I THINK, THEREFORE I AM

In 1637, the French mathematician and philosopher Rene Descartes wrote Discourse on the Method and famously declared, “I think, therefore I am.” In his discourse, Descartes, credited with being the Father of Modern Philosophy, separates thinking, rationality and the capacity for language from the body. Furthermore, reasoning is completely detached from emotion (Skirry, 2005).

This struck a chord with many and whether he intended it or not, his proclamation transformed thinking and set a wave in motion in the field of science. For nearly three centuries afterward, philosophers, psychiatrists, neuroscientists and most individuals concerned with intellectual matters followed Descartes’ lead and focused on rationality and the cognitive aspects of brain functioning – all while leaving emotion out of the conversation.

There were few thinkers such as Charles Darwin, William James, Carl Lange and Sigmund Freud who tried to tackle the understanding of emotion and its role in decision-making. For the most part, however, the vast majority turned a cold shoulder to emotion research (Damasio, 1994).

SHIRTING THE FOCUS TO WHAT REALLY MATTERS

Years later, one of the world’s top neuroscientists, Antonio Damasio, chronicled the lives of some of his patients in his novel, Descartes’ Error: Emotion, Reason, and the Human Brain, to explore the relationship between emotion and reasoning. The story of his patient, Elliot, is one of his most well known cases. Elliot suffered from ventromedial frontal lobe damage as a result of a tumor and subsequent surgery. Prior to the surgery, he was a successful businessman, devoted husband and father.

However, he reported to Damasio that as a result of the surgery, his life was crumbling before his eyes. While he was still intelligent, Elliot had lost all motivation. His personal and professional life suffered greatly. He and his wife divorced and he could no longer hold a job. He had become incapable of making decisions. “The tragedy of this otherwise healthy and intelligent man was that he was neither stupid nor ignorant, and yet he acted often as if he were. The machinery for his decision-making was so flawed that he could no longer be an effective social being” (Damasio, 1994, 38).

What was the cause of Elliot’s lost motivation and inability to make decisions? It turns out that Elliot’s lack of emotion crippled his decision-making. When the part of the brain that houses the ability to feel, to have emotions, is damaged, reasoning becomes incredibly difficult. Even simple choices like choosing what to eat at a restaurant or making an appointment are riddled with frustration and endless deliberation.

Gerald Zaltman, a Professor at Harvard University and author of several publications focused on human thought, explains, “In reality, people’s emotions are closely interwoven with reasoning processes. Although our brains have separate structures for processing emotions and logical reasoning, the two systems communicate with each other and jointly affect our behavior. Even more important, the emotional system—the older of the two in terms of evolution—typically exerts the first force on our thinking and behavior. More important still, emotions contribute to, and are essential for, sound decision making” (Zaltman, 2003, 8).

Damasio’s research and the work of Zaltman as well as others including Joseph Le Doux (The Emotional Brain, 1996), Malcolm Gladwell (Blink, 2005), Daniel Kahneman (Thinking, Fast and Slow, 2011) have made it clear that a blind eye can no longer be given to emotions. The paradigm has shifted and the power of emotions and its impact on reasoning and decision-making is at center stage.

THE POWER OF EMOTIONS AND THE IMPACT ON MARKETING

There is something very compelling about Morton Salt – not just because Hermann said so, but because consumer behavior shows it. Walk into a local grocery store and find yourself in front of the wall of salt. You’ll see numerous brands – from private label to specialty brands, all at varying price points. Salt is salt. It’s a commodity. One brand of regular table salt is not better than another. Yet, Morton Salt rules over the rest. Even though it costs an average of thirty percent more than other brands, consumers continue to reach for Morton. In fact, the brand has consistently maintained about a fifty percent share of the market in the United States (Kompella and Travis, 2014, 132).

Brands like Morton Salt are able to maintain an irrational edge because as the social sciences prove, consumer behavior isn’t purely rational. If it were, purchasing salt would be a game of finding the brand with the cheapest price point and Morton, the more expensive brand, would be just another brand in the wall of salt at the grocery store.

For marketers, understanding how consumers make decisions and really feel about a particular brand is critical to achieve business objectives and secure success. A product, service, or worse, an entire brand can fail if it doesn’t meet the emotional needs of consumers.
For marketers, understanding how consumers make decisions and really feel about a particular brand is critical to achieve business objectives and secure success.

