

Overview

First Edition

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The School of Thought

In remembrance of Bill Hunt, my first research guru,
who introduced me to the idea of consumer models



Abstract

Marketers, advertisers, communicators and policy-makers use a fairly common set of descriptors of the people to whom they wish to appeal. These are loosely termed “demographics” and generally consist of some or all of age, gender (not necessarily, but possibly, sex), educational level, home and other languages, life-stage, occupation, location and some measure of wealth. Marketing strategies may be framed in these terms, or in combinations of these variables along with, sometimes, some attempt at “psychographics” (their attitudes, interests, personality, values, goals and lifestyles).

Generally, marketing and communication outcomes are tracked mostly in terms of such demographics: but very seldom at a psychographic level and very seldom with any real understanding of the human being at the focus of this energy. Of course, this may not be true in the ad creative business (a well-known creative director once showed me how to walk in the moccasins of those to whom you wish to appeal) but it is certainly how things are tracked.

This approach has been influenced by consumer models that posit rationality as the basis of communication processing and decision-making – a classic example is the AIDA (Awareness, Interest, Desire, Action) approach which sounds perfectly reasonable, but is now known to ignore the reality of how human-beings – not “consumers”- actually operate.

This paper seeks to outline a more appropriate approach to understanding how marketing and communicating works by moving from a consumer-led model to a people-led framework. This implicitly understands that people live in their own reality bubble (think a snow globe) which arises from their basic humanity, and their accident of birth in the first instance, and then explicitly notes how subsequent events and choices circle back and change what is in that bubble. In turn, this affects the way people interact with the outside world.

The framework outlines a set of measures that are relevant, short and easy to implement in order to understand the people with whom one wishes to communicate. How to determine where people fall in terms of these measures is explicitly provided. An action outline is provided.

Prologue

Looking back over one’s life, interests, achievements, successes and failures, and what still fascinates as one ages, one may well be struck by the circularity of many elements of it.

How did my interests as a child affect my future choices? How did those choices mature into achievements, successes or failures? What ended up as unexpected? Was there a common theme? What was affected by my basic humanity? By my upbringing? By others? What changed over time? Why? What is the ultimate take-out?

Many aspects of life are circular: our belief systems are under constant review just as our life circumstances change as the clock’s hands sweep, as we make the choices life throws at us and assess the outcomes. Circles within spirals.

This paper sets out a model of the human condition and shows how this not only explains one’s life journey but has wider applicability in understanding the underlying background to how people run their lives and make those choices. It is about how we make decisions – everyday decisions and life-changing decisions - and what that means for policy makers, marketers, communicators, those who seek to influence others, as well as researchers.

Most of my career has been spent as a marketing researcher, specialising in survey design and analysis specifically, as a survey statistician. As a result, I was introduced into the world of consumer behaviour models early but these were, initially, quite circumscribed and confined to the area of specific brand choice processes.

But there is a wider dynamic that drives how people make these and many other decisions. Central to this is a set of basic hypotheses as to how people think: how the conscious and unconscious components of our brains might interact, and how this affects the how we see the world around us. Central to this, too, is an understanding of the human condition and how each person’s life journey drives their choices, their decisions.

I use aspects of my own life as examples. More detail is available in a full paper.



Agenda

I recently saw the brief for a major tracking study into media and buying habits. South Africa has a proud tradition of such studies, albeit often beset with politics. I was struck how *traditional* parts of the brief were, despite professing a desire to embrace new and more modern thinking. There was a clear trust in the so-called “tried and tested” approaches.

But how tried and tested are they?

I mean, you will never be criticised for choosing Toyota over Tesla, say, or Hoover over Suck-o-matic. It is a bit like choosing Copernicus or Galileo over the Pope...you could lose your head...

Oh, but hang on – Galileo was right...

So the object of today is to give you a reset – I hesitate to say a new paradigm, but, certainly, a new way of thinking...but about what?

People.

Not “consumers” – but “people”.

We will do this initially by looking at two streams of thought that should not be new to you (though, judging by the brief I saw, may well be) and that turns out to have an interesting link that directly affects marketers and communicators and policy makers.

These lead to an even bigger idea that top marketers embrace but seems not to have arrived in the mainstream yet, at least in a measurable way.

We end up combining the three into a better way of thinking about the people you want to talk to or research or persuade...the OLIVES framework.

Introduction

This is the house I grew up in. It was designed and largely built by my Dad and his friends just after he and my Mum married. He continued adding to it and improving the plot we lived on the whole time we lived there.

It is an ordinary middle-class home, occupied by an ordinary middle-class white family. My dad was an electrical/electronics engineer but could turn his hand to just about any engineering type project. My Mum was a bookkeeper of note. My Dad was instrumental in opening up the air waves of Rhodesia at the time.



For contrast, here are two homes typical of the type of place lived in by the majority of South Africans – who are black.



Stop and reflect on that. You see what I was handed, as a given, from birth. You see what many others were handed, also from birth. What were you handed? Stop and think about that. Just stop.



This is a picture of a room of giant vacuum tubes as used in powerful radio transmitters of that bygone era. My Dad ran one of these, the colloquially named London-link (formally call-sign ZEA) that used to also receive “pictures by radio” that took 30 to 40 minutes to come through, and were used by the newspapers the following day. The vacuum tube room was indeed a warm room I was able to walk through, and had its own characteristic smell.



There was also a Morse Code room where urgent signals would arrive and be printed on long ribbons of paper in a wavy line. My Dad and his colleagues could read these straight off the wires (the origin of the term?). This was a little after carrier pigeons, but not by much!!

My grandfather ran a telegraph link in Mahalapye (in what is now Botswana), linking Bulawayo to Kimberley, before becoming a very senior postal manager in Bulawayo and, later, Salisbury, where I was born. Did this also influence my Dad? Of course. Me? Undoubtedly.

Primary Goal - Reset

What do think were the antecedents of those in the other houses? What was their “accident of birth”? What did that do for them compared with me in terms of a start in life?

Of course, there is more. You will introduce three new ideas that are linked – windmills, candles and olives – hence the logo. These ideas present a Reset in terms of how we should be thinking or those with whom we want to communicate, persuade or research.



In this Reset, we will look at initially at two streams of thought but we first to start with these Givens – the Given of the accident of one’s birth, as these feed into all that follows. And in doing so, first look inside...

You

Think first of where you came from. What are YOUR Givens?

What came from the fact that you are a human? There are similarities that join us – indeed, we all share 99.9% of our DNA. This is a crucial point to remember: we are more similar than different.

But different we are: there is a small proportion of our DNA that accounts for the variation between individuals AT BIRTH. Obviously, much of this variation comes from our parents (your sex and your genes and your “race” as defined by society). But there is an element of random variation as to what we get from each parent – that is why siblings are not generally identical. And this goes back to all our ancestors in ever-decreasing proportions: our parents received a mix of *their* grandparents, with randomness again a factor, and back and back...

