

Delving deeper

Jackie Dhaeyere
an independent
consultant with
CloudArmy



If 95% of our thought processes occur beneath our level of awareness, why is neuroscience still seen as murky and mysterious?

Neuromarketing is a term that has been bandied about in the marketing and market research industries for the past decade or two. It's therefore not necessarily spanking new but it's also not shooting the lights out in terms of adoption, by clients and vendors alike.

Despite some extremely smart and dedicated people committed to educating clients and promoting the application of insight from neuroscience to both marketing and market research, the widespread mainstream adoption thereof remains a slow burn... and I continue to wonder why this is the case.

On the one hand it has to be recognised that the biggest market research companies are deeply invested in traditional approaches to market research

in spite of the evidence highlighting its shortcomings. It would be naive to expect them to be the primary drivers of alternative techniques and thinking inspired by neuroscience.

So, if they're not going to drive the adoption of new techniques designed to tap into the nonconscious, it must be up to clients to drive this. But I suspect that few clients, and not due to any fault of their own, really understand the value of what it has to offer. If they did, the status quo would be different.

While it truly is not necessarily rocket science, the subject is unfortunately too often considered to be murky; a mysterious black box. It can be intimidating to the

average in-house research personnel, who are important influencers in the research methods commissioned on behalf of their employers.

I, too, come from a traditional market research background having "learnt market research" within what is now one of the dominant global market research companies. It took 10 years for me to identify exactly what it was behind my feeling of ambivalence about what I did for a living. Why did I tend to feel the insight we presented to clients was underwhelming and overpriced? Why did I mumble with a fair dose of reservation, "I'm a market researcher"?

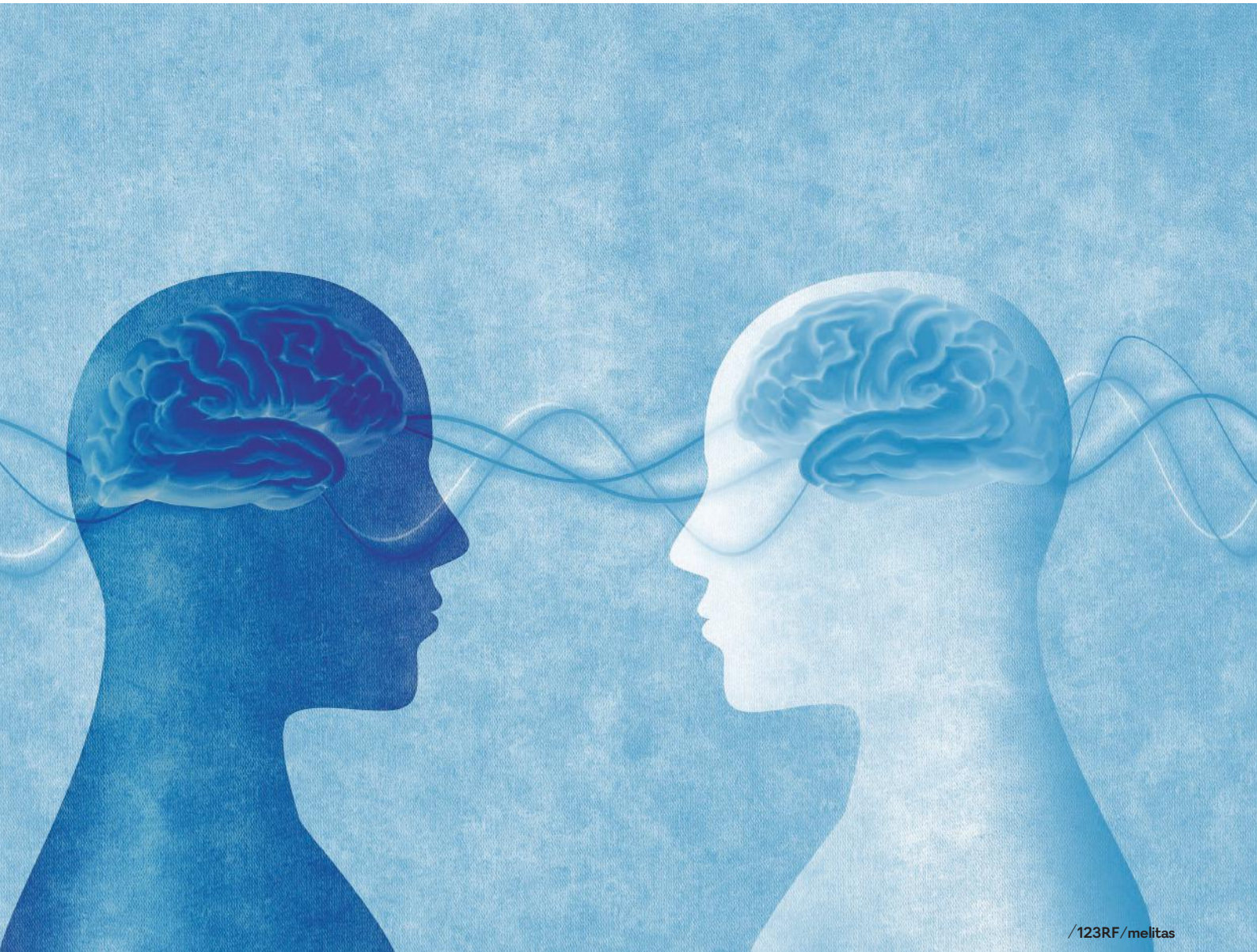
About 12 years ago while in the employ of a large corporate, our team of in-house marketers and researchers as well as our creative and media agencies were extremely privileged to be coached and mentored by an expert consultant in this field. She'd been brought into our business by our then highly visionary chief marketing officer. Her brief was simple: "Teach my team about the learning from neuroscience and how we should be applying this within our business to be better, more effective marketers informed by more accurate and predictive research learning."