Marketers must essentially become social scientists, determined to unlock deeper human truths and the underlying motivations that drive behavior. By leveraging principles of neuroscience and psychology, marketers will not only equip themselves with the tools necessary to serve their consumers better, they will create a lasting connection with them. It’s that human connection, built on trust, which keeps consumers coming back for more.

This may seem daunting. How do marketers become social scientists? How do they navigate the emotional landscape of consumer minds? What are the risks? Can a team of marketing professionals be convinced to look past traditional market research methods and enter the world of research that traverses through the emotional terrain in order to discover relevant human truth? Is success really attainable?

The following demonstrates how the team behind the 45-year-old snack brand, Pringles, solved a great challenge utilizing emotional research and was subsequently able to secure global success for years to come. The objective of showcasing Kellogg’s challenge and steps to finding a solution is to communicate a simple fact – the most important ingredient to ensure new heights of success for your brand and business are human truths – those deeply embedded values that link all humans together.

LEVERAGING THE KNOWN: EVERGREEN CAMPAIGNS

Kellogg strives to create global commercial innovations that are successful year after year. The company refers to these types of campaigns as “Evergreen Campaigns” because they continue to be fruitful for a long period of time. An example of this is its holiday campaign for the Pringles brand, which Kellogg has been leveraging for nearly ten years. Every year, since launch, the return on investment has been above average. From a business perspective, these types of campaigns provide marketing efficiencies through global creative usage. More importantly, an Evergreen Campaign allows Pringles to connect with consumers and be part of their story.

The Pringles team in Europe had found a similar gem. Through activations at concerts and festivals and fun giveaway of Pringles “Speaker Cans,” their local summer commercial innovation had created a cult-like following. For the Summer Campaign to be successful across regions, the team was ready for the challenge. All of these concerns were legitimate. The team conversed. There were debates. The pros and cons were weighed. After thoughtful and careful deliberation, a verdict was reached.

The team was ready for the challenge.

NEVER ASSUME ANYTHING

Global consumer research and the success of the Summer Campaign in Europe led the Pringles team to believe that summer was a special time for consumers. Why is summer so unique to consumers?

Why does summer have such a distinct place in the hearts of consumers?

Everyone has experienced summer and it would be easy to assume why people love it. The sun shines bright and the days are longer. Summer means no school and relaxed schedules. There are the barbecues, pool parties, the beach, outdoor fun – the list is endless.

However, if the team were to assume they know about summer simply because they have experienced it, they would fall victim to the Dunning-Kruger Effect. As David McRaney, author of You Are Not So Smart explains, “You are generally bad at estimating your competence.” We often think we know something, when in actuality we have so much to learn (McRaney, 2011, 78-81). In an article titled, We Are All Confident Idiots, David Dunning writes, “In many cases, incompetence does not leave people disregarded, perplexed or cautious. Instead, the incompetent are often blessed with an inappropriate confidence, buoyed by something that feels to them like knowledge” (Dunning, 2014).

There was too much at stake for the Pringles team to assume anything.

For the Summer Campaign to be successful across regions, a deeper analysis of summertime was necessary. The team desired to uncover the emotional and psychological architecture of summer – the specific elements that make the season special for consumers. Where does that architecture originate from?

Then we could ask the important question: what, if any, connection is there to Pringles?

In every sense of the word, this quest for answers was an exploration. Research could very well show that summer is too diverse of a season or that there isn’t a link between the season and Pringles. Quite frankly, anxieties were running high, but the team prepared to accept whatever was to be uncovered. Gaining trust with consumers requires knowing what resonates with them and delivering on that. One of the worst mistakes brand ambassadors can make is trying to force a campaign that does not resonate with consumers.

CHOOSING A PARTNER

With objectives clearly outlined and expectations set, the Pringles team decided to partner with Brandtrust, a market research and strategy firm based in Chicago, Illinois. The firm specializes in utilizing principles from the social sciences to uncover deeper human truths that can be leveraged to solve a wide array of business objectives.

This would be the Pringles team’s first time working with Brandtrust, and of course, with all “first time’s” – there were risks involved.

• The team was turning away from what is known to them in regards to market research and trying out an entirely different methodology – Emotional Inquiry – in hopes of finding insights that are deeper and better.

