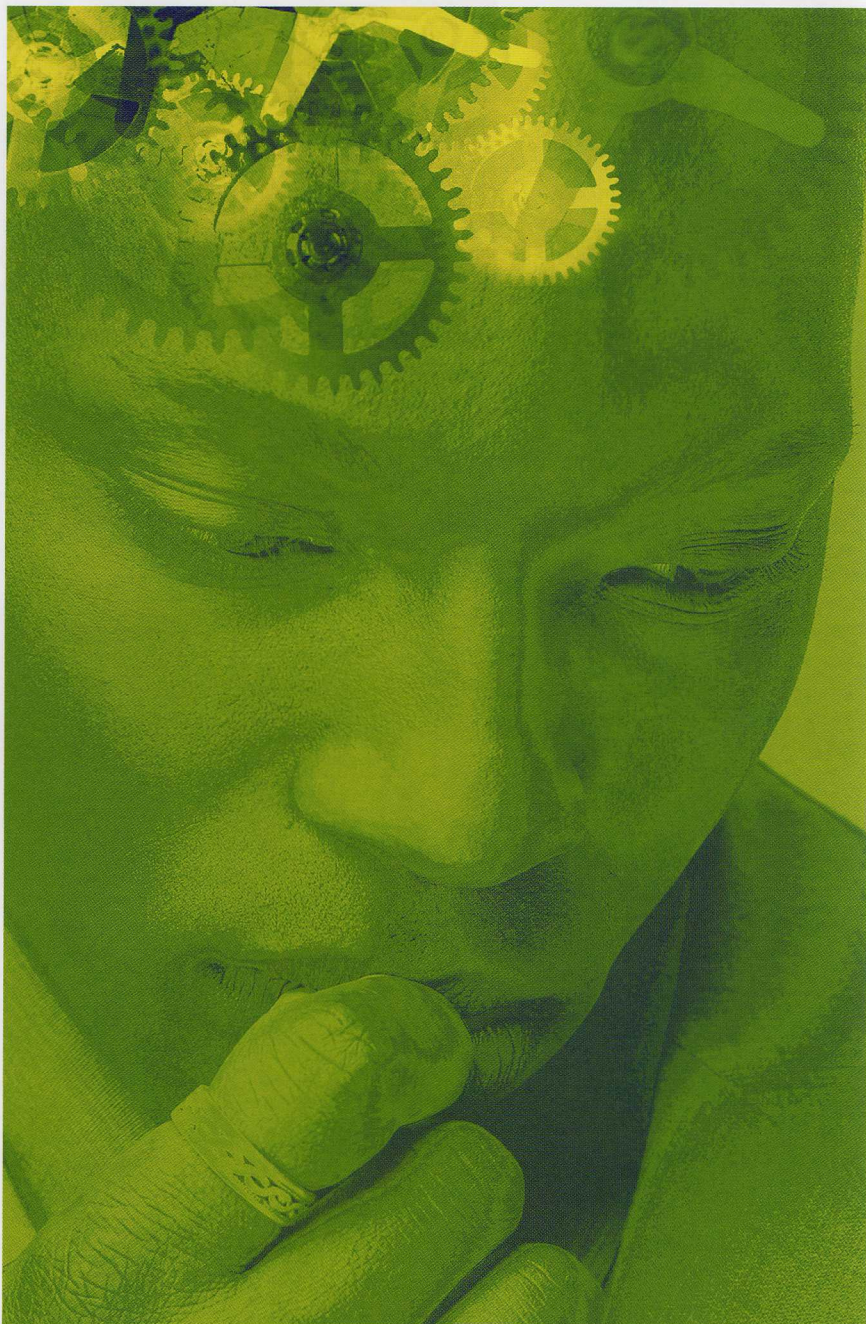


“Why does a consumer choose one brand over another?”

This is a key question marketers often struggle with, and information solicited from consumers frequently falls short of providing a decent answer.



Discovering the Feeling: Applying Neuroscience to Marketing

By Mark Weeks and Christine Williams

With the explosion of brands and product choices (perhaps linked to increasingly incomprehensible technology) consumers have more to process than they have time, inclination, or sometimes ability.

So how do they cope? Well, they are having to trust more and more to their gut feelings. Marketers have long recognised this and, particularly for brands that do not have any clear tangible advantages, have sought to directly infer emotional

benefits in their communication. Brand development is still driven by one part science and one part pure instinct. The battle has been to tip the balance in favour of science.

