

DANCING WITH DUALITY

Achieving brand growth in a
mindful and mindless world

September 2020

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GAME CHANGERS



Our world presents more choices than we can manage, with more brands and products becoming available through more tech-enabled channels. This offers people the benefit of access to almost anything these days, presenting them with all manner of choice.

How people make decisions is complex and nuanced, it is not simply about responding either automatically or deliberately. Rather, we are adaptive in the way we process information, based on what is going on around and within ourselves. Our decisions arise along a continuum, where multiple cognitive processes ranging from more mindful to more mindless are operating at the same time.

Whether we pay a little or a lot of attention when making a choice, our decision-making is regulated by an adaptive control process in the brain that can dial up more deliberative processing as required. All of this is deeply influenced by the context in which we are making decisions, as well as by goals, prior associations, and experiences stored in our memory.

KNOWING THIS, HOW DO WE SUPPORT BRAND GROWTH?

To achieve sustainable brand growth today, it is necessary to:

1. Understand peoples' brand relationships and choices, and
2. Know how to influence those relationships and the mindful and mindless choices that result – in other words, to know how brands can influence the regulatory process in our brains.

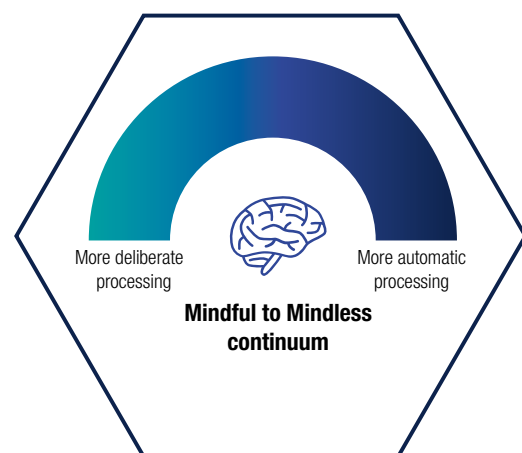


THE MINDFUL TO MINDLESS CONTINUUM

How we choose products and brands is complex and nuanced, using more than a couple of systems. We as whole people are engaged with our decisions, and the choices we make in different contexts fall along a mindful to mindless continuum.

“Our decisions arise along a continuum, where multiple cognitive processes ranging from more mindful to more mindless are operating at the same time.”

Figure 1 The mindful to mindless continuum



THE SECRET TO BRAND GROWTH?

It hasn't changed, the secret to brand growth is a simple one: get **more people** buying, **more often** with the brand being **more easily** accessible.

MINDLESS & MINDFUL: WHAT'S REALLY GOING ON IN THERE?

It has become fashionable to say, “his gut or intuition made him choose A”, but the reality is that decision-making is more complex and nuanced.

There is a growing body of literature to support this understanding. For example:

- In the build-up to making a choice, multiple cognitive processes unfold which range from more deliberative to more automatic in nature.
- Neuroimaging techniques have revealed that a regulatory process monitors and guides this cascade of processes and allows people to arrive at a behaviour adapted to context. One key feature of this process is that it can inhibit an automatic response and trigger more deliberative processing that might be better suited to the situation.
- A person's motivations and goals – wearing clean clothes, quenching thirst or finding a potential life partner – deeply affect their emotional experience, how they process and store information in memory, and hence, how they make choices.

- Describing adaptive memory, Schacter¹ explains: *“An elaboration-dependent system ensures only events important enough to warrant encoding have a high likelihood of recollection”*.
If we didn't come equipped with this adaptive memory feature, all the information with which we are bombarded would stick, quite literally ‘too much information’.

What does all of this tell us about the way people choose brands in our mindful and mindless world?

While brand choice is often more mindless and makes use of shortcuts, this doesn't paint a full picture. In many cases, more mindful choices take over – triggered by context, motivations, emotions, values, or past experiences. When this happens, we engage cognitive resources.

We might, for example, turn to the internet or social media to find out more about a brand, see what others think about them, or ensure they align with our values.



BRAND INTERVENTIONS

Many factors influence whether choices are more mindful or mindless. Brand leaders can benefit from both by building intuitive, relevant, and culturally attuned associations with the brand, designing marketing interventions that disrupt automatic processing, while ensuring that people always have easy access to strong arguments that will support a more deliberative choice – whether this is in their minds or at their fingertips.

Brand growth also comes from intervening when people are intuitively choosing between competitive brands: moving them from a more mindless to a more mindful state.

If we imagine people scrolling mindlessly through brand information as if quickly scrolling through a social media feed, it becomes clear that it is in the brand's interest to stop the mind-scrolling – particularly in the moments that matter.

They can do this by triggering 'conflicts' that challenge more automatic, mindless choices, or through interventions that disrupt someone's automatic impulse, cause them to pay attention, and encourage a more mindful and possibly different choice.

Leading brands typically need to reinforce existing associations, whereas challenger brands have more to gain from making people stop and think about the choices they make. However, in disruptive environments, arguably ALL brands can at times benefit from making people more mindful in their choices. Even leading brands benefit from disrupting the marketplace through innovation or a shift in positioning in order to maintain their lead.

If in the moments that matter, such as at the time of purchase, the brand is not easily accessible, or there are other significant physical barriers to purchase, the brand will not benefit from either the mindful or mindless choice a person may have made. Brand growth therefore does require more people to buy their brand more often and the brand needs to be more easily accessible.



STAGE AN INTERVENTION

Brands can stop consumers' mind-scrolling by designing interventions that make them pay attention, even for a second. Use this opportunity to reinforce or explain your key messages.

Brand owners should be conscious of the fact that the socio-cultural context in which people make decisions is dynamic. People's beliefs, values and goals are influenced by these changing socio-cultural contexts. This means that the relevant associations consumers have with a brand can be different in these different contexts, and they can change over time. Brand owners who continuously identify how relevance is evolving are likely to stay ahead of the curve.



CULTURE IS CRITICAL

The internal and external context in which people operate shapes their beliefs, values and goals. These factors are dynamic, constantly changing, and can change the way people relate to or associate with a brand.

Figure 2 External influences



Socio-cultural context



Planned communication



Physical context



Incidental communication

Whatever the intervention, it is possible for brands to disrupt the process of decision-making sufficiently for people to make a more mindful brand choice.



PERCEPTION, EXPERIENCE & IDENTITY: INSTRUMENTS TO INFLUENCE BRAND CHOICE

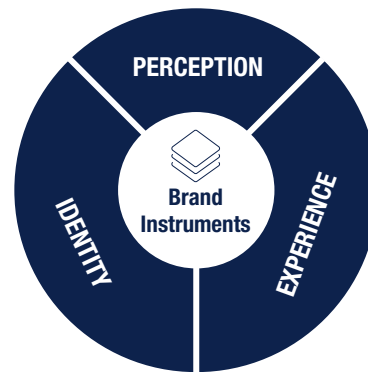
There are three intertwined marketing instruments at the brand owner's disposal as they attempt to influence brand choice:

- **Perception:** Influencing how the brand is perceived and how it contextually lives in the mind.
- **Experience:** Delivering on the brand promise to support a strong memory structure.
- **Identity:** Building distinctive brand assets (often overlooked in measurement systems).

When, how, and in which combination we put these strategies to work is determined by an understanding of brand relationships and choices, and importantly, how people act upon their brand associations in different contexts.

When a brand offers a timely and unique balance of functional and emotional – further enhanced by complementary, multi-sensory assets – that brand comes to mind more readily in key moments.

Figure 3 Brand instruments



INFLUENCE BRAND CHOICE

In three simple steps: influence how the brand is perceived in the mind, deliver on brand promises in the customer's experience, and build distinctive brand assets.



MEASURE UP

The realities of brand choice can be measured through our Brand Value Creator (BVC), looking in particular at how a brand aligns to an individual's functional and emotional goals.

PERCEPTION: CONTEXTUAL ASSOCIATION MANAGEMENT

Brand marketing is intended to build relationships between consumers and brands. Attitudinal Equity (AE) is our relationship metric and is central to our validated equity measurement system, Brand Value Creator, that reflects the strength of this relationship by measuring the degree to which a brand aligns to a person's functional and emotional goals. AE is a vital outcome metric, but there are some things to bear in mind:

- Managing brand associations is critical to growth, so we need to understand the interaction of perceptual and experiential drivers of AE in the competitive context.
- People bring their perceptions with them into different contexts:
 - › they may use them mindlessly, as mental shortcuts to make quick, intuitive decisions;
 - › but sometimes (perhaps triggered by brand communication or by a change in their knowledge, goals, experiences), people will slow and shift to more mindful processing.
- Research professionals are often guilty of assessing brands in a contextual vacuum or within a trade-defined category that may not reflect the true choice context or alternatives.

Our measurement system reflects the realities of brand selection, where a person defines the competitive set, so we can understand how brand relevance adjusts in different selection contexts.

EXPERIENCE: DELIVERING ON BRAND PROMISES

The signals a brand sends and the experience it produces are inextricably linked.

If there is a gap between what the brand says and what the brand does, expectations are violated, and attitudinal and behavioural adjustments can follow. When the experience consistently reinforces the brand promise, perception becomes more grounded, customers grow closer, and they use the brand more frequently.

To shape positive memories and outcomes, we need to be aware of the key experiential forces that drive strong and lasting relationships. These have implications for how brands are managed and measured.

IDENTITY: STANDING OUT THROUGH DISTINCTIVENESS

We need to make a brand easy to choose in the moments that matter. Often, a brand stands out when it has unique and authentic tangible features such as the shape of a bottle, a colour, a sonic cue, or a celebrity.

These pieces of brand information are like rare gems found in a unique place that make the brand shine more brightly and distinctly in the mind, particularly in established, mature categories. Well-managed brand assets contribute to a person's mental network of brand associations while enabling in-the-moment selection shortcuts.

We should acknowledge the role of brand identity and give it the measurement attention it deserves.



THE SAY-DO GAP

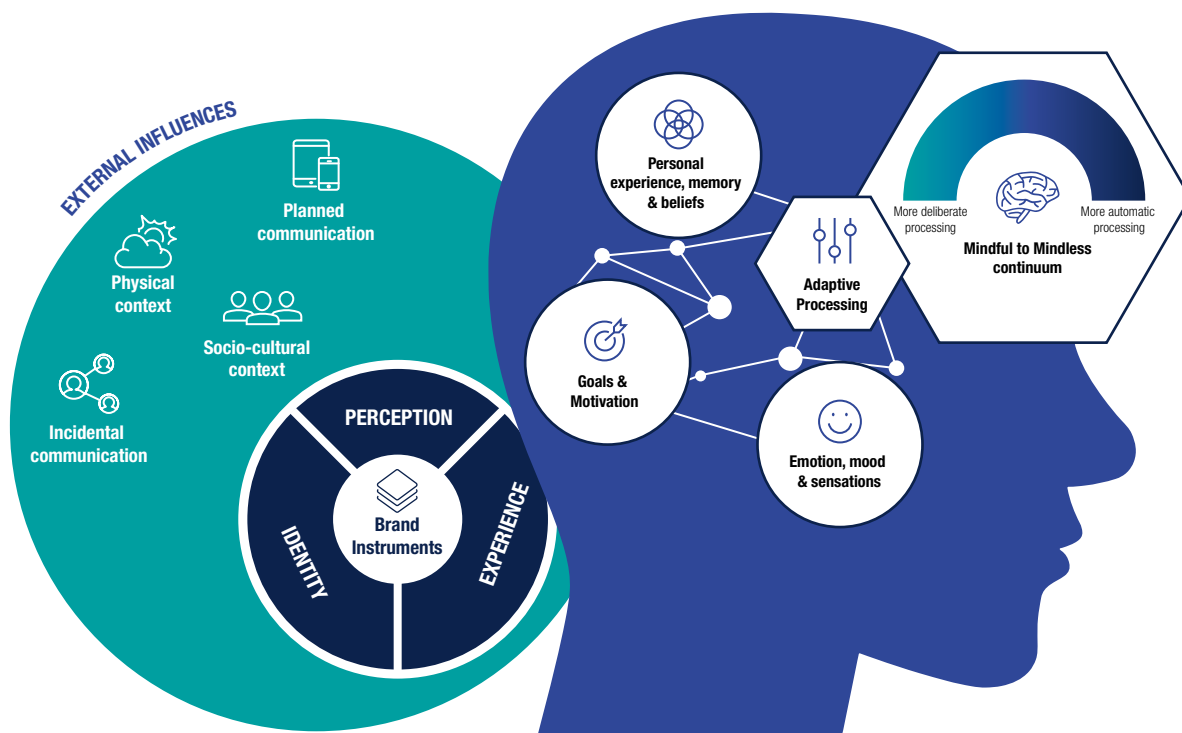
A brand needs to deliver on what it promises. If there is a gap between what a brand says and what it does, consumers' expectations won't be met, which can damage the relationship.



BE UNIQUE

A brand is more likely to stand out if it has distinctive, authentic and tangible features, e.g. the shape of a bottle, colour, celebrity or sonic cue. Think of the Nike swoosh or Red Bull's wings.

Figure 4 A holistic view of how people make brand choices



People are adaptive and contextual decision-makers, often looking to take mental shortcuts to fulfil their goals without much effort. But when triggered, they can also shift to more mindful processes.

A WORD ON BRAND PURPOSE

One of the ways in which brands can build interventions is by drawing attention to a specific brand purpose. By making people aware of the brand's values and principles, people can make decisions about if and how the brand aligns with their own personal goals and values.

In order to impact brand choice, the brand purpose should be authentic and an integral part of what the brand stands for. If not, it is more a Corporate Social Responsibility initiative which can help HR, for instance, but which is not very likely to lead to brand growth. And, people can very quickly identify when brand purpose is more a marketing tactic than a genuine reflection of what the brand stands for.

With more consumers being aware of the societal, environmental and economic impacts of their brand choices, brands can indeed communicate a more explicit brand purpose.

While this is often used to help people make more mindful choices, brands should be aware that they can also align with people's values in a more mindless way, e.g. by using cues that intuitively evoke the values that people want to connect with.



AUTHENTIC PURPOSE

To influence brand choice, the brand purpose must be authentic and a key part of what the brand stands for. You can use intuitive cues that align with the values that people associate with. But, be careful – people will be able to tell if brand purpose is constructed as a marketing ploy.



SUMMING UP

To connect with consumers in a meaningful way and grow strong brand relationships, we need to understand people, how they process information, and how and when to intervene to help them achieve their goals.

We have learned that people are adaptive and contextual decision-makers, often looking to take mental shortcuts to fulfil their goals without much effort. But when triggered, they can also shift to more mindful processes.

Opportunistic brands find ways to challenge and disrupt mindless choice, then consistently deliver an experience to match the brand promise.

By understanding how to influence brand relationships and contextual choice, marketers can ensure their brand shows up in the right places and at the right moments – in this way achieving sustainable brand growth.



ACHIEVE SUSTAINABLE GROWTH

Understand how to influence brand relationship and contextual choice, and infuse this knowledge into the effective use of marketing instruments to achieve sustainable brand growth.

REFERENCES

1. Schacter, Daniel (2002), "The Seven Sins of Memory: How the Mind Forgets and Remembers"
2. Venkatraman, V, Timpone, R, Garcia-Garcia, M, et al. "Disrupting System 1 Thinking: Better Science for Smarter Marketing" (September 2020). Presented at ESOMAR conference: <https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/disrupting-system-1-thinking-ipsos-esomar.pdf>

DANCING WITH DUALITY: KEY TAKEAWAYS

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