The State Of Neuroscience in Market Research

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In todayâ€™s age all of the major market research companies have neuroscience offerings, the reason being that they provide us with an understanding into the unconscious consumer response to stimuli which we know from advances in neuroscience is critically important to decision making. Neuro enables fresher, deeper, and richer insights, and can add unexpected perspective to evaluations of advertising, brand perceptions, and shopper experience.

As an insider to the early years of neuromarketing, it was easy to see how some overzealous neuroscientists felt they had discovered the ultimate tools to replace traditional market research methods. This belief was fueled by enthusiasm for neurometrics coupled with serious naivetÃ© about market research. And yet, neuroscience practitioners have now achieved a more mature perspective. Using the brain processing construct of Nobel Prize-winning neuro economist Daniel Kahneman, it is understood that neuro tools tell us completely different information about unconscious, emotional consumer response (System 1) and traditional research approaches address rational and cognitive response (System 2). Both are critical for understanding consumer decision making - - especially since the two systems are often fighting one another. That is why it is sometimes so difficult to make up our minds. The reason traditional market research firms offer neuro tools is simply that most studies are better off with them. Moreover, clients have become more savvy, and now request them. As the realization sinks in, researchers cannot continue to address only the rational, conscious side of reaction or the emotional, visceral side. Both are critically important. But which neuro tools to use? Now that neuro tools have been categorically accepted, the key question becomes which tools are best and for which applications. The truth is that they all do slightly different things and they all have plusses and minuses. There is both art and science to knowing which tools are best for given research objectives and client priorities including scalability, cost, timing and consumer comfort. While there may be room for some debate, here are some considerations of what each tool is especially good for. Biometrics: Stabile and sensitive measure of emotional engagement; provides great specificity and overall effect; consumer-friendly, scalable Facial Coding: Passive measurement for type of emotional response and emotional valence; secondary indicator of emotional engagement; easy to integrate into surveys; scalable EEG: Highly sensitive measure of engagement and emotional valence. Provides great specificity. Less consumer-friendly and scalable depending upon equipment used Eye Tracking: Attention and interest; patterns of observation; what is seen, in what order and for how long with great specificity; consumer-friendly and scalable; now available on line, in-store, etc. Implicit: Understanding unconscious perceptions and impact of stimuli on brands, sensitive for differentiating between brands and ads on key attributes and drivers; easy to include in surveys, scalable and consumer-friendly fMRI: Most sensitive neuro tool relied upon in academic labs for exploratory research on emotional response, engagement and memory; most expensive, least scalable Two camps exist within the big market research industry players with respect to developing proprietary systems and creating alliances with neuro research boutiques. Our philosophy is to be methodology-agnostic -- to fit client objectives, because we appreciate that they do not all do the same things and have created relationships with the leading neuro tool experts across the world. This enables us to offer the best methodology for each type of study. Other companies focus on specific neuro tools to the extent that they may have developed them in-house or invested in specialty providers. The large research company advantage Clients benefit when sourcing neuro research through established research companies. First, established firms have a deep understanding of quality research. This relates to study design, answering client objectives, consumer comfort, fatigue prevention, projectability, analytic depth and understanding of marketing context. Second, large market research firms can be objective in their choice of tools and adapt to scientific breakthroughs. Third, the large firmâ€™s volume builds deep experience in neuro fast, adding depth of expertise for selecting methodologies, designs and analyses. Fourth, large research companies are expert at integrating neuro with traditional methodologies. Study implications can leverage insights from System 1 and System 2 for the greatest consumer understanding in one report. This leads to economies of scale, study efficiency, norms and potential modeling or Meta analyses, plus a sensitivity toward when to use what tool. Simply put, integrating neuro tools with traditional research provides the best solutions today -- and promises even more valuable insights for tomorrow. Elissa Moses

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