-34 age group.

Some issues with the ad concept included:

- A main issue with the ad was that on first viewing, the purpose of the ad was unclear until the latter part of the ad, and thus the repeated use of the word “free” initially caused confusion.
- Some participants felt the ad needed to show more images of Veterans, and make a more direct visual connection between Veterans and the freedoms portrayed in the ad.

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