It is partly this that explains the ongoing fascination we have with

the area of Neuroscience, a branch of scientific and clinical knowledge dealing with the nervous system, particularly the brain.

Work done by neuroscientists, such as Prof. Antonio R. Damasio, has helped us develop a better un-

derstanding of how decisions are made. Damasio, currently the Director of the Institute for the Study of the Brain and Creativity at the University of Southern California, has been one of the leaders in this research and has proved that emotions play a central role in human decision making.

Whereas it was previously assumed that emotions were the antithesis of reason, today they are seen as the foundation upon which decisions, thought processes and actions are based.

In other words, emotions underpin reason making the rational and emotional inextricably linked. Therefore, the term "rational decision" does not mean an objective choice but rather a decision in favour of the maximum subjective expected benefit. For example, a perception of "good value" might be termed a rational criterion for choice. But owning things that are deemed to be "good value" is not normally an intrinsic life goal. "Good value" represents a judicious use of money, and not wasting money will increase our possibility of acquiring more things in the future, things that we believe will bring us

choice is remembered as good or bad and is stored as part of our future decision toolkit.

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the new buzzword in branding, resulting in the "Emotional Branding" concept and a proliferation of new ways of measuring emotion.

However it is important to understand that trying to distinguish between what's rational and emotional is totally subjective, and largely artificial, as the two are inseparable. Similarly, the importance of emotions in decision-making doesn't mean we should just randomly include emotions in the brand relationship or brand communication.

Dan Herman explains in his book, 'Creating Emotionally Significant Brands': "The popularity of "Emotional Branding" and of ESP

on how they think they will make them feel; including emotions, physical sensations and theoretical evaluations, then the implication for insight and branding is far more significant.

It means that consumers don't desire brands, but rather they de-

sired feeling that they are looking for in that given situation. And every brand signal must help shape the belief of how the consumer can expect to feel.

We also have to be truly customer-centric in the way we do market research by not focusing on what

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sire an outcome. Our focus therefore should be on discovering and understanding the feeling - not the brand.

It means that it is not just about what the brand says, projects or portrays (e.g. the brand is sexy). If this imagery is not internalised as desired feelings by consumers and linked to the brand (e.g. that they will look or feel sexy when using it), it will not affect their brand choice. In fact, simply looking at beliefs can lead to erroneous results. Two ads were tested for the same brand -- one of them set out to imply the feeling of confidence that would come from using the

consumers feel (i.e. think) about our brand but rather how they believe our brand will make them feel. We know that what a product has and what product does will probably affect how the consumer feels about the brand, however what is even more important is how every interaction with the brand molds the anticipation of feelings, as this is ultimately the deciding factor.

The difference is best illustrated by a simple example. Only 27% of respondents expressed a positive reaction to Porsche 911 drivers and yet, given the chance to be one, 89% said "it would be my lucky day". The disconnect between how the consumers felt about the brand and how they anticipated the brand would make them feel is glaringly obvious.

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It might be easy for a consumer to judge if an ad was inspiring, say, but it is far harder for them to know whether or not they were inspired. By focusing on the life event rather than on the brand, we can identify these emotions much more clearly.

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more good feelings. If this was not so, why would "good value" be any reason for doing anything at all? So, the concept of "good value" is only rational when we consider its emotional consequence.

When we make a decision our brains relate our perceptions back to previous experiences and their associated emotions. By assembling these "somatic markers" we can anticipate the feelings that we believe we will experience from each of the options. We will assess the possible outcomes and consequences of these available choices and make a decision based on our "gut feeling". In turn, each experience and

(Emotional Selling Proposition) is often based on the erroneous assumption that emotions can be simply 'glued' to brands by means of advertising. In other words, this kind of Emotional Branding is faking rather than making emotionally significant brands. It creates look-alikes. The symbolizations, the advertising, the packaging may evoke emotions and impress the untrained eye, but the brand will lack genuine feel appeal to its target consumers."

Herman's argument emphasises that there is more to it than just hoping consumers will replicate the emotions they see or feel towards the brand or its communications. If consumers choose brands based

brand. After exposure to each ad, there was no measured difference between the two groups in terms of their belief about the brand's ability to make you feel confident. The ad appeared to have failed on its objective. However, examining the feelings anticipated from using the brand revealed a significantly higher sense of confidence among the group who had been exposed to the ad that more accurately reflected the desired feeling.

As marketers, the real quest should be to develop and reinforce a "somatic marker" for your brand. The brand should become the shorthand in consumers' minds for the de-