

A new way of thinking about communication testing

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A ground-breaking new way of communications testing coming out of TNS is set to challenge the market research industry. Traditional methods of testing advertising effectiveness have remained largely unchanged since the very beginning of print media, with short-term sales-focused outcomes being measured to determine the success of an ad. This new approach urges the industry to look beyond short-term sales effects of ads, and to consider the long-term brand impact too. Neuroscience learnings about how brand memories are formed are an essential ingredient in measuring the long-term brand impact.

This challenge to look beyond sales-focused ad measures was outlined during the recent annual SAMRA conference, an industry platform where the latest thinking about marketing research and its applications in business, marketing, social and political decision-making are presented by local and international practitioners. Alida Jansen and Lorcan McHarry from TNS took Gold after presenting their paper, 'Beating the Brain Game - Communications success in the new era of Neuroscience' at the 2014 conference.

Traditional measures of advertising success (for example 'ad liking', 'brand linkage' and 'interest') reflect the immediate response to the creative execution and sales message, but it misses the bigger question about whether the message will land in the long-term memory, thereby updating (or building upon) existing beliefs and perceptions about the brand.

Over the last decade or so, a lot of Neuroscience research has gone into understanding how the human mind processes information. In today's cluttered media environment, consumers are bombarded with more messages than ever before. And the mind is ruthless when deciding which pieces of information are stored in our deepest, most personal memories. The so-called autobiographical memory is where our personal history is stored - and these memories have a profound impact on the automated choices we make on a daily basis. Brands that land up in this memory, as part of our 'personal history', have a greater chance of being bought.

Incorporating these learnings into communications research enables a more holistic view of how likely the message is to have a sustained brand impact. One key learning from Neuroscience comes from a paper written by Lisman and Grace in 2005¹. This paper identifies a critical pathway that the mind employs when processing new information and deciding whether to embed it into the autobiographical memory. New information must pass through three gateways in order for it to become a personal and deep memory: it needs to be novel in some way (different than expected), have some sort of deeply personal affect, and it must be relevant to the person's current goals.

TNS used these findings to inspire quantitative survey measures to reflect the three memory gateways. Testing these quantitative survey measures against Neuroscience results from an EEG test revealed that the combination of these quantitative surveys is able to reflect the truth of what happens in the brain. This means that the way in which we measure communications can (and should) be updated by learning from Neuroscience. A balanced view of both short-term sales effects, as well as long-term brand and memory effects, can provide a more holistic picture of communications success.

The challenge to the industry is clear: to truly embrace Neuroscience for all it has to offer, market research should update its methods and measures as new learnings about the brain become available. All too often, Neuroscience techniques seem separate from quantitative surveys, and are bolted on to more standard research methods to gain a detailed view of brain workings. However, Jansen and McHarry's paper challenges traditional communications measurement systems and actively seeks to fold Neuroscience learnings into quantitative surveys.

With TNS's new way of thinking about communications testing (built on both the short-term and long-term impact of ads), the company is able to offer a unique and insightful solution to its brand and communications clients. This is certainly an

important and essential step forward for the company and for the industry as a whole.

About TNS

TNS advises clients on specific growth strategies around new market entry, innovation, brand switching and stakeholder management, based on long-established expertise and marketleading solutions. With a presence in over 80 countries, TNS has more conversations with the world's consumers than anyone else and understands individual human behaviours and attitudes across every cultural, economic and political region of the world.

TNS is part of Kantar, one of the world's largest insight, information and consultancy groups.

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