

Brain power

The subconscious can reveal the truth about a sponsorship's effectiveness - and how it can deliver better value - but only if you know the right way to go about it, says Daphne Mavroudi-Chocholi.



The challenge for marketers, in this age of heightened demand for ROI, is to deliver cost-effective results and potential savings – in both monetary and corporate reputation terms. So the ability to tease out in-depth data about a sponsorship's effectiveness before making a major investment has to be a no-brainer.

Neuromarketing offers a path to these potential savings, measuring the brain's subconscious responses to literally anything and everything that the five senses can take in. It can be defined as the application of advanced neurological knowledge for marketing purposes.

Ask – and the answer ye shall receive may be inaccurate

The brain's complexity is stunning: 100 billion neurons (brain cells) communicating in milliseconds to produce unmatched feats of perception and comprehension. Its versatility is equally astounding: constantly taking in and processing stimuli from all five senses, while keeping you upright and moving, talking, eating, laughing.

Harnessing this data, studying the brain, its structures and its functions, is the realm

of neuroscience. As the 21st century unfolds we are gaining understanding of the brain at an exponential rate. This has led to breakthroughs in learning how and where specific brain processes occur. Three of these neural functions are vital to marketing success, which is why they form our primary NeuroMetrics: Attention, Emotional Engagement, and Memory Retention.

Why are these three key? Because unless you are paying attention to a stimulus, you will not become emotionally engaged. If you are not emotionally engaged, you are not likely to remember it. And if you do not remember it, you are unlikely to purchase the brand, product, or service (or view the entertainment content) that is being offered.

The role of the subconscious

Your brain takes in about 11 million bits of data every second, but your conscious mind can only process about 40 bits of data a second. That is a selection ratio of only 0.000004%. So, you can see from this simple math that the vast majority of what you experience and respond to every second of your life is concentrated in your subconscious—NOT your conscious mind.

As human beings, we are designed not to be able to access our subconscious through our will. If we could, we would be paralysed by the sheer ocean of information flooding into our brains, and unable to comprehend, much less act, on it.

That's why traditional consumer research methods such as surveys and focus groups are fundamentally flawed in their ability to

tease out accurate and, therefore, reliably actionable information. The fundamental neurological fact is: when you ask someone to recall what they felt and what they remember about something they experienced, *in the process of formulating a response the brain actually alters the original data it recorded at the time it experienced the stimulus.*

So, all good intents aside, respondents to conventional consumer research techniques simply cannot supply reliably accurate answers. What marketers get through articulated consumer responses is not necessarily what the brain initially registered and responded to. When significant sums are going to be committed to launch a new brand, product, package

design, ad campaign, or sponsorship, that uncertainty poses risks.

Robin Wight, the president of Engine and the author of *"The Peacock's Tail and the Reputation Reflex: The Neuroscience of Art Sponsorship"*, expressed his view on the subject this way:

"...If you ask people a question in a focus group research, they will answer from the front of their brain, whereas the middle of their brain makes the decision. So, that is a big challenge and difference, it is very hard to get people (to) change their mind. There is a new learning from brain science in which we understand the challenges, some ways to overcome (this) and also some new ways to measure advertising."

We listen to the brain

The brain can tell you the truth about what it experiences. But you must 'listen' to it at the split second it registers and responds to a stimulus.

At NeuroFocus we use EEG (electroencephalography) technology to measure brainwave activity across the full brain. It is the most widely-used technology in leading neuroscience laboratories worldwide – and has been for several

decades.

EEG sensors, placed around the scalp, capture the minute electrical signals that the brain inherently produces. We apply high-density arrays of them to capture brain activity at up to 2,000 times a second per sensor. Combined with sophisticated eye-tracking technology, these measurements deliver the most comprehensive and temporally-accurate picture of how the

brain responded to anything that the five senses experience.

The sheer volume of data collected is massive. A typical neuromarketing study of a 30-second TV advert will encompass 5 billion data points; and the computational processing power that we employ to cleanse, process, and analyse that ocean of information will total 40 billion data points.

Fading tickers and flaming backgrounds

A study we did for ESPN shows how neuromarketing can cut through the complexities of corporate sponsorships and pinpoint which specific elements are most effective.

The cable TV sports network tasked us with discovering how effective the on-air sponsorships of two different car companies were for a basketball game

telecast, in both a pre-game environment and during the actual game itself. It also wanted, for comparative reasons, to know how well sponsorships for two other companies performed on a competitive cable network, during another basketball game.

