

Neuroscience: Three Major Shifts to Keep in Mind

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We know that much of consumer buying behavior is driven by emotion. So the ability to understand emotional response is critical to comprehending what may be the most influential driver of business success. And yet, powerful emotional response so often resides in the non-conscious parts of our brain. How then can we researchers harness the emotional influence on decisions to better understand consumer behavior?

As market researchers continue to gain mastery of our understanding of human emotions and decision drivers at the non-conscious level, we need to remain aware of three major shifts in the way we collect data in our quest to better measure non-conscious consumer response.

1. Shifts in Perspective

The quick adoption of non-conscious research methods has led to a rapid evolution in perspective about these tools. They are clearly rising in acceptance and perception of importance. But importantly, the research industry has matured to recognize the importance of both non-conscious and conscious response, ideally analyzed together in the same context of reaction to stimuli.

Conscious measurement is not going away, as consumer decisions are not entirely rational or entirely emotional. They are both. The richest insights come from layering non-conscious measurements with traditional research methods. There is also no "right" non-conscious tool for every research problem. Each solution brings its unique advantages and experts have a better understanding of what they can and cannot achieve.

Finally, we are seeing a growing interest in behavioral economics, focusing on understanding decision outcomes by taking into account emotional and psychological factors.

2. Shifts in Emerging Methods

It is likely that you have heard a lot lately about facial coding, implicit reaction time testing, eye-tracking, biometrics and EEG. Over the past several years, most of these non-conscious measurement methods have become increasingly reliable, scalable and affordable.

And we can expect even more testing options to come online with the rapid innovations in technology for both hardware and software. For instance, with the explosion of consumer wearables, like Fitbit and Apple Watch, gaining attention, there are new possibilities emerging with mobile biometrics that capture heart rate and GSR.

3. Shifts in Practices

When it comes to research practices, non-conscious methods are becoming the standard and more universally accepted. Clients and researchers alike are no longer asking if they should include non-conscious methods. Instead, they are asking, "Which non-conscious methods are best?"

The field is also no longer the exclusive domain of neuro boutiques. Large and mid-size market research firms have adopted these methodologies by conducting R&D, hiring experts and partnering with boutique providers. Hence, the term "traditional research agency" is losing meaning as the large players aggressively innovate and implement new solutions in this area.