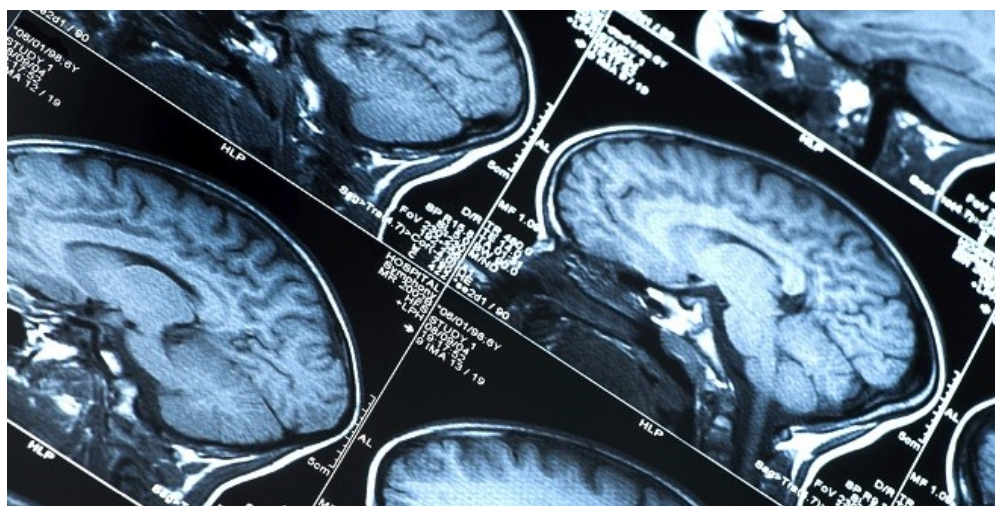


How neuromarketing can unlock cross-cultural understanding

12th December, 2014 by [Gemma Calvert](#)



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Professor Gemma Calvert of the Institute for Asian Consumer Insight discusses new techniques that could be key to the future of global brands.

Asia is fast becoming the centre of gravity for big consumer brands. By 2016, Asia will account for a quarter of the consumer goods market and 40% of total consumer growth. In the bid to dominate and maintain market share, brands compete ferociously to attract and maintain the rising tide of middle class consumers in key markets including China, Indonesia, Japan and India. Vital to their success is the ability of these global brands to communicate their unique assets in an increasingly cluttered market environment and cut through the morass of cross-cultural differences that shape consumer behaviour. Yet all too often, these prevailing cultural norms are impenetrable by traditional market research methods, and marketers are left scratching their heads as to why new products, campaigns and other marketing initiatives fail despite millions of dollars invested in consumer insight.

It is now well established that as much as 90% of our behaviour is driven by emotions and motivations that operate below our conscious awareness. These so-called 'System 1' or 'implicit' brain processes are now accessible via a range of neuromarketing techniques including MRI scanning, cap electrode EEG, biometrics, facial decoding software, eyetracking and implicit association tests. Of these, web-based methods such as implicit testing, facial decoding and eye-tracking, which offer scalability, practicality (no equipment necessary) and fast, cost-effective solutions, are beginning to dominate the rapidly expanding neuromarketing industry.

Implicit association testing is one of the most established approaches now at the forefront of cross-cultural market research. These tests use online respondent panels and capture consumers' 'gut instinct responses' at timescales too fast for the conscious brain to respond and influence the outcome. They are now being used to predict the likely acceptability of new products, brand extensions and packaging designs, as well as measuring advertising effectiveness, the ease with which shoppers can identify a brand on shelf, and what is really stored in



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their heads about a brand's perceived benefits and assets. By acting in the brain as shortcuts to expected rewards, powerful brands will increasingly become guides to aid consumers through the unfeasibly large choice of purchasing options, winning advocates by simplifying and enhancing the shopping experience.

Many implicit association tests are language agnostic, exploiting images rather than words, and are able to expose individual differences in consumer attitudes, stored brand memories and product preferences. In a study carried out in Malaysia, a global supplier of personal care products commissioned Neurosense to identify which of several designs communicated the concept of the modern Muslim woman. Where explicit qualitative failed to elicit a clear winner (partly due to this group's discomfort about talking about such concepts), respondents' implicit reactions (obtained in less than a second) to the different illustrations of women produced a clear statistically significant frontrunner and gave clear insights into which features of the design elicited different emotional attributes.

Beyond the marketplace, governments and non-profit organisations are also gaining greater insight into how best to effect behaviour change, to encourage sustainable choices and connect at an emotional level with the world's growing populations. In a study using functional MRI that we conducted in connection with the French Government's initiative on anti-smoking behaviour change, cigarette warning labels designed to put smokers' off or make them think twice, was found in reality to stimulate the brain areas involved in nicotine addiction to a greater extent than images of the same packs without these warnings – a counterintuitive insight that was not revealed by focus groups or explicit surveys.

Professor Gemma Calvert is Founder of Neurosense and Senior Fellow of the Institute for Asian Consumer Insight.

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