So, how was this achieved? Much to our benefit, this consultant was especially gifted in simplifying the complex and appealing to her audience's common sense and intuition. We simply needed to appreciate the operating system of our consumers. And so, the basic principles about how we think and how our brains work, were shared with us.

These indisputable facts are:

“

We are not the
rational 'homo
economicus' beings
we have
traditionally
believed



/123RF/melitas

1. We are not the rational “homo economicus” beings we have traditionally believed, our thoughts are not orderly and hierarchical, initially likened to the workings of a computer processor. Rather, we make sense of the world through the most advanced pattern recognition system known to man, our brains. Our minds work as an associative processor, meaning that we learn through an extensive network of associated ideas and concepts, which has significant implications for the content and efficacy of the marketing messages we communicate.

2. The vast majority of thought processes, about 95%, occur beneath our level of awareness. It is therefore nonconscious,



THE BIG TAKEOUT

Every single decision we make, no matter how big or small, is driven by emotion

and we are unable to accurately report on it, even when asked to. Despite what has long been believed, we do not have conscious access to our motivations.

3. Decisions are primarily felt, not made. What this means is that decision-making is not the output of conscious deliberation as we have long believed. Instead, it has now been proven through neuroscience that every single decision, no matter how big or small, is driven by emotion. As marketers, we therefore must ensure we are evoking emotion in the consumers we strive to influence and as market researchers, we need to ensure we are measuring the emotional responses of our consumers to our marketing initiatives.

And it's important to understand that the emotion that drives everyday decisions is not necessarily the overt feelings of happiness or anger that we are all able to identify when we experience them; it is far more subtle than that. It is nonconscious and therefore cannot be reported via reflection or introspection. Alternative methods for measuring this kind of indirect emotion are needed.

Because consumers will provide an answer to any question asked of them, all too often highly rationalised and bearing little resemblance to the truth, it is difficult for some to accept that "consumers cannot tell us that".

One of my favourite analogies is this one used to explain what consumers can and cannot accurately tell us. Just like when we are feeling unwell and go to the doctor, we are only able to report on certain symptoms... a sore throat, achy joints and feeling feverish. Any self-respecting doctor, however, would not make a diagnosis nor prescribe a treatment based purely on what his patient is able to directly report.

This information would be considered in combination with other information gathered by the doctor via specialised equipment such as a stethoscope, a thermometer and blood tests, for example. Only with a complete picture of reported symptoms from the patient, together with information gathered by the doctor, can a reliable diagnosis be made.

Applying this analogy to market research with the consumer as patient and the marketer or market researcher as doctor, consumers can mostly and accurately tell us what, where, when and with whom, provided we are not asking them to recall too far back.

What they cannot accurately tell us is why they do what they do and if they will do what they say.

To more accurately understand why consumers behave as they do and what is likely to motivate future decisions in response to our marketing efforts, we need to use alternative and specialised techniques in combination with direct questioning. These techniques are specifically designed to measure subtle, underlying emotion and nonconscious motivation.