Each of nine sponsorship elements were tested and analysed across all seven of

NeuroFocus' NeuroMetrics. The combined Primary scores gave us an overall Effectiveness number, and we also derived three additional metrics from them: Marketplace Performance Indicators of Purchase (or viewing) Intent, Novelty, and Awareness.

During the pre-game segment, measurements were made of nine specific

on-screen executions on ESPN where the sponsor's name and/or logo were presented during the program. A total of seven separate executions were measured on the competing cablecaster's program.

We compiled an overall assessment of the successes and 'missed opportunities' for each of these program sponsorship elements, and delivered a final summary of evaluations and recommendations for both

the pre-game and half-time programs. To show just how specific those recommendations can be, the following are a sample:

ESPN

- Alter the lighting around the sponsor's name and reduce the flame/smoke to avoid the subconscious 'visual masking' effect.
- Render the sponsor's name in the ticker title in pop-out format.
- Reduce the static logos on the desk front to just two.
- Change the color of the sponsor's name in text for the pop-out effect.
- Avoid multiple moving elements as they create a subconscious 'change blindness' effect, causing the sponsor's logo to be ignored.
- Add rotating/whirling animation to the sponsor's logo on the desk front.
- Reduce the number of animated monitors to one set, and eliminate the constant motion on the rear monitors to prevent 'repetition blindness'.

Competitive Cable Channel

- Separate the sponsor's logo by shifting it to the left, while moving the semantic content to the right—the brain prefers this visual layout.
- Revise the number of visual elements associated with the sponsor's name and the show title from 5-6 to just 2, to improve subconscious perception.
- Align more of the audio intro with the video to improve audio-visual synchrony, which the brain seeks and expects.
- Reduce the speed of the animation for the sponsor's logo.
- Insert vertical separation between the sponsor's title and the scores.
- Occlude the sponsor's logo in the background slightly to improve subconscious effectiveness.

Value Delivered

Clearly, attempting to capture viewers' split-second responses to each of these sponsorship elements after the fact, through surveys or focus groups, would be an exercise in futility—if not a direct road to a nervous breakdown for the poor researcher.

In contrast, neurological testing (our

preferred phrase for neuromarketing) captured those precise responses at literally the instant that viewers' brains were reacting to the stimuli, in such depth and detail as to make the results truly illuminating.

For ESPN, the ability to document to its advertisers the varying degrees of effectiveness of different on-air

sponsorship executions delivered a unique competitive advantage. For advertisers, this ability to measure a matrix of sponsorship applications provides greater understanding of the effectiveness of each element and the sponsorship as a whole and greater control over and accountability for sponsorship outlays.

Neuromarketing and ambush marketing

A vexing problem – or an opportunity, depending on which side of the issue you're on – is so-called 'ambush marketing'. How effective is it for companies who practice it? How damaging is it to companies who are authorised sponsors?

Neuromarketing is ideally and uniquely suited to tease out accurate answers, because consumers' responses are captured at the early precognitive stage, before the answers they give to

conventional forms of marketing research are distorted by factors such as education, language, ethnic and cultural influences, and more. As the London Olympics approach, ambush marketing is an issue at the forefront for sponsors and non-sponsors alike.

Neurological testing can decipher the degree to which consumers identify, at the deep subconscious level, a brand with an event. The same sophisticated

methodologies can be used to evaluate the effectiveness of a celebrity spokesperson, or the relative effectiveness of sponsorship messaging across multiple media platforms – a core aspect of many modern sponsorship programs.

To explore those aspects, we conducted internal studies on sponsorships for both the Beijing and the Vancouver Olympic Games.

For Beijing's summer Games we wanted to learn:

- Which specific sponsor brand attributes did viewers associate with the Olympics overall?
- How effective – or not – were specific sponsor and non-sponsor adverts that aired within the Games? Were these adverts primed by the Olympics content?
- Did adverts featuring Olympic-specific creative content fare better with viewers than non-Olympic-themed executions? Or vice versa?

For the Vancouver Games we sought to discover:

- How effective was Visa's corporate sponsorship, executed across three different platforms: traditional TV, the Internet (website), and social media (Facebook page)?
- How effective was the celebrity voice-over for the campaign?
- How well were key marketing messages and core brand attributes conveyed across these multiple platforms?

The results of these studies provided a deep dive into the core dynamics of major sponsorships, for different categories of client companies, in different mediums, with different individual elements.

Conventional research methods cannot

define sponsorship effectiveness in this manner, with this accuracy. They leave unanswered questions. Neuromarketing, by contrast, gets to the heart of a sponsorship because it measures what people don't say. And why would a

sponsor want anything less?

Daphne Mavroudi-Chocholi

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