• Choosing a partner is personal just as much as it is professional. Marketers need to be able to trust that their partner will deliver because their team is relying on it. In many cases, a marketer’s job and reputation can depend on it.

• As agency partners would be involved in the research process, there was an expectation that the insights would provide the creative teams with inspirational fodder to work with.

Despite these concerns, the Pringles team believed that if there was a partner who could push their thinking and move them beyond the surface of what they already knew, it was Brandtrust.

ENTERING THE WORLD OF EMOTIONAL INQUIRY

To understand the validity of Brandtrust’s research and the power of Emotional Inquiry, it helps to understand the principles that serve as the foundation for everything the company does.

Market research is intended to uncover and assist in understanding consumer wants and needs. However, many of the traditional techniques and methodologies utilized in market research fall short because they do not employ the tools necessary to accurately identify the emotional needs of the consumer.

Furthermore, “ninety-five percent of thinking takes place in our nonconscious minds - that wonderful, if messy, stew of memories, emotions, thoughts, and other cognitive processes we’re not aware of or that we can’t articulate” (Zaltman, 2003, 9). The Nobel Laureate and Father of Behavioral Economics, Daniel Kahneman, adds “When you are asked what you are thinking about, you can normally answer. You believe you know what goes on in your mind, which often consists of one conscious thought piling in an orderly way to another conscious thought. But that is not the only way the mind works, nor indeed is it the typical way. Most impressions and thoughts arise in your conscious experience without you knowing how they got there.”

Studies confirm people are hard wired to make up answers to questions with great conviction even though we may not have the slightest idea what the answer really is.
More often than not, market research methodologies simply cannot access the unconscious minds of consumers because when asking questions about a brand, it is virtually impossible to get accurate responses. The social sciences show us that the very act of posing a question causes the mind to go into “What is the right answer?” mode, preventing someone from providing an accurate picture of why they feel the way they do.

From childhood, people have been trained that they will be rewarded for positive behavior (providing the right answer) and punished for negative behavior (answering the question incorrectly). It is for this reason that research entrepreneurs will endeavor to get the answer right or please the interviewer before they will examine their own feelings for an answer that is truly correct. The phenomenon is known as priming and as marketers, it can lead us astray if we’re not careful.

Psychological studies have confirmed that people will make up answers to questions even when they don’t really know what the answer is.

Emotional Inquiry is a psychoanalytic technique that combats the limitations of traditional market research by leveraging the social sciences. Through one-on-one interviews, researchers guide respondents through relaxation and visualization exercises. As respondents visualize specific moments in time, researchers ask a series of probes to further understand how they feel as they recall the times, places and people involved. This process unearths the mental models embedded in memories and elicits the deep emotions and sensory impressions that shape consumer beliefs and motivations regarding their experiences. Through Emotional Inquiry, marketers are able to uncover the subconscious emotional motivators that are not apparent with more superficial research methods.

**SOMETHING SPECIAL ABOUT SUMMER**

Emotional Inquiry interviews to understand summer and the possible connection to Pringles, kicked off in April 2014 in Chicago, Illinois and Phoenix, Arizona.

Why only conduct research in the United States, versus globally?

It made sense for the Pringles team to pilot the research in North America. The North American brand team and two agency partners – attended research.

Emotional Inquiry is unlike any other market research methodology. Sitting in the dark backroom, listening to the researcher guide respondents through a series of visualizations seems like a therapy session at first. The front room has two big, comfy leather love seats. The respondent is asked to close their eyes – as this not only reduces priming, but also scientifically helps people visualize better. They can literally see the colors, hear the sounds, and feel the very same emotions they did in that moment. It’s as if they are reliving their memories before your very eyes. The researcher, trained in the social sciences, speaks slowly and gently – as to relax the respondent and build rapport with them.

It would be a lie to say that there wasn’t a bit of a temptation to revert back to the processes the team already knew. This was the first time the team was engaging in this type of research. There was skepticism mixed with anxiety as the first Emotional Inquiry interview kicked off.

Could deep insights really be uncovered in this way? Was the team going to be able to leverage any of what the respondents were sharing through their personal stories?

Yes and yes.

The experience was like a “light bulb moment” for the team. Every interview brought the team closer to meeting their objectives. As the researchers probed into the unconscious minds and respondents shared stories, laced with evocative language and rich emotionality – it was clear to the team that they were unearthing deeper human truths. The team members, each in their own way, were becoming social scientists.

