

BRAIN SYSTEMS AND BRAND EXPERIENCES

Integrative approaches for total consumer understanding

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INTRODUCTION

In the field of consumer behavior understanding, there are many approaches available to assess the relationships between consumers and brands. As consumer behavior investigators, we believe integrative approaches are the new reality of the consumer research industry, enabling us to bring together both declared and non-declared responses from individuals, and thus provide a more holistic understanding of the issues under study.

While asking questions is still necessary, combining it with complementary techniques such as social listening, ethnography and data analytics can ensure a much broader and deeper consumer understanding.

The consumer decision environment is changing in an incredibly fast pace, both in social and technological aspects, and affects the way people interact, communicate, how they relate to brands, and decide (or not) to buy them.

From the human understanding perspective:

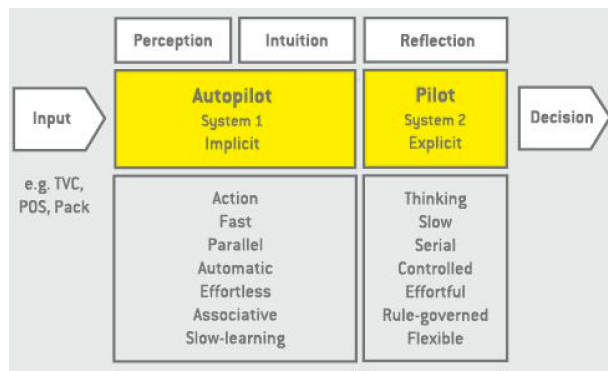
1_ **Social**: Daniel Kahneman, the 2002 Nobel Memorial Prize in Economic Sciences recipient and author of *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, suggested that people make decisions using two parallel brain systems:

- Fast and intuitive - System 1 engages automatic processes that run at an unconscious level and uses previous experiences and associations we have formed from such experiences;
- Slow and reflective - System 2 engages controlled, conscious processes, relying on more demanding and logical reasoning. *"System 2 allocates attention to the effortful mental activities that demand it."* (Kahneman 2011) ¹⁾

Despite the idea of having a clear cut between both systems, our brain automatically uses short-cuts to select which decisions also require cognitive thinking, therefore combining system 1 and 2 on the decisions we make.

"...Systems 1 and 2 are both active whenever we are awake. System 1 runs automatically and System 2 is normally in a comfortable low-effort mode, in which only a fraction of its capacity is engaged. System 1 continuously generates suggestions for System 2: impressions, intuitions, intentions, and feelings. If endorsed by System 2, impressions and intuitions turn into beliefs, and impulses turn into voluntary actions." (Kahneman 2011) ²⁾

Figure 1. illustration of Kahneman's framework



The idea that two hemispheres work independently is refuted, in the sense that both sides of the brain work in **synthesis**, not in antithesis. *"In summary, most of what you think and do originates in your system 1, but system 2 takes over when things get difficult, and it normally has the last word."* (Kahneman 2011) ³⁾

2_Technological disruption: Consumers currently live in an environment where decision-making is much more complex and multifaceted. This is the dispersion Era, in which 31% of people watching TV nowadays are looking at another device at the same time, and mobility is the great driver of our increasingly connection. Nine out of ten internet users declare they accessed internet via their cellphones ⁴⁾. We are always on.

From the research industry perspective, both social and technological aspects are noticeable:

- As the way products and brands connect with people becomes more and more fluid, through several touchpoints, many of them being out of their control, the implication is that the way we investigate brand imagery and performance must also evolve in the same direction;
- New technologies available also provide changes on how to assess and unveil what is behind people's decisions, transforming the way we do research.

Several contemporary publications assume market research relies only on measuring straightforward reasons or rational thinking from consumers' "answers". Nevertheless, we have been using, for a long time, combinations of different techniques that rely on deriving direct answers: statistical analyses to understand drivers of key performance measures, qualitative techniques that get around the "direct thinking" (such as projective ones), ethnography to get up close to consumers' real lives and moments of truth. All of these avoid a direct focus on consumers thinking about their behaviour.

Integrative approaches are the reality, with no way back, on the consumer research industry. While it is still necessary to ask questions, the use of complementary techniques that activate both Systems 1 and 2 may lead to a *broader* and *deeper* consumer understanding.

PAPER DEVELOPMENT

In this paper, we discuss three main ideas:

- Brain Systems
- Brand Experiences
- Integrative approaches for total consumer understanding

We develop our rationale focusing on the *chocolate confectionery industry*, more specifically on mainstream brands, broadly consumed in Brazil.

Brain systems

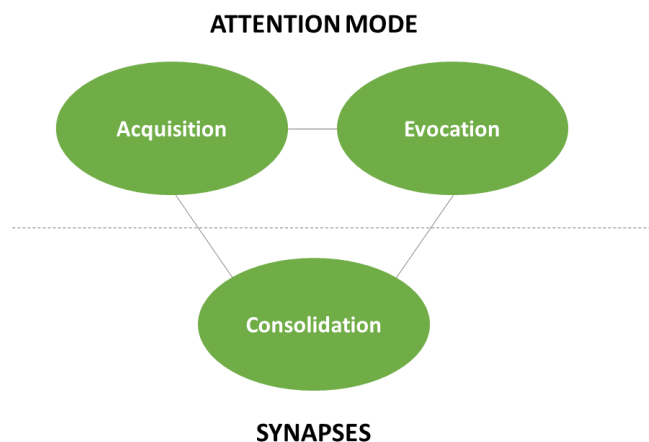
Understanding the theory

When we quote the famous neuroscience phrase “*We think much less than we think we think*”, we put in doubt the capacity of consumers to state fully how they feel. We believe consumers are not completely aware of the mechanisms that they use to make decisions. Moreover, that it is not possible to rely exclusively on explicit perceptions and answers when investigating consumer behavior.

