

Press Release: Neuroscience is a proven measure of media effectiveness

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Market researchers are using neuroscience to figure out how our brains respond when we're watching TV or reading a newspaper.

Not content with asking people for their responses in a survey, researchers can now analyse the brain activity, including "detailed memory encoding," which shows how people are responding emotionally and what they remember.

News Works, which represents New Zealand publishers including NZME, Stuff and Allied Press, engaged neuromarketing company Neuro-Insight Australia to conduct research on brain responses while groups of people read newspapers and watched TV.

Publishers have long suspected that newspapers provide an extremely high level of engagement because readers are focussed on the task. Now they've called in the scientific boffins to prove it.

Neuro-Insight Australia used brain-imaging technology on 120 New Zealanders, of varying ages and ethnic backgrounds, to measure how their brains responded and how much they remembered. They were divided into two groups; the first read a newspaper for 15 minutes, then watched a TV programme. The second group watched TV first, then read a newspaper.

The same advertisements appeared in both the newspaper and during the TV programme to examine the effects of combining the two mediums.

The results showed that when people read a newspaper they were far more focussed, with higher levels of emotional intensity in both the stories and the advertising than while they were watching TV.

The highly complimentary nature of the two mediums also captured a strong priming effect. This means that advertising is much more likely to be filed into consumer's long-term memory. Higher levels of memory encoding have been validated to drive greater ad effectiveness. This in turn means that in the future, consumers are more likely to remember, and act on advertising, when deciding to buy a product or use a service.

It is the long-term memory encoding that is an important measure, according to Professor Richard Silberstein, who is chair of the company which conducted the research. Silberstein, who has 40 years of neuroscience research experience, said memory encoding was most strongly linked to future behaviour.

"Memory encoding has been validated to drive sales and behaviour change so it's a very important measure in terms of determining effectiveness," he said.

The study showed that when TV advertising was seen before the newspaper advertising, the newspaper's capability to drive long-term memory encoding increased by 26%.

And if the product had a strong creative link across TV and newspapers, such as a particular brand of car, the long-term memory encoding increased by a startling 37%.

Those taking part in the research wore lycra caps fitted with felt sensors placed strategically on different points of the skull to measure cognitive function as they read newspapers and watched TV.

These sensors picked up tiny electrical signals made when the brain's 100 billion neurons communicated during the experiment.

From that Silberstein could measure which part of the brain, the left or right hemisphere, was most active at which stage.

The left-brain hemisphere had a preferential bias for remembering detailed information and the right side processed "global features" such as the sound track of an ad, the underlying emotion in someone's voice or a picture of scenery.

Memory was highly selective, Silberstein said. "People don't remember every single experience they've ever had in their entire life. The brain knows what is important for you and then it stores it."

The brain picks a moment to remember and uses that moment to reconstruct the experience.

"Your memory is never one hundred per cent accurate because every time you remember something, you're recreating it based on an image of an old memory."

It is those "hooks" or series of encoded memories that advertisers rely on to encourage people to act on what they've seen, read and remembered.

When the two mediums of television and newspapers were combined, the long-term memory encoding increased markedly.

News Works CEO Brian Hill said he was thrilled by the results of the New Zealand neuroscience study because it confirmed what the industry had always believed. The neuro-analytics showed that when people read a newspaper they gave their full attention to both the articles and the advertisements, and that it was therefore one of the most effective forms of advertising.

News Works partnered with the Marketing Association of New Zealand to host events last week in Auckland, Wellington and Christchurch to share the key findings from the New Zealand study with marketers and agencies. Hill said that he was delighted with the level of interest in neuroscience expressed during the events.

"We first became aware of the growing interest in neuroscience late last year when we learned of a UK study which had contributed towards the marketing community starting to rethink how they approach their buying of digital media," Hill said. The UK study showed that people who viewed advertising on premium news sites were far more likely to store advertising to their long-term memory than when people viewed advertising on social media.

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