World Knowledge Forum 2013

Neuroscience & Marketing

The fields of neuroscience and marketing are not often thought of together. Today, however, Dr. Gemma Calvert, Founder and Managing Director of Neurosense Ltd., Dr. Hilke Plassman, Professor at Ecole Normale Superieure and faculty at INSEAD, and Dr. Ruihong Tang, Founder and CEO of Brain Intelligence Neuro Consultancy Ltd., met at the 14th Annual World Knowledge Forum to show how the two fields are in fact, correlated.

Dr. Calvert gave a brief overview of neuromarketing, stating that there are three things we know about people: they don't always tell the truth, they don't always think how they feel, and they don't always do what they say. This is why it is so significant for companies to "capture these vital subconscious consumer responses to brands, products, and marketing communications."

Though all in the same field of work, Dr. Plassman, Dr. Ruihong, and Dr. Calvert study very specific and different aspects of neuromarketing.

Dr. Plassman initially posed a question: is this combination of neuroscience and marketing based on hope, or hype? She emphasized two main points, especially when using an fMRI. "You see maps of brains lighting up. It's important to understand what that means and how you can leverage this."

Specifically, her work revolves around isolating certain areas of the brain, through virtual lesions, to test consumer reactions. She explained that if you influence brain activity in certain areas, you can change behavior.

Dr. Plassman was, however, careful to note that "neuro-imaging is a very young science." She felt that moving forward, companies must specifically know what they want to manipulate. "You have to think of neuroscience as a tool that is not a silver bullet, but that complements traditional marketing research methodologies."

Dr. Tang's research is focused on the Chinese market, with its application in traditional television advertising compared to newer internet-based ads. "Nowadays," she said, "we do not only watch TV. We watch while using our laptops, we use our mobile phones while watching. How much time is really left for our TV commercials?"

Through testing a variety of brain and emotional responses with electroencephalography (EEG), and using eye tracking to measure how long the eye rests on the image, Dr. Tang came to a surprising conclusion. "Before, our advertisers used to think that TV got more attention because the screen is bigger. And TV generates more influence because it has been there for so long. People believe in it, it has credibility." Yet, internet ads generate more of a response.

Dr. Tang has also had significant success consulting with similar studies for video game programs, increasing one unnamed game's players, play time, and revenue by 20 percent.

Finally, Dr. Calvert discussed the work of her company, Neurosense. Though her company offers a variety of packages through the principles of being scalable, cost effective and fast, she highlighted one particular study done for MTV.

Neuroimplicit tools are the foundation of her work, and MTV was able to reestablish their standing within youth culture through the use of large samples and simple testing methods. Dr. Calvert said, "Apart from not requiring large pieces of equipment, they are difficult to fake."

Though from three distinct studies within the niche market of neuromarketing, the panel was in agreement with Dr. Calvert when she confirmed, "The whole field has been expanding exponentially. You can test a lot of things implicitly."