Fortunately, these techniques exist, and they can offer multiple advantages. Implicit response testing — my personal favourite — is versatile, widely applicable, saleable, well-suited to a range of digital devices, quick to administer, quick to turn around

“

What [consumers] cannot accurately tell us is why they do what they do and if they will do what they say

and cost effective. What more could any market researcher want?

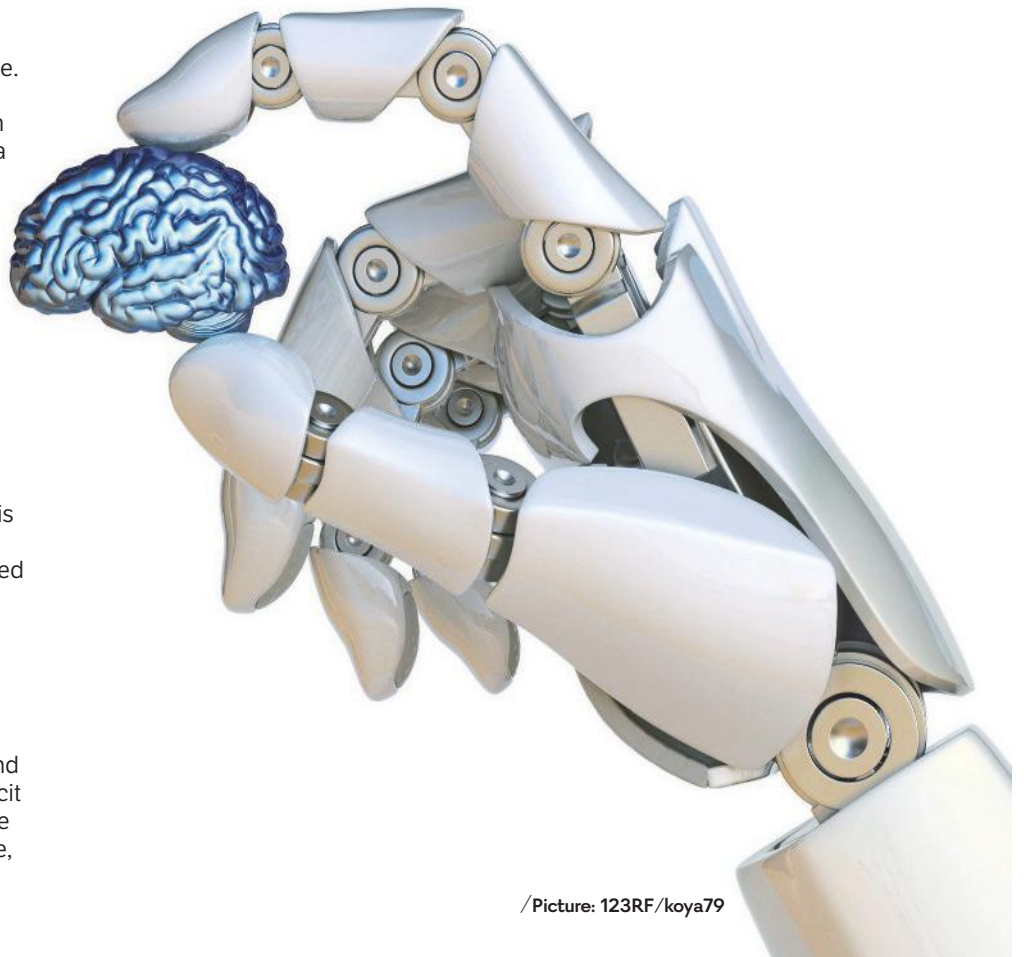
Using another analogy of sorts... how

many departmental heads would feel comfortable making budgetary decisions with only 5% of the required information? It seems ludicrous, and it is. But it's no different to a sole reliance on marketing communication and market research that exclusively talks to and explores the conscious minds of consumers.

And if one accepts that most of human behaviour is driven by automatic nonconscious mental processes that we are not aware of, and quite honestly, in the words of Daniel Kahneman "disbelief [in this regard] is not an option", it really is no different.

In conclusion, nothing is perfect, and no-one is or should be asserting that these newer tools and techniques tapping into the nonconscious minds of consumers are fully evolved just yet.

But those who have been after the science and using these techniques appropriately are seeing significant and continuous benefits from including such metrics in the mix — and placing increasing weight on them too. ▶



/Picture: 123RF/koya79