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'As time passes, we encode and store new experiences that interfere with our ability to recall previous ones. I can remember what I had for breakfast today, but not what I had for breakfast on this day a year ago because I have had many breakfasts since then that interfere with my ability to pick out a single one from the crowd.'

Using the analogy above, if a lot of new pathways are created across the grass field, it becomes increasingly difficult to see and follow the original.

So now we understand how we learn about brands, let's apply this to the way we choose brands.

How we decide between brands

The first question to resolve is how brand learning can influence brand choice at all. Surely if brand choice is driven by intuition, it suggests we are not going to be influenced by marketing at all?

Part of the answer is that brand decisions, like all decisions we take, are influenced by intuition. Antonio Damasio in his book *Descartes' Error* (5) explains this in full, and also explains how learning can influence intuitive decision-making. He postulates that we construct during our lives what he calls 'somatic markers':

'Somatic markers are ... feelings connected, by learning, to predicted future outcomes. When a negative somatic marker is juxtaposed to a particular future outcome the combination acts as an alarm bell. When a positive somatic marker is juxtaposed instead, it becomes a beacon of incentive.'

We use somatic markers almost continuously in order to make everyday decisions. Usually they operate as a warning, a 'negative' marker. For example, despite all our parents' advice, we never learn to look before we cross the road until one day we step out and a car flashes by and nearly hits us. Next time we try to cross a road, this somatic marker is triggered subconsciously and we look more carefully.

Somatic markers provide one explanation of how advertising can influence

intuitive brand choice. Take for example the slogan 'Vorsprung durch technik': we may not understand it, but nevertheless it is unashamedly German, which for most people will trigger a somatic marker for engineering quality and reliability. It uses the word 'technik', which sounds like 'technical', and triggers a marker that equates with scientific expertise; and because it is not translated, it might even trigger a marker of sophistication and confidence.

An example of decision-making influenced by associations

To bring all this together, I'd like to end with my favourite example. Imagine you are in the supermarket, buying toilet paper. As I said earlier, if one particular brand satisfies our needs better than any other, then this is highly likely to be chosen, so if you are very short of money you will probably pick the cheaper store own brand. But let's assume you want a premium-quality toilet paper, and the choice is between Kleenex and Andrex, both at the same price.

The brand manager will have you believe that you 'think' about each brand for a moment, recalling what you know. You have seen ads for both, and Kleenex, you might recall, is quilted for extra softness and strength; Andrex, on the other hand, is advertised with a puppy, and claims to be soft, strong and very long. On this basis the rational choice might well be Kleenex, because no one is going to buy toilet paper just because of a puppy.

Now let's examine this situation with the benefit of what we have learned.

When you saw the Kleenex ad, you processed it with low involvement (sorry, Mr Brand Manager, but no one is that interested in toilet paper). Because you were working at low involvement, you didn't use your working memory to 'deduce' whether quilting would make the paper any stronger or softer, you just stored the brand name and the word. Likewise, the first time you saw the Andrex ad, you did

the same: you just stored the brand name and the puppy.

Standing opposite the fixture, you instinctively retrieve this learning about both brands: Kleenex = quilted, Andrex = puppy. 'Quilted' sounds like something which is soft. Puppies are also soft. So they are equal. But puppy also triggers two strong somatic markers from experience – one is 'loving', the other is 'family'. Which do you think wins? No contest. And that I am sure is one of the reasons why Andrex outsells Kleenex three to one in the UK.

All this happens in a few seconds. What we have shown in this example is that these two associations – 'quilted' and 'puppy' – both of which have been linked to their respective brands by advertising that has been processed with low involvement, barely noticed, and conceivably completely forgotten, are quite capable of exerting a powerful influence on brand choice. I believe this is how most advertising now works in the UK, and will eventually work around the whole world as our lives get busier and media become more diverse and more fragmented.

1. Robert Heath: 'The Low Involvement Processing Theory', *Admap*, March 1999.
2. H. E. Krugman: 'Brain Wave Measures of Media Involvement', *Journal of Advertising Research*, 1971, reproduced in *How Advertising Works - The Role of Research*, edited by John Jones, Sage, 1998.
3. Giep Franzen: *Brands and Advertising*, Adlib Publications, 1999.
4. Daniel L. Schacter: *Searching for Memory*, Perseus Books Group, 1996.
5. Antonio R. Damasio: *Descartes' Error*, Putnam, 1994.



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