

THE INSIGHT IN QUESTION

By Thayalan Bartlett

Advertising gets more and more predictable and is lackluster in triggering consumers to believe that they need a new brand experience through trial or brand switch. Whilst many would pull-out the marketing book to question the communication strategy, analyse price, distribution, product formulation and cost efficiencies there could be an external force that is yet to be identified- the power of the oversight.

The relevance of the key insight and its obsessive nature with brand communications specialists is the barrier between the old theory of advertising fundamentals and the new age consumer. Insights are losing their effect in offering some major categories the edge they require to compete and sustain them. As product innovation becomes less frequent in categories like FMCGs and the period between brand innovation and category adaptation gets leaner, brands are finding it more challenging to stay afloat in the consumer's mind. This phenomenon also happens when categories such as automobiles and airlines have been innovating at great pace in the last two decades but have completely missed out on what the consumer expects from them. We know that- first- in- the mind used to have the staying power for brands. This is no truth in today's world. Brand power through insight driven positioning is less effective than before as consumers have become more discerning, aspirational and disloyal to brands that they loved yesterday. Why?

THE EVOLVING BRAND AND THE EVER EVOLVING CONSUMER

In the years gone by brands evolved at a slightly faster pace than consumers. In fact they set the benchmark for aspirations through better fragrance or greater vitamins egging-on consumers and edging out competition. Today, consumers set the benchmark for brands as the rate of evolution- desire, aspiration and knowledge are faster in the consumer world than the brand world. The reason could be that brands are failing to make positioning relevance with consumers and are slower at recognizing the changes and prefer to trust innate methods as in the case of Lux- The beauty soap for film stars. At some point in the consumer world film stars were recognised as the epitome of fashion, style, popularity and identity. But in today's consumer world film stars are in serious competition with music icons, sports icons, political icons business icons that are raking in star quality and are making film stars less appealing. The silver screen as a delivery point of beautiful faces has its own set of challenges as it competes with modern gadgetry like your TV screen, your phone screen and your computer screen where engagement is up close and personal giving the receiver to assess and select who they like to emulate. They deliver songstresses, news presenters, supermodels, sports personalities, business personalities and entertainers who are drawing away appeal from film stars. The insatiable appetite for consumers to relate to stardom is setting new benchmarks for brands like Lux to rethink its positioning strategy. Take hair care for example: shampoos have covered everything from anti-dandruff, to offering shine, bounce, pro-vitamin health to beautiful long and strong hair to solutions for bad hair days and what not. With due respect to the brand developers they were very real pointers for great brand stories. They were a success and helped in building brand equity and creating shareholder wealth. But the challenging question is what next? Brand custodians are pushing the threshold on the influence of insights in their quest to conceptualise great advertising ideas. Some hotly contested product categories are fatigued by the sheer pace of unappeasable aspirations and are bordering on inventing insights for consumers within the traditional boundaries of the consumer world.

THE ANSWER COULD BE IN OUTSIGHTS

I am going to stay with shampoos to explain the relevance of insights. Hair was the symbol of femininity and has transitioned from dandruff to bad hair days. Women have moved on from yearning to be head turners and making jaw dropping entries. In today's merciless world women form a significant portion of the workforce and are subject to terror in the city, panic at the stock exchange, to the scarcity of opportunities, to suppression of women that is bringing forth a new and resolute woman who sees nothing but the desire to conquer. Superwoman is not self-made but circumstance led to be the determined victor in the theater of social challenges. It's is not about attention any longer but about recognition. Her hair was once the symbol of beauty and the epitome of femininity. Today it is a weapon for social standout value. It is a transition from passive acceptance to the fight for social survival through distinct recognition. It is away for inflicting the effects of power. Shampoo, in the new consumer-world should not look within as most insights and positioning platforms have been done and have failed to engage the consumer in a compelling way. A shampoo brand should reset its benchmark for consumer aspirations through a new experience by getting consumers to look beyond the brand's immediate realm for the insight because your beauty is judged by others and not you. At least not anymore. "I am what I am and I really don't care what others think" was an attitude statement at a time when youth had all strings attached but yet wanted to demonstrate their defiance and make an investment in a radical identity in a rapidly changing social landscape. It was an effective insight a decade ago for brands to play with. But not quite so in present times. In the new world it is the others who make you and an old notion that you make yourself. The truth is that unless you recognise that there are a lot of people in your making its hard to make it in these times. We are in times where ratings matter. Ratings shape you and make you and you are measured all the time.

Shampoo brands should recognise that their consumers live in a hostile social environment and not in an artificially peaceful world like advertising portrays them to be. This brings about realism to the proposition which consumers might be willing to connect and give the brand more legs for the next leg in their journey to carve out more share- hence a proposition like -"your hair is a weapon for seduction" might have better acceptance than a vitamin story or a superfluous story "Like more bounce or manageability" as these cues bear no relevance in the new-world. Sure "your hair is a weapon" so it is sublimely loaded with all the values of health, shine, bounce, colour, etc. and is the RTB for the proposition. From the belief that it takes a lot more than determination to be seductive, make hair the key arsenal to be the weapon for seduction leading it to the advertising idea - "hairplay" (as in foreplay) -An artful prelude to social acceptance and engagement .

The critical point that you need to consider is the force of outside influences that shape and make insights in today's over-claimed brand world. It's the power of the insight that activates a series of social electrodes which form new and fresh insights. The skill is to have the ability to advance that knowledge. Identifying the insight and transforming it into an insight for competitiveness is where it all lies. I would like to stress that this change is happening in most FMCG and other highly competitive categories, where positioning platforms have been exhausted. USPs are in short supply and is more scarce than oil. The traditional insight still holds true in many categories today, but it is in transition and on the path to evolution; soon it will be at a maturity stage, making it fact and common knowledge. Facts make advertising predictable. Insights make advertising correct, Insights make advertising a discovery and engage consumers to relate to it.

THE OUTSIGHT HAS GREATER SIGNIFICANCE IN THE AUTOMOBILE CATEGORY: This is another category that is failing to recognise the power of the oversight and not making brand sense with prospects. The premium automobile category is one that is still stuck to superior performance, elegant styling, cutting-edge engineering and virtually unlimited options. The gap between innovation and adaptation has been reduced within the category and all premium brands virtually offer the same. A Merc is as good as a Jaguar. A BMW is as good