“System 2 has some ability to change the way System 1 works, by programming the normally automatic functions of attention and memory.” (Kahneman 2011)⁵⁾

For a more theoretical perspective, we interviewed Dr. Ivan Hideyo Okamoto, PhD neurologist specialized in human memory, about some physical aspects of the human brain. The objective of the interview was to understand in greater depth the structures of acquisition, consolidation and evocation of information, that conjugated are transformed in our memory.

Figure 2. illustration based on Dr. Okamoto’s explanation about memory



*“What is memory? It's a **path that builds up** in your brain. If you want to keep some information, it needs to have an **emotional valence** and to be **important enough** for you to be **willing to record it**. Your brain makes a **connection path** between a neuron and the other neuron related with that subject. And **this is physical**, an extension of the cell connects with the other, named **synapses**”*
Dr. Okamoto, neurologist

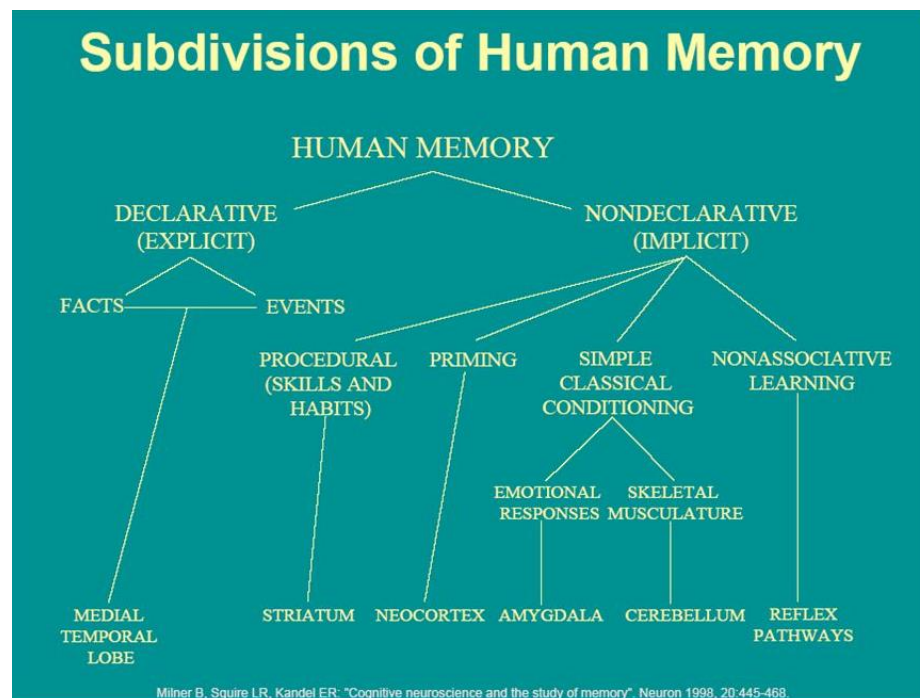
We are not able to save all information we receive during the day. To be able to consolidate information into memory, we need to be attentive while acquiring it. Consolidation is the path inside the brain that pretty much follows the computer processing logic: you need to record the information in a file if willing to find it later. If you only throw the information in the brain, without building any connection or associations, you will not be able to recall it afterwards.

Memory is one among several brains systems we have. Attention, planning, language, etc. are all part of our brain systems and we do not have a specific area for each of them - this is not the way our brain works. We do have, though, main and supplementary centers, for cognition and for movement commands, and they work simultaneously.

*“Memory is not a unitary faculty of the mind, but is composed of **multiple systems** that have different operating principles and different neuroanatomy”* (Squire, 2004)

The subdivisions of the human memory are shown below in the Larry Ryan Squire scheme. It portrays a representation of the long-term memory of an individual.

Figure 3. subdivision of human memory by Larry Squire



Our declarative (or explicit) memory is in our brain frontal lobe and is the one we can easily verbalize. This is where the autobiographic information is recorded: *How old are you? Where do you work? What's your mother's name?* People answer these easy questions very quickly, **without even thinking too much**. Besides, this is where people record general knowledge information, or events. *Who was the president of the US before Trump? In what year did Ayrton Senna die? What were you doing the moment you heard about the Twin Towers attack?* As we are repeatedly exposed to such information, we record them as declarative memory and **easily evoke** them when we need to.

On the other hand, we have our nondeclarative (or implicit) memory. *Do you know how to ride a bike? When did you learn it?* Unless you have fallen and bruised yourself very badly, you will hardly remember this exact moment. Learning to ride a bike is by repetition, trial and error, collection, movement memory. If you stay years without cycling, you remember it after five seconds starting again.

*"The nondeclarative memory refers to a collection of skills, habits, and dispositions that are **inaccessible to conscious** recollection. Yet, it **influences our behavior and mental life**, and are a fundamental part of **who we are**."* (Squire, 2004)

We may not be able to access our nondeclarative memory, but it is part of who we are, and it influences our personality, our actions, **our decisions** and our declarative memory evocation.

A deep dive into the perceptive universe of Chocolate

Let's go through the mechanisms by which certain foods operate in our bodies and how chocolate comes into play in that context.

