

I believe that brand measurement needs to become less rational

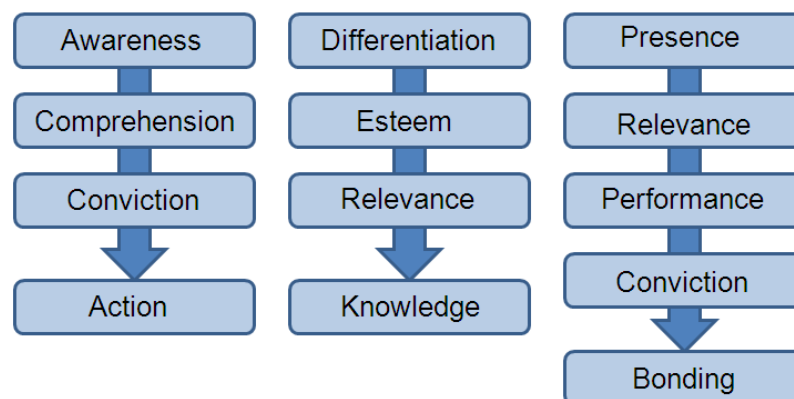
I believe that brand experience and affect play a larger role in consumer decision making than cognitive factors, and that as a result, we will have to embrace new 'irrational' measures of brand strength.

Rational models lead to rational measures

*"it is impossible to provide accountability by answering the 'what happened' question alone. The how and why question inevitably intrudes, they are Siamese twins."*¹

It is impossible to talk about brand measurement without first considering how brands are built, and how communications work to build them. Economic measures ultimately tell us how a brand is performing, but not why it is performing. A whole host of intermediate hard and soft measures are needed to gauge brand health, and to help us develop it. A model of how communications work is essential before you start developing metrics.

Traditional metrics used to assess brand health have their roots in traditional views of how brands are built. These traditional views tend to be variations of persuasion models that rely on moving the consumer through a series of logical stages^{2 3 4}:



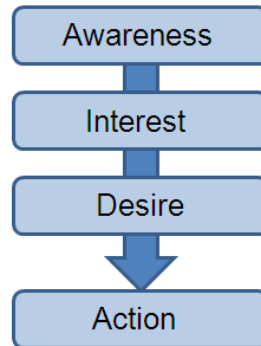
¹ 'Is your advertising working? – IPA Diploma reading list 3.1.2

² DAGMAR (1961)

³ Y&R Brand Asset Valuator (1997)

⁴ WPP Brand Dynamics Pyramid (1999)

The role of brand communication within these models is therefore to gain and hold attention long enough to communicate the required information, summed up in the AIDA model:



Inevitably, communication evaluation methodologies have been developed focussing on rational measures⁵. The basic assumption, that brands rationally persuade consumers to buy, permeates all levels of brand measurement, from brand health to communications evaluation.

The irrational human

*"This [persuasion] family of models is flawed on two accounts, first it ignores experience, second, the brain just does not work that way."*⁶

It's interesting that definitions of what a brand is⁷ allow for non-rational elements, whilst traditional brand models seem to focus purely on rational measures. It seems that we prefer to measure what we can, rather than what we should.

Proof that human decision making is essentially irrational is extensive, however, this is not the focus of this paper. I would direct the reader to the references at the end of this paper for further reading in this area.^{8 9 10 11}

Irrational models

Ambler's MAC¹² model provides an alternative to rational persuasion models. This model dictates that decisions are first made based on prior experience

⁵ Such as Millward Brown's link test measures: 'message take out', 'ease of understanding', 'believability', 'relevance', 'branding', 'persuasion'.

⁶ Ambler, T (1998b) via McDonald, C. (2003). Is your advertising working?

⁷ "Brands are simply a collection of perceptions in the mind of the consumer". 'What is brand equity anyway?', Paul Feldwick, 2002

⁸ 50 years using the wrong model, Paul Feldwick and Robert Heath, Annual MRS Conference, 2007

⁹ Field, P., Binet, L. (2008) 'Marketing in the era of accountability', WARC/IPA.

¹⁰ Damasio, A, (1996) Descartes Error: Emotion, Reason and the Human Brain

¹¹ Tropicana IPA Effectiveness award winner (2006)

(memory), if we have no prior experience, then we revert to emotional judgements (affect), and finally, if we have no salient emotions, we revert to cognition. Likewise, Hall's PEM (perception, experience, memory) model also prioritises experience and memory over cognition.

It is important to note that these models do not make consistent predications. As our experiences, memories and emotions towards a brand change, so will our behaviours. It is this constant state of flux that makes our decisions seem irrational, what we really mean is our behaviour is unpredictable given cognitive factors alone.

Measuring what's in people's heads

Directly measuring what's in people's heads represents a problem, memory recall is dependent on context,¹³ which has broad implications for the way we probe it:

"Many researchers quickly become aware of the distorting effects questionnaire structure can have on data. But few realise that memory itself can be altered by the way we ask questions."

Measuring affect also presents certain difficulties; emotions are by their nature, subconscious forces¹⁴ which make them very hard to measure indeed:

"Asking people to describe or reflect on their emotional states is beset by a basic methodological contradiction: How do we consciously access and explain something which by definition is unconscious and irrational?"¹⁵

To get at our unconscious memories and feelings, one might turn to neuroscience. However, whilst neuroscience has provided corroborating evidence for the role of memory, experience and emotion present in both the MAC and PEM models,^{16 17 18} it fails in telling us what is actually in consumers' heads.

There are no easy direct methods of getting at the memories and emotions that consumers' hold in their minds. I believe that brand measurement should

¹² Heath, R (2001). The hidden power of advertising

¹³ Le Doux (1998). The Emotional Brain.

¹⁴ Laybourne, P. and Lewis, D. (2005). Neuromarketing: The future of consumer research? *Admap* 461, May 2005.

¹⁵ Penn, D. (2005). Brain Science, That's interesting, but what do I do about it? *Market Research Society Conference*, 2005.

¹⁶ Ambler, T. and Burne, T. (1999) *The impact of affect on memory of advertising*. *Journal of Advertising Research* 39(2), pp 25-34.

¹⁷ McClure, S. M. et al (2004). *Neural correlates of behavioural preference for culturally familiar drinks*. *Neuron*, 44(11), pp 379-387

¹⁸ Plassman, H., Ambler, T., Braeutigam, S., Kenning, P. (2007). What can advertisers learn from neuroscience? *International Journal of Advertising* 26(2)

radically change to assess changes consumers' subjective memories, experiences and emotions.

Irrational Measures

Measuring changes brand experience:

*"The first trial is of other marketing endeavours...with advertising focussing on corroborating and re-enforcing product experience."*¹⁹

Changing consumer's subjective memories and experiences are key factors in the 'irrational' models, and this is certainly something a brand can achieve.

From medicine to psychological experiments to 'the Pepsi challenge', there are plenty of examples of brand effect on subjective sensory experience, e.g. taste. Furthermore, brain imaging experiments show that brain areas associated with memory are activated during strongly branded product experiences, but not during more weakly branded product experiences.

Comparing consumer's subjective impressions of a brand with objective measures will provide an indirect measurement of the extent to which marketing efforts have changed the consumer's experience of the brand. Some examples of this approach might include:

- Sensory experience enhancements, as measured by blind vs. branded sensory evaluation (taste/touch/smell)
- Social experience enhancements as measured by with vs. observed measures of confidence such as body language and discourse analysis²⁰

If needed, brain imaging could be used to verify that the brains memory systems are activated in the test vs. control conditions to prove the role of experience.

Measuring changes brand affect:

We have a tendency to describe brand affect, or emotional response, with incredible specificity. However, the evidence for the degree of variation in emotional brand response is weak, and instead only seems to vary on valence alone. This may explain why measures such as 'likability' and 'preference' have some predictive validity, they measure a general liking for a brands. However, as we have seen, measuring affect directly has complications.²¹

¹⁹ Brands and Advertising (IPA Diploma reading list)

²⁰ Hall, B (2002). A new model of advertising effectiveness. *Journal of advertising research*, 42(2).

²¹ Hall suggests indirect methods that assess autonomic responses such as skin conductance, eye movement and facial expression. However, these direct physical examinations are clearly outside of everyday life, and so are subject to context effects.

I believe affect can be measured by breaking it down to constituent components that can be each measured in terms of differences between the consumer's subjective feelings and objective reality. 'Value' and 'desirability' have both been highlighted as predictive measures of brand success,²² I believe that this is because taken together, they are correlates of brand affect.

The evolutionary role of affect has been theorised to aid us in making decisions, providing a stop/go response to stimulus. This is achieved by the analysis of risk and reward.

In brand context, risk is equated to value, it is the relative financial risk of choice compared to other options. This 'reference dependence bias', i.e. the need for relative comparisons, has been observed in monkeys as well as humans, highlighting the evolutionary role of perceived relative value.²³ Measuring perceived relative price is nothing new²⁴, but by comparing this to actual relative price will give an indication of the consumer's subjective opinion of financial risk vs. an objective measure. A subjectively 'smaller than life' assessment of risk would provide the first key factor of brand affect.

In a brand context, desirability can be equated to popularity. Again, this links back to the evolutionary bias that says 'if everyone has it, it must be good'. Communications strategies that focus on brand fame take advantage of this bias, and have been found to be very successful. Measuring consumer perceptions of popularity/fame, and comparing these to actual measurements, will provide an indication of brand desirability. This might be achieved by asking consumers 'how many people out of 10 do you think use this brand to establish a consumer perception of popularity, this can be compared to actual popularity (penetration used as proxy). Desirability, a subjectively 'larger than life' assessment of popularity, would provide the second key factor of brand affect.

Perceived brand value (risk) compared to perceived desirability (popularity) would provide indirect, and measurable correlates for brand affect.

Conclusions:

What we choose to measure depends on how we think brands work. If you believe that brands operate via persuasion, then there are a whole host of existing rationally biased metrics that can be used to assess brand strength. However, if you believe as I do, that brand experience and affect play a larger role in consumer decision making than cognitive factors, we will have to embrace new

²² Butterfield, L. (2003). Advalue: Twenty ways advertising works for business

²³ http://www.economist.com/blogs/freeexchange/2009/10/monkey_economics_research_of_t.cfm

²⁴ Shaw, R. and Merrick, D. (2005) Marketing Payback: Is Your Marketing Profitable?

'irrational' measures of brand strength. I believe that the 'irrational' contribution of brands is exactly what we work so hard to create, and hence should be measured. Finally, all of the measures mentioned have also been linked to brand financial value, these measures are not just pop psychology, they are predictive of a brands financial success²⁵.

Tim Jones Planner

²⁵ Buzzel, D. (1987). The PIMMS principles, linking strategy to performance.