

HOW TO DRIVE SUSTAINABLE BRAND GROWTH?

An interview with Gillian Drewett about Ipsos' new brand growth story

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In September 2020, Ipsos published its new brand growth story, grounded in the latest scientific thinking about how people make decisions in a digital world that presents us with more choices than we can manage. This new understanding and strategic advice for brands is encapsulated in the paper *Dancing with Duality: Achieving brand growth in a mindful and mindless world*.

Contributing author and expert in Ipsos' global brand health tracking research Gillian Drewett speaks to Simon Atkinson from the Ipsos Knowledge Centre about Ipsos' perspective on brand growth in the context of our new way of understanding how people make decisions today.

Q Let's start by thinking about brand growth and evaluating brand performance over time. Can you tell us a little about how we approach the topic?

A No matter the climate - whether it's clear or stormy, as we are experiencing now, sustainable brand growth is essentially the end goal for our clients.

Tracking research is a methodology that weathers the storm, so to speak, because it offers a consistent way for our clients to keep their fingers on the pulse of their market and importantly stay connected with people over time. The research we do offers ongoing information and insights for our clients. It helps them find the deep roots in which they can anchor their brand growth plans.

Q This subject of how to grow your brand is one that many marketing textbooks have been based on. What's the Ipsos perspective on this?

A At Ipsos we are passionately curious about society, markets and people. And sustainable brand growth needs to start with people. For our clients, good things come when people buy more often and more easily. The *Dancing with Duality* paper really is all about expanding on this point.

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Q So, 'Dancing with Duality' is the title of the white paper. What's the background to your choice of name?

A Well the full title is 'Dancing with Duality – Achieving brand growth in a mindful and mindless world'. If we're thinking about how brands grow, by being chosen by more people more often and more easily, the key word there is "chosen". And so the title really refers to the way we make decisions.

What is new and fresh in that paper is our understanding of *how* people make decisions. If we now know more about how people make their choices, we can better know how to influence their brand choices... and knowing better really opens up space and brings opportunity for our clients to explore. Dancing with Duality is a great concept because we make quick and slow decisions and we "dance" with those all the time.

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Q Thinking about how people make their decisions, is there one particular way I should be looking at it, or do we need to be a bit more sophisticated than that?

A Well, here my answer will also pick up a bit on what we were saying about the title of our paper. For a long time now, the prevailing narrative around decision-making has been that we either use "System 1", which is fast and intuitive or "System 2", which is a bit slower and more deliberative. But the joy of scientific endeavour is that there's always more to learn, there's always more to discover, and when we learn more and discover more it gives us opportunity to change.

And that's the case now. We know more about how people make decisions - and it's not binary. It's not an "either, or" thing, it's both. And it's both in varying degrees and at different times, and all at the same time! As humans we are complex creatures, and in the paper we are showing that decisions arise along a mindful to mindless continuum, with mindful being more deliberative and mindless being a bit more automatic, and in our brains there is a whole bunch of stuff going on: a cascade of multiple processes are kicking off there, dancing if you will, all at the same time, and over time. This goes from milliseconds when you don't even realise something is happening but you've made a decision to a longer time, over days or even months. And what's more is that this is happening in response to an action, a particular need, a desire we are trying to fulfil, but also in response to the context in which the decision is being made. This means our decision-making process adapts to context. Essentially, we are adaptive decision makers.



Q Is this where the dancing comes in then? I've got this sense of different patterns and different rhythms...

A Yeah, it has quite a few different layers. There's a lot more to it – it's also important to say that there's neuroscience and behavioural research out there that supports this. At Ipsos we have a scientific paper which forms the foundation for this Dancing with Duality paper.

Q You talk about how people make decisions in different contexts and bearing in mind their own needs. Clearly every context is different, and everyone's needs may be different, but are there any other key things we should bear in mind when we think about this topic?

A Perhaps I can answer that in relation to brands and brand growth. We, as people, can adapt our decisions based on the need and the context. Which means that if brands show up in the right way at the right time, the decision a person might be making about a brand - whether they're going to buy it or consider it - can be influenced. It may not be entirely new news, but the fact that we now know more about how people make decisions and how we can influence that is really exciting.

Q So, brands can directly intervene in those decisions that we are making?

A Yes, and of course brands have been intervening and influencing forever, but we are now able to do it better. The context has an impact, what's going on around us has an impact, and even the broader environment has an impact. So, external and internal influences all go into how we make choices. But I think what's important now is the phrase "directly impact" because marketing endeavours have always been about trying to influence people to buy or consider their brand, and now we can do it in a more pointed and more directed way because of what we now understand about how people make decisions. Therefore, brands can be more successful at influencing by intervening in the right kind of way for people.