Intuitively, we all know how some kinds of foods we eat affect our emotions and our moods. After all, who has never gotten angry or upset and wanted nothing other than a big cup of ice cream drizzled with chocolate sauce to calm down?

We use food to affect our moods all the time without even thinking about it. However, more importantly, our daily nutritional intake can have huge impacts on how we feel, and most of it is due to a little chemical called serotonin.

Serotonin is one of the major mood neurotransmitters in our brains. Very simplistically, when serotonin levels are low, we are more depressed, and when they are high, we are happier. Serotonin levels are key to health mentally and physically, since it has many diverse and important roles in the body. Because it is so common in all kinds of animals, serotonin can be found in a variety of foods, such as walnuts, bananas, pineapples, kiwis, plums, tomatoes...

Nevertheless, because serotonin in its complete form cannot pass through the blood-brain barrier, we have to do more than include serotonin-rich foods in our diets: we have to include its building blocks.

In fact, our bodies naturally understand this, and cause us to crave foods rich in tryptophan, an amino acid key to serotonin production in our brains when serotonin levels are low. What foods are high in tryptophan? Carbohydrates, turkey, bananas, dairy, meat, nuts, eggs, beans, fish... and chocolate.

A first and very appealing account for chocolate liking is purely sensory. Chocolate has a set of extremely appealing sensory characteristics. It is both high in sugar and in fat, a combination that is known to be appealing and which is, at least in part, innate in origin. Cocoa butter (the fat in chocolate) has the property that it melts at body temperature, producing a distinctive and very pleasant oral sensation. Chocolate also has a very attractive aroma. These sensory properties might be sufficient to explain the current motivation for ingesting chocolate: people like and crave it because it tastes and smells good.

It has been established in the nutrition community that childhood and other meaningful life experiences may play a crucial role in food preferences and habits throughout a person's life. Researchers have found that physiological and psychological needs are often at play when a person is attracted to a specific food. On a psychological level, *"positive social contexts in combination with positive sensory attributes provide the important associations needed for foods to become comfort foods"*. Regarding chocolate, specifically, its *"favorable sensory qualities combined with its positive connotations of gift-giving and reward developed in childhood"* could be the reason it is a comfort food for many individuals. Chocolate provides a great match of its delicious taste and smooth texture in terms of sensory attributes and a feel-good sensation when people are choosing for something to eat, motivated by a search for a certain level of security, or identification, or reward.

Emotions, thus, play a powerful role in food choices, as the connection of smells and tastes of specific foods to specific past events and people can lead to what a person wants to eat. The irony is that it is a two-way street - not only mood affects how we eat, but also how we eat affects our mood.

Brand experiences: what about the Chocolate brands in this context?

From the chocolate industry perspective, the game is slightly more complex. The amount of offers in terms of brands, types of products, flavors, fillings, packs and formats in the chocolate market is enormous. The way brands communicate with their consumers also varies a lot according to their intended positioning and objectives. Big (and frequent) questions are:

- Do consumers really perceive these brands as their manufacturers would like them to?
- Can a brand really entice a certain specific mood / emotion in a unique way for its consumers, distinctively from other brands?
- How should brands "correct their routes" effectively to build more positive and stronger mental networks in consumers' minds, and have their brands on top of their consideration sets in a given chocolate purchase & consumption situation?

Based on the current knowledge about **brain systems**, it is important to reframe *how people think about brands*. When choosing a specific chocolate brand, people can use cognition (System 2) or intuition (System 1), but in most situations, consumers' brains will engage both types of processes.

On the other hand, when brands are building their positioning, they could also try to activate both systems, depending on the objective: for example – is it the aim of a communication to bring a **disruption** in the market? Alternatively, does it intend to reinforce **emotional** connections already established?

In the next module, we will dig into the chocolate market structure from the consumers' perspective, and understand how they relate to different brands.

Among the **complexity of the chocolate market** in Brazil, we could have several cutouts to select the brands under study here.

For this paper, our selection was based on mainstream brands, with relevant market share, and that are massively available in the retail channel.

Integrative approaches for total consumers understanding

"They made that big decision on the basis of a good report from one consultant. WYSIATI – what you see is all there is. They did not seem to realize how little information they had." (Kahneman 2011) ⁶⁾

We are not binary - the split between system 1 and 2 does not have a clear cut. Consumer behavior occurs activating both systems 1 and 2 while making decisions.

Market Research has never been binary either, and doesn't need to be! Ideally, to assess the underlying reasons and emotions behind decisions and behaviors, we should always look for a proper balance of tools – combining the more pragmatic measurement with a human touch and understanding.

So, what have we done to **read** consumers' perceptions about chocolates in both brain systems?

The case: scope and results

We used three primary data capturing modules: 1_**L**istening; 2_**E**xperience and 3_**R**esearch.

This gives us the acronym and analysis frame "**LER**", the verb that means *to read* in Portuguese. The objective was to read consumers in a more integrative and holistic manner, for a deeper understanding of their decisions based on systems 1 and 2, and the complementarity of non-declared and declared perceptions about brands.

When planning the case, our System 2 had in mind a clear scheme on the **LER** frame. We would start from **L**, passing through **E** and finally present to the readers our **R** phase. But...

...as *"The normal state of your mind is that you have intuitive feelings and opinions about everything that comes your way."* (Kahneman 2011),⁷⁾ we decided to allow our intuition to speak louder and tell the story in a different flow.

In theory, intuition surely hands it over to System 2 to help us rethink the story, as *"...the automatic operations of System 1 generate surprisingly complex patterns of ideas, but only the slower System 2 can construct thoughts in an orderly series of steps."* (Kahneman 2011).⁸⁾ That is why we decided to change the presentation order of the modules to enable a better storytelling.