After the completion of research, the team gathered together for a one-day workshop at Kellogg’s. The goal of this workshop was to find connections (if any) that would be fruitful for Pringles to move into creative development and ultimately to testing. At the end of the day, anxiety was replaced with excitement as the team had not just one, but seven different emotional summer territories that aligned with Pringles.

The next step was to determine if these findings were relevant beyond the US. This step had been built in and is part of the global learning agenda to ensure insights cultivated in one region can travel and provide relevant inspiration for global ideas. The global team leverages the regional team’s knowledge and expertise of their consumer to make these discoveries, and findings were shared with the Pringles global leadership team for input and approval of relevance and fit for their individual regions.

All of the research territories were aligned globally.

**QUALIFICATION**

After the one-day workshop, the multi-functional team spent time creating concepts based on the consumer territories identified. The concepts were placed into a quantitative IMI platform messaging study across three regions, along with our current control concept, which was based on existing summer idea from Europe. The objectives were as follows:

- Identify which Pringles message ideas have the potential to generate the greatest potential behavior change with the target audience.
- Incremental
- Buy-rate
- Identify which Pringles summer messages have the potential to generate the greatest attitudinal impact
- Fluorability towards the brand
- Campaign rating compared to competitive messages
- Evaluation against a battery of image attribute statements
- Facilitate campaign optimization:
  - “Why / Why Not” participant open-ended feedback
  - Identify which features are most motivational and effective

The results could not have been more beautiful.

Data showed that all of the ideas based on the Emotional Inquiry consumer insights tested considerably stronger than the Pringles control concept. The new concepts resulted in a significant average lift of 5.5 points of purchase interest for the brand. The test confirmed positive first with the brand and an increase of favorability for Pringles.

This was the first time all tested concepts performed better than the control. The insights generated from Emotional Inquiry were so rich and so beneficial to the Pringles brand that Pringles worked with Brandtrust to create a brandbook for all of the members of the Pringles team as well as agency partners, outlining through imagery and text the rich emotional architecture of summer. This book is an artifact of our evergreen insights, and will serve as inspiration for years to come.

**THE TRUTH IS ALWAYS YOUR FRIEND**

As marketers, we have the power to make a choice everyday. We can either choose the familiar or step outside of our comfort zone and try something different. We can either lean on our own intuitions and assumptions, or we can make the choice to be like detectives and search deep for truth. We can spend all day, months – years even – focused on the differences among our consumers, or we can unlock the deeply seeded values that unify all humans.

The choice is ours.

When faced with a business challenge that has the potential to strengthen consumer connection or break it (as is the case with every challenge – big and small) – the risk of going deep and turning to emotional research will always pay off.

The power of emotional research lies in its ability to take you beyond the superficial and reveal the motivations, drivers and values that inspire consumers at the deepest level.

The truth may not always seem friendly, but it is always your friend.

Emotional research delivers just that. The challenge for your business then becomes – how can that truth be leveraged? How does our brand become friends with the truth?

When a brand is able to align with the deeper truths that connect us all, the results are simply and undeniably beautiful. Much like summer.
Marketers need to uncover the subconscious emotional motivators that are not apparent with more superficial market research methods. They simply must sample emotions, not people.

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**EMOTION AND TRUST**

Quite simply, business is built on trust. Making and keeping promises builds trust. Trust is among the most basic of human emotions. Understanding the real nature of consumer emotions is fundamental to success.

Brandtrust specializes in helping our clients understand the emotional factors that drive consumer decisions, create trust in the marketplace, and engage employees in the workplace.

**SOME QUESTIONS TYPICALLY ANSWERED WITH BRANDTRUST EMOTIONAL INQUIRY**

- How do consumers feel about our brand? How do they feel about our competitors’ brands?
- Why do consumers choose one brand instead of another?
- What is the best and most effective way to position our brand?
- How can we build customer loyalty, and what dimensions of loyalty matter most?
- Should we be advertising and what should we be saying?
- How can we break through advertising clutter?
- How can we determine what aspects of our brand are motivating to our customers?
- What are the emotional “drivers” we can tap to attract new customers?
- How can we position our brand to clearly differentiate it from others?
- How can we realize higher margins on the basis of emotional benefits?
- How can we measure and improve the effectiveness of our branding efforts?
- How can we enhance our customers’ experiences so they do business with us more often?