Q That brings us onto a more practical question. How can brand managers know they are doing the right things for the success of their brand, and how can they evaluate the brand's performance over time?

A Marketing matters because it helps to drive change, but it needs to be the right kind of marketing effort for the right kind of change. I think that now more than ever. If a brand shows up in the right way at the right moment, good things happen for the brand, and good things happen for people. You might even say brands can help people find what they're looking for, not necessarily in the bigger life sense - or the classic U2 song! - but in the products and services sense, of course.

We can highlight the different marketing instruments available that influence choice and brand growth, instruments such as perception, identity and experience - we go into this in more detail in the paper. For a brand and its custodians, the people responsible for the brand, to be able to manoeuvre those instruments, they need the right kind of data and the right kind of metrics that will give them the right kind of insights. And the right metrics really matter, metrics that give meaningful information that marketers can actually do something with. They can trust that if they do move a lever that something will happen in the real world.

It's not necessarily about collecting new or different data, it's about how we view that data - and how we view it in a new light with this new knowledge about how people make decisions. For example, some metrics that we have like Brand Value Creator (BVC) measure the strength of your brand and competitor brands. Remember that competition is important in the market, so BVC offers that market context. Then, Brand Mental Networks, or BMN, offers the consumer context because we hear in people's own words what they have to say about the brand. If we also include social media data alongside our tracking data, that gives us even more of the voice of the consumer, and what they're choosing to say, not what we have asked. So we essentially get both sides of a coin, if you will.

Q Just to come back to that point about competitors, what would be your advice to marketers wanting to do the right thing by their brand by knowing their competitors?

A Competitive context is critical because we're all spoilt for choice these days and there's any multitude of messaging out there, so you need to be noticed. And your competition is trying to do exactly the same thing! You need to understand how you're stacking up and what inroads you're making and, in fact, what inroads your competitors are making. You can get that competitive context from your survey data. This is why it's so important to have sound information that you can rely on.

Brand communications tracking is really powerful when it's done right because it gives you that depth of information that you can draw on to make your marketing and brand decisions, both the tactical ones and the longer-term strategic ones. And it provides that market context over time from people because we speak to them and hear their voices. If a brand is seeking to influence those people, make sure that what you're collecting and how you're collecting that information is really, really sound. *Read more on this in Shifting Context, Shifting Priorities (see Further Information)*

Q Tell me a bit more about how the brand growth story comes to life.

A Tracking data and the tools we mentioned allow marketers to influence brand choice so that brands can have more people buying more of their brand more easily - this is how brands grow. But I also think that implementing the learnings from the brand growth story is where it does come to life. It doesn't mean we need new data, or we need different data, but it's what we do with the data and how we analyse it, viewed with the new lens we have. That's where the magic happens.

We can take these new insights and come up with fresh ways to understand what's going on in the market for our clients. It provides a way forward that matters and has meaning because our brand growth story is essentially not so much a framework but more an underlying theory that is grounded in scientific rigour, and that is an amazing thing to be able to centre it around.



Q We've talked about the white paper *Dancing with Duality*. Where can people find out more?

A I think the Ipsos global website is the best place to start, you can find out more about the brand, our brand tracking business, as well as the new white paper.

Just to say one more thing about the new brand growth story - it has been a long time coming and the collaboration has been spirited and amazing. Something that Seth Godin said is that it's about being a driver of the markets, not simply being market-driven. And I think that this new view of how people make decisions allows us, and our clients, to be drivers of the market. Which is really exciting.

Q And if you'd like me to remember one thing, what would it be?

A Remember that people are adaptive decision makers, know your context, *understand* your context, and you'll be set for sustainable brand growth.

FURTHER INFORMATION

- Watch the full interview and clips of some of the questions here: <https://www.ipsos.com/en/how-drive-sustainable-brand-growth>
- Read the Ipsos Views paper *Dancing with Duality: Achieving brand growth in a mindful and mindless world*: <https://www.ipsos.com/en/dancing-duality>
- Find out more about the science behind Dancing with Duality in our ESOMAR paper *Disrupting System 1 Thinking*: <https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/disrupting-system-1-thinking-sept-2020-ipsos.pdf>
- *Shifting Context, Shifting Priorities* discusses why the time is right for brands to review their strategy and the foundational insights on which it is based: <https://www.ipsos.com/en/shifting-context-shifting-priorities>

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