Let us start by the "E" approach (Experience), for a greater context of the chocolate category in consumers' lives. We will move on to the "L" approach (Listening), where we gather a "spontaneous" mapping of the chocolate market, from the perspective of the consumers. Finally, we will end with the "R" approach (Research), revealing some quantitative assessment of brand attributes, both explicitly and implicitly, with the use of IRT™ (implicit reaction time).

These are our System 1 and System 2 working together for you to *read* a better story.

The EXPERIENCE mode: In-depth home interviews with an ethnographic approach

The objective of this approach was to do an in-context research, to capture the real experience of chocolate purchase and consumption. We observed real people in real life by focusing on the behavior of individuals within wider contexts, including their physical and social environments, as well as their interpretation and perception of the category and brands.

"We cannot assume that they will learn anything from mere statistics. Let's show them one or two representative individual cases to influence their System 1." (Kahneman 2011).⁹⁾

Sample profile: Besides the demographical screener used to guarantee a mix of gender and parenthood in the sample, the main lens used for recruitment was attitudinal: each participant must be a frequent chocolate consumer and have recently consumed it in more than one situation.

We talked to:

- a 27-year-old woman that describes herself as **chocolate addicted**;
- a 22-year-old man that even trying to balance his diet, **refuses to give up on chocolate**;
- a 36-year-old woman, mother of three children, that **loves to consume chocolate compulsively** (with a 9-year-old daughter clearly replicating her behavior); and
- a 40-year-old man, father of two children, concerned about providing a good role model to his kids for a healthy and balanced diet, even though he consumes chocolate **daily**.

What do they have in common? An intense **LOVE** for chocolate.

Figure 4. Lucy from Peanuts by Charlie Schulz



All of the participants' involvement with the category is **extremely emotional**. The words used to describe the category are very affective. Chocolate is *"everything"*, *"happiness"*, *"joy, comfort"*. Even for a little girl, participating along with her mother, chocolate means *"family reunion"*.

Speaking of children, they seem to replicate adults' behavior and preferences. Parents are well aware of the importance of guiding their children about healthy eating habits, but do not so frequently apply this in their lives. Some contradictions appear during the speech and that is where the **ethnography approach beauty arises**. We observed a mother finding her own behavior reflected on her daughter's behavior, when the girl says *"I'm tense, I eat chocolate like my mom"*.

*"Chocolate [contains] one of the substances that is the precursor of a substance in our brain, called serotonin, which is our neurotransmitter of **pleasure, reward, and enjoyment**. [Serotonin is] what is lacking in patients with depression, what is diminished in the premenstrual period of women. Irritability, premenstrual tension exists, is a hormonal storm ... women are known to start feeling more anxious about chocolate, because they **need to produce more serotonin** in that period."*, Dr. Okamoto talking about the effect of chocolate in the human brain.

Although the category connects to consumers' **hearts**, their **minds and bodies** also express themselves when they state the reasons why they eat chocolate. For them, chocolate **relieves physical and emotional discomforts**, such as anxiety, premenstrual syndrome pains, and nervousness. As we learned about serotonin and its effects, it is easy to understand the reasons behind these profound needs. While eating chocolate people really start feeling more relaxed, calmer, happier: *"It's like an analgesic when you are in pain"* or *"Like the sun coming up to lighten the day"*.

Such verbatim from consumers expresses feelings **we wouldn't have heard if we had only observed them**. That is why the research industry cannot afford to stop asking qualitative questions. As Matthew Salganik of Princeton University points out, *"Researchers who study dolphins can't ask them questions. So, dolphin researchers are forced to study pure behavior. Researchers who study humans, on the other hand, should take advantage of the fact that our participants can talk."*¹⁰⁾

"There is no limit to the number of questions you can answer, whether they are questions someone else asks or questions that you ask yourself... System 2 receives questions or generates them: in either case, it directs attention and search memory to find the answers. System 1 operates differently. It continuously monitors what is going on outside and inside the mind, and continuously generates assessments of various aspects of the situation without specific intention and with little or no effort" (Kahneman 2011).¹¹⁾

When it comes to brands, though, consumers do clearly express their preferences; but the constant brands exchange and the very low loyalty level in this category caught our attention. While the involvement with the category is so strong and emotional, brands seem not to carry the same passion.

It is at this point that brand salience comes into play. Brands have different narratives to connect with consumers, but in the end of the day, from the Experience approach, it seemed to us that the main drivers relate to general category traits, as were the benefit consumers have from eating a chocolate, regardless of which type, size, filling... or brand. When it comes to entice a certain specific mood or emotion in a unique way for consumers, at first sight, it seemed that all brands had the "same effect".

This observation did not come out as a surprise – the Chocolate category is quite well known by its highly emotional characteristic, in which the risk involved in a "wrong decision" is very low, and its possible reward is very high. Thus, a low loyalty level is expected – and poses an even greater challenge to marketers when positioning their brands. They need to keep in mind that the "brand name" and more rational RTBs (reasons to believe) have a potential effect if consumers did activate their System 2 when buying chocolate; but cues such as appetite appeal and packaging attractiveness are fundamental to entice the System 1 – and really move more people towards their brands.

The *experience* mode alone was not enough to reach the deeper understanding we were looking for. We will come back to this in our closing chapter. Remember, the TOTAL consumer understanding demands more than one single approach.

