

BOOK REVIEWS

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NEUROMARKETING: THE NEW CONSUMER SCIENCE

A LÓGICA DO CONSUMO: Verdades e mentiras sobre por que compramos (BUYOLOGY: Truth and lies about why we buy)

Martin Lindstrom. New York, USA: Doubleday, 2008. 241 p.

Ubiquitous advertising in the postmodern society is beginning to be questioned in the corporate environment, since organizations are still using traditional marketing strategies to understand new consumption habits, and continue to advertise without innovation or creativity. Understanding such ideas, as well as the reasons for, and implications of consumer decisions, requires a thorough scientific analysis. Based on these traits, branding guru Martin Lindstrom conducted a worldwide study on the neuromarketing phenomenon, which he skillfully describes in “Buyology: Truths and Lies About Why We Buy.”

In the first chapter, the author says that despite the investments made by governments in anti-smoking advertisements, the number of smokers and the statistics on tobacco-related diseases continue to grow, world over. Hence, the question is: “Why do people continue to smoke?” To find answers to this, Lindstrom conducted a worldwide survey with 32 smokers from several parts of the world. They answered questionnaires and interviews, and underwent functional Magnetic Resonance Imaging (fMRI). The study concluded that the warning signs on cigarettes did not discourage smoking, but activated the *nucleus accumbens* (the area of the brain called “the pleasure center”), encouraging smokers to consume more cigarettes. In other words, the cigarette pack warning pictures became excellent marketing tools for the tobacco industry.

The second chapter presents a striking feature in contemporary consumer behavior, that is, people’s forgetfulness when it comes to TV commercials. According to Lindstrom, such a lack of attention is a result of the lack of creativity on part of advertisers. Consequently, another question is posed, which is, “How effective is merchandising?” To answer this question, the author recruited 400 people and presented them with a sequence of brands (e.g., Coca-Cola) that were advertised on a TV show and random brands that were not advertised on the show. Finally, it was found that the subjects remembered the famous brands more vividly, than they remembered the random ones. Thus, merchandising works when the brand has a “meaning” and/ or role in the plot of a show.

In the third chapter, the author discusses mirror neurons, which are activated when an action is being carried out by one person and observed by another. To prove this concept, the author describes a study carried out with individuals who



By

LUCAS RODRIGO SANTOS DE ALMEIDA¹

lucasalmeidarecife@gmail.com

ORCID: 0000-0001-9203-1151

¹Faculdade Joaquim Nabuco, Recife, PE, Brazil

read descriptions of actions, such as “biting into a peach” and “picking up a pen.” Subsequently, when they watched videos of people carrying out such actions, the cortical regions of the brain of the respondents were activated.

In the fourth chapter, the author examines the role of subliminal advertising, which, since the 1950s, was popular as an “ambiguous and complex” technique, present in drawings, songs, films, etc. To prove the efficacy of subliminal advertising, the author recruited smokers to view subliminal images of the old American West (cowboys, deserts). After that, the smokers viewed explicit images of cigarette advertising (Marlboro and Camel logos). Finally, it was found that, by comparing brain reactions, *the nucleus accumbens* was more activated when smokers saw the subliminal images than when they saw the explicit brand images. This means that subliminal advertising works.

The fifth chapter addresses the “transcendent and liquid” aspect of postmodernity, in which the uncertainties and changes that permeate society are constant. According to Lindstrom, people use rituals, superstitions and beliefs to guide their lives. The author argues that the cultural aspect is inherent in popular superstition. For example, the number of car and aircraft accidents increases in some countries due to the fear brought about by the hype around Friday the 13th. This scenario emphasizes the “strength” of popular beliefs. In conclusion, the author emphasizes that the food rituals performed by brands and products “stick” much more (e.g., dipping the Oreo cookie in milk before eating it).

The sixth chapter explains the presence of religious elements in brands and products. Initially, it presents the marketing of land and water bottles, which, in addition to being profitable, adds values of sacredness, purity, and blessing by companies and consumers. In this chapter, Lindstrom performs an experiment with 65 men who were exposed to images of strong brands and religious images (e.g., Coca-Cola bottles and the Pope) in sequence. The study concluded that people’s emotions and/or reactions to strong brands are like emotions in the face of religious symbols, that is, people unconsciously create connections (respect, obedience, and order).

In the seventh chapter, Lindstrom conceptualizes the so-called somatic markers, which are brain shortcuts that people form through experiments, emotions, and reflections, to generate “sensible” decisions. According to the author, the markers create associations for their entire lives in people’s brains. As a result, advertisers use fear and memory to sell their products.

In the eighth chapter, the author criticizes visual advertising. In his opinion, it is mostly an ineffective method. Nevertheless, if it is used together with other senses, it may bring greater profits for companies. In a survey on brands and senses, Lindstrom exposed 20 individuals to images (including those of brands) and known fragrances, presenting them separately, first, and at the same time, later. After that, the study identified that images and fragrances become attractive when combined.

In the penultimate chapter, the author determines that modern organizations are unable to predict and identify how consumers will react to their products, such as video games, soft drinks, motorcycles, etc. This phenomenon is due to uncertainties in consumer behavior, as well as imprecise market research. As for the future, the author predicts that neuromarketing will be the main organizational tool, while traditional research methods will play secondary roles. Owing to its popularity, it will become affordable.

In the last chapter, on the centennial ubiquity of sex in advertising, Lindstrom questions its effectiveness, presenting research attesting that the sexual content “steals” the attention of the ad’s message. Thus, the answer to the permanence of sex in advertising is in the presence of the mirror neurons, in which both, women and men project onto the image of a female lingerie model and a male underwear model.

In conclusion, the author suggests that a shift in the organizational paradigm is necessary, since consumer behavior is unconscious. The work developed by Lindstrom is reflective and controversial. In Brazil, there is a modest increase in theoretical research on neuromarketing, while empirical research is scarce. As for the Brazilian market, for example, companies such as Airsense, specialized in olfactory marketing, have used flavorings for bakeries, movie theaters, and stores to encourage sales or the customers’ permanence at the point of sale (Azevedo, 2015).

Theoretically, it may be inferred that neuromarketing will assist organizations in developing their products, while it will also provide knowledge on consumer behavior through the human brain. From this perspective, this technology may generate ethical, cultural, and social consequences in the long term. Thus, more studies on its use must be carried out by Brazilian researchers, in their various areas of expertise.

REFERENCE

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