The LISTENING mode: we also conducted a social media listening module that provided us with spontaneous discussions consumers have about chocolate brands. Scott Cook, Intuit co-Founder and P&G senior executive, says: *“A brand is no longer what we tell a consumer it is – it is what consumers tell each other what it is.”*

In the recently launched book “Everybody lies”, the author Seth Stephens-Davidowitz states, *“Many people underreport embarrassing behaviors and thoughts on surveys. They want to look good, even though most surveys are anonymous. This is called social desirability bias.”*

“The more impersonal the conditions, the more honest people will be... internet surveys are better than phone surveys, which are better than in-person surveys. People will admit more if they are alone than if others are in the room with them.” Seth Stephens-Davidowitz 2017 ¹²⁾

Inspired by those great thoughts, we went to the internet to map consumers’ spontaneous brand mental networks. We listened to consumers’ voices within the social media environment, to capture what they were talking about regarding the chocolate brands, how they unconsciously group these brands, if they perceive these brands differently from each other, and if they use any brand for any specific purpose. We received spontaneous comments that brought to us a broader scope on questions we would not even ask. We got declarations that people would unlikely give in a more traditional research environment.

As people build their own definition of brands, we can say that brands exist in people’s mind as an associative network. Do you remember Dr. Okamoto’s explanation on how memory works? Brands also interact based on associations and create a consolidated memory structure in consumers’ minds. Below is our chocolate brands’ mental network map:

The diagram illustrates a network of brands and categories. The central nodes are labeled A, B, C, D, E, F, and G. The peripheral nodes are labeled with various brand names and categories. The legend at the bottom identifies the categories:

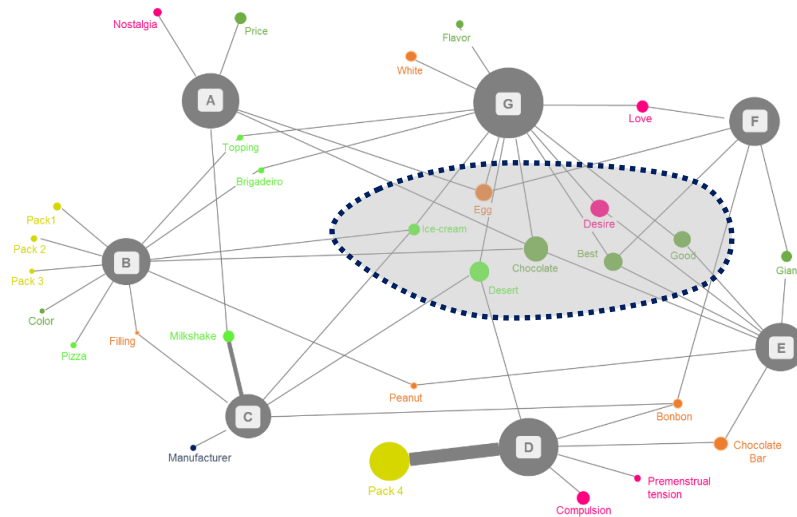
- Emotion (pink)
- Functional (green)
- Type (orange)
- Pack (yellow)
- Recipe (light green)
- Manufacturer (dark blue)
- Touchpoints (light pink)
- Advertisement (purple)
- Other brands (red)
- Occasion (blue)
- Children (cyan)

- The size of the brand bubble refers to the amount of mentions it gets: brand G is the most prominent one within this specific competitive set, receiving 34% of the mentions captured;
- The size of the comment bubble refers to the frequency of this specific comment among all coded verbatim: “pack 4” appears as the most mentioned characteristic, highly associated to a specific brand;
- The line thickness refers to the strength of the connection between a specific comment and a brand. For instance, “Pack 4” appears in most of the comments about “brand D”, giving us the impression one does not exist without the other. *Would this be part of this brand’s strategy, communication and signature?*

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Right in the middle of our map, we can find some shared characteristics that are associated with the majority of our seven brands. These are themes commonly mentioned about the brands, core of the comments extracted from social media. Those characteristics, that help to build the category meaning, are mainly functional.

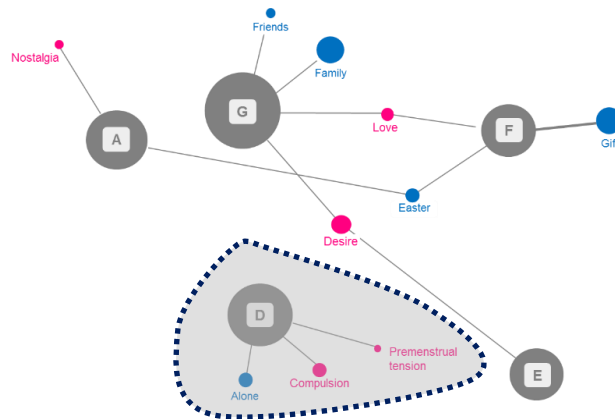
Figure 6. summarized map with functional and emotional characteristics



This is clearly an extra layer on our total frame of analysis: in the **Experience** module, we shed some light in a more emotional involvement originated by the category as a whole, while in our **Listening** phase, most of the shared mentions bring up functional traits from the chocolate universe.

In the **Experience** mode, we also discovered chocolate is perceived as responsible for: 1) bringing the family together (by a 9-year-old girl), 2) my “me-moment”, to be left alone and relax (by a 40-year-old parent), or even 3) my escape valve, to relieve anxiety (by a 27-year-old woman). In our **Listening** mode, we understood that each brand can indeed have more specific roles, to fulfill different needs, in different occasions.

Figure 7. summarized map shows emotions and occasions associated to each brand



Chocolate brands do share core characteristics that together compose the overall category imaginary. However, each individual brand carries its unique perception. For instance, brand D (see figure 7) does not share the compulsion association with other brands in this set, revealing that it is likely to be consumed individually, at a lonely moment. *Would this be the consumption situation envisioned by the marketing strategy of this brand?*

Based on LISTENING and EXPERIENCE modules alone, we could say that while the chocolate category is predominantly emotional, functional aspects appear more automatically. But...

*“Product and brand are treated as trade-offs because we think of them using the emotional versus rational model of decision making...what happens as a result of this is that **the connection between these two levels become lost...** More often than not, the two are not connected or intertwined.”* (Barden 2013). ¹³⁾

We are going to address this “quick conclusion” in our closing chapter. Remember, the TOTAL consumer understanding demands more than one single approach (or two), and we still have one missing piece.

“System 1 is designed to jump to conclusions from little evidence – and it is not designed to know the size of its jumps. Because WYSIATI, only the evidence at hand counts...The amount of evidence and its quality do not count for much, because poor evidence can make a very good story.” (Kahneman 2011). ¹⁴⁾

Finally, **the RESEARCH module**: a neuroscience quantitative application by using IRT™ (implicit reaction time), that allowed consumers to answer in an automatic way, before they started processing cognitive thinking.

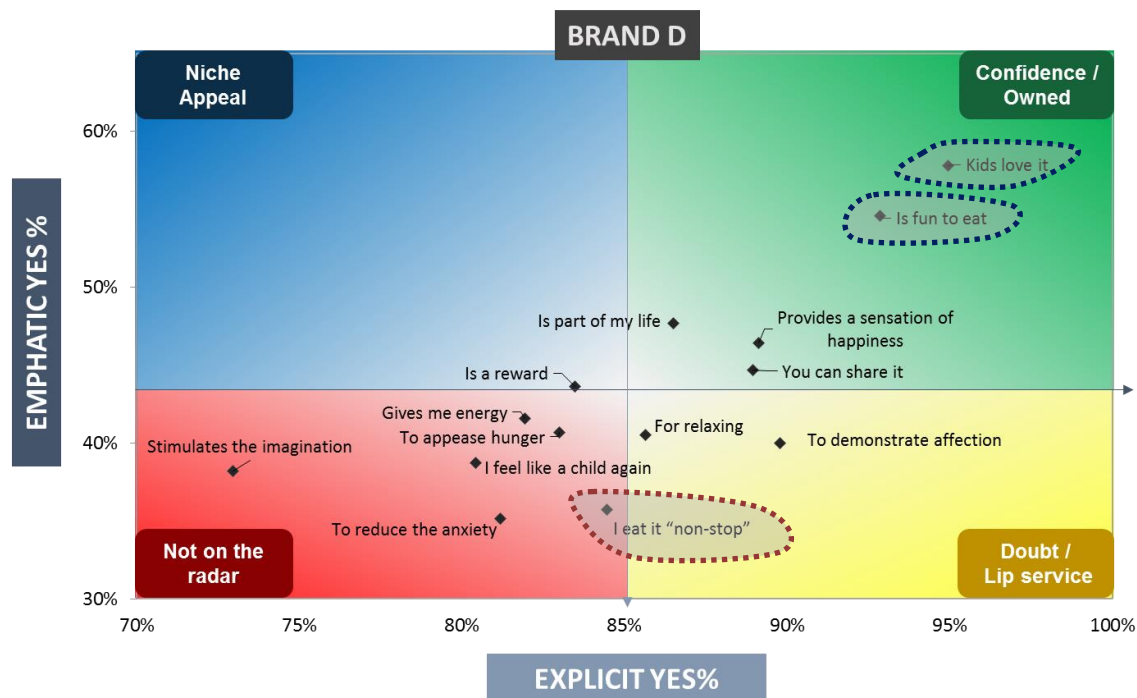
IRT™ tells us how people feel about brands beyond declaration. It helps us to identify what the intrinsic beliefs or convictions related to the brand under study. Academic research shows that the speed of response reveals unconscious feelings and impulsive reactions towards brands and it affects our *System 1* thinking, which plays a key role in how people choose brands. The faster we respond, the stronger is the conviction we have for the association we make.

“System 2 is more of an apologist for the emotions of System 1 than a critic of those emotions – an endorser rather than an enforcer.” (Kahneman 2011). ¹⁵⁾

For the **Research module**, we evaluated fourteen brand image attributes within a four brands competitive set. The attributes are not shown in a traditional association matrix, nor with an agreement scale from 1 to 5, but in a duel yes or no allowing respondents to not overthink on comparisons or which score to give. Is this a YES or a NO? Moreover, is this a fast YES?

Let's go back to brand D, now in the Research analysis. The graphic below shows the levels of explicit and implicit answers to a list of brand attributes associated to this specific brand. Among the attributes tested, the ones on the top of the chart have higher explicit association, although not necessarily all of them bring conviction when consumers are evaluating the brand.

Figure 8. quadrant graph with attributes association with brand D



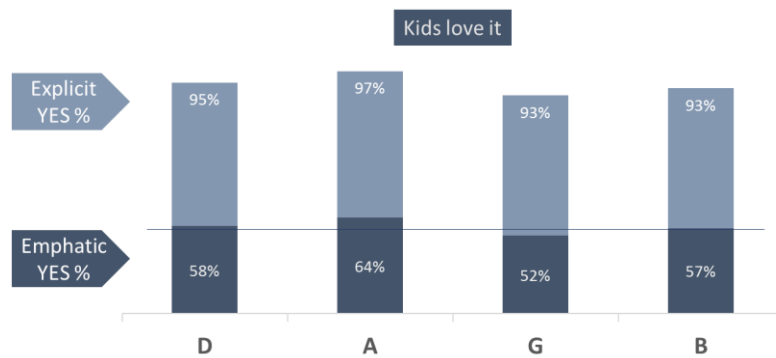
On the top right quadrant, we find the attributes that exhibit both intrinsic and explicit responses from consumers:

X: The *explicit* axis shows the percentage of people who agreed that a certain attribute is associated to brand D. This is our traditional assessment, broadly used in Marketing Research, and indicates our conscious thinking. So, *do kids love brand D?* 95% said yes!

Y: We also measure the *emphatic* (or implicit) axis: the percentage of people that agreed quickly that the attribute connects to the brand. Here we have the strength with which this association is held when we think about brand D. *Do kids really love brand D?* 58% said yes very emphatically, with certainty! Considering that the average of emphatic responses, for this brand, is 43%, we can say yes, 58% indicates strongly and well-established opinion that kids DO love Brand D.

Although the childhood universe appears emphatically associated to brand D in the Research module, it is also strongly connected to other brands within the selected competitive set, leading us to conclude this emphatic result might be consequence of a general category perception (for the fact that children do love chocolates). Besides, brand A is more emphatically associated to this attribute, so would it be worth for brand D to focus on this aspect, even if this were its highest implicit association?

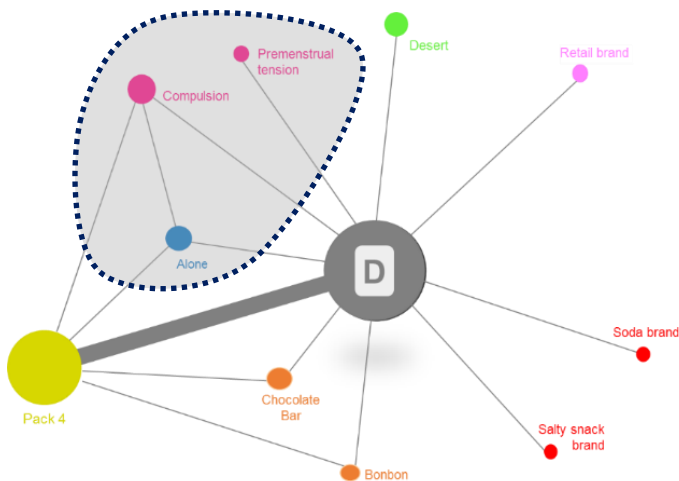
Figure 9. association with *kids love it* statement



What would be unique for **brand D**, then?

Looking back at **brand D**'s spontaneous mental network from our Listening module: Compulsion + premenstrual tension + eating alone are characteristics that brand D does not share with other brands within the selected set.

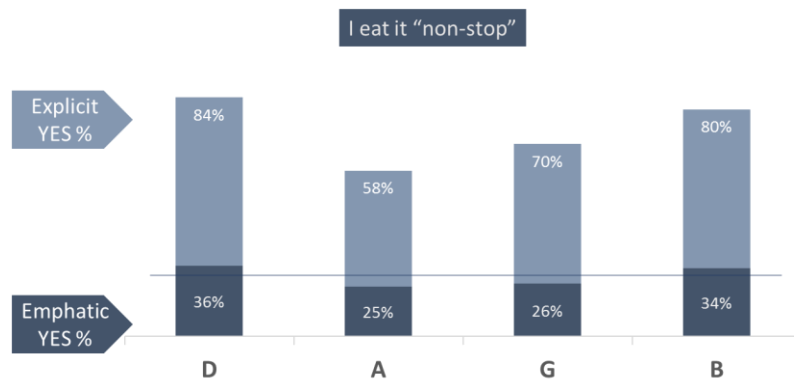
Figure 10. brand mental network for brand D (Listening mode)



*“the strength of an association between a brand and a goal depends on the **goal being unique**, if a brand is linked to several goals, each of these connections will be weakened.”* (Barden 2013) ¹⁶⁾

Let's think on the *Compulsion* aspect from **L** phase? Wouldn't *“I eat it non-stop”* be the translation of it in our **R** module?

Figure 11. association with *I eat it “non-stop”* statement

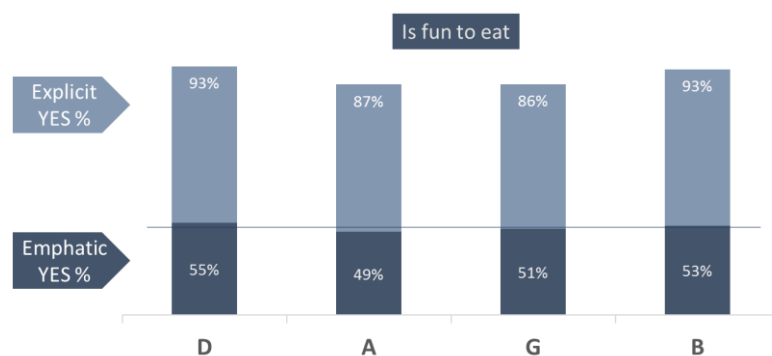


The association with this attribute, in our implicit exercise, is not strong enough to take it out of the lower quadrants, meaning that respondents are not certain this attribute is connected to the brand.

Would “*I eat it non-stop*” really be the direct translation of the compulsion aspect we were investigating in our previous modes? The attribute seems to carry a negative connotation that is hard to capture by emphatic certainty or even by explicit association.

Would be “*Is fun to eat*” better aligned to the compulsion aspect, then? Both brand D and B show similar levels of association with this attribute. Each of these brands has such strong associations with “fun to eat” for different reasons, from different messages in communications to their own intrinsic functional characteristics – but those can clearly be optimized by their respective manufacturers, if they aim to “own” this attribute.

Figure 12. association with *Is fun to eat* statement



Do consumers really perceive brand D as the manufacturer intends to position it? Are these the signals conveyed by the brand’s proposition?

One could have a different conclusion if evaluating brand D in an isolated scope.

In the Listening module, we could say brand D is dependent on what it communicates in its package and from the compulsion emotional aspect that appeared in social media comments. Endorsed by some associations our interviewees from Experience mode stated, such as *“I eat it like popcorn”*, we could believe compulsion is indeed the story that the consumer apprehends from brand D’s signs and cues.

“...if we base our communication on weak associations between the signal and the proposition, then its effectiveness will suffer – especially if consumers process the message not reflectively but on autopilot.” (Barden 2013) ¹⁷⁾

From the Research module, though, one could propose the brand D manager to think about targeting children, since the higher emphatic attribute associated to its brand is *“kids love it”*. However, when we understand the emphasis which the FUN aspect connects to Brand D, it opens up a potentially stronger territory for the brand to work on.

Then, why did we need three modules to make sure we understand consumer behavior regarding brands? Well, this is not a matter of only confronting results, but connecting the dots...

CONNECTING THE DOTS (OR CONSOLIDATING THE SYNAPSES)

We have different approaches to investigate consumer behavior, which we chose to add altogether. The equation is simple: active questioning + passive observation + explicit & implicit data capture, which give us a *total consumer understanding* as a result.

Back to *“We think much less than we think we think”*: we definitely have evidence on how consumers cannot fully explain the reasons why they go for a specific brand, when questioned. We also understood that there are implicit levers, far below the surface, that we can pull (or attributes the brands should reinforce) in order to influence their behavior towards our brands. Moreover, one (or even two) approaches alone might not be able to reveal the full picture – and that it is key to connect properly the dots among all of them.

As marketing ambassadors, our mission is to drive brand growth by understanding the reality of how people choose brands. Along this paper, we learned about how memory is built in our brains: acquisition, consolidation and evocation of information. We also talked about brand salience and mental network construction, when received results from our “LER” data collection frame.

How do these layers connect to each other?

The way we think about brands is a consequence of the synapses our brain builds while consolidating information it gets from them, feeding a more emotional unconscious System 1 structure of thoughts, feelings, experiences, images, stories, associations, colors, sounds, symbols and memories. The acquisition – consolidation vector correlates to what we call *memory salience*, which are all the existing aspects of the brand’s mental network. It is what is already

there, built along the years of consumers' experience with the brand. Salient brands come to mind in the moment that matter. As they have strong associative memory structures, they are most likely to be chosen at the purchase moment.

The *attention salience* supports a more conscious process of thinking, activating system 2: this is about the consolidation-evocation vector, in which we have consumers making the decision and brands inserting cues and stimuli to capture their attention.

Brands need to activate both brain systems!

An important goal of a brand should be to create a mental network that reinforces its core positioning elements, bringing unique elements, with a proper density. The brands that reach such a feat have stronger associative memory structures and are most likely to be chosen at the purchase moment.

Would a brand be willing to invade its neighbors' network and "steal" their competitors' associations? Does the brand need to build a new connection, a new association, a new network?

"It's very difficult to establish wholly new connections...that would be like trying to make consumers fundamentally relearn – how much effort would it take to convince the autopilot that a rose stands for fun and not for love?" (Barden 2013) ¹⁸⁾

After positioning a brand, marketers also have the task to monitor what consumers are getting from it. What can we expect consumers will understand from the brand's message and give the brand back – in terms of perceptions and behaviors?

Surely, their mental network goes much beyond what brands tell them via "official" communication touchpoints. There are many brand references for consumers that get out of the circle of influence of the brand. Some mentions (or memories, we could say) are not directly built from an official brand touchpoint, but from diverse touchpoints that are not under control of marketers. Messages that stray away from the brands intentions may come from word of mouth, YouTube homemade videos, negative or controversial buzz generated by campaigns from the past, or by the retailer that exhibits the brand in a certain space (more or less privileged) in the store.

The greatest value of the *integrative approaches*, then, is to shed light on elements that are below the surface, that are not obvious, and not properly stated. When we use different approaches with a clear objective and in a coordinated way, we can assess such elements and act on them to improve products, and to make communications that are more effective in several touchpoints. In short, to provide consumers with stimuli that will move them to not only positive perceptions and feelings but also to the consideration and purchase of our brands.

NOTE

Thinking on the technological aspect we mentioned previously in the paper introduction, we chose to follow with a Device Agnostic approach in Research module that allowed interviewees to access survey from where they were and when they wanted to, in a “fun” and more natural environment to encourage participation.

Endnotes

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2. Ibid., p. 24.
3. Ibid., p. 25.
4. Ipsos Connect EGM Multimedia 2016
5. Kahneman, D. (2011). Thinking, Fast and Slow, p. 23.
6. Ibid., p. 88.
7. Ibid., p. 94.
8. Ibid., p. 21
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12. Seth Stephens-Davidowitz (2017). Everybody Lies: What the Internet Can Tell Us About Who We Really Are. The Guardian.
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17. Ibid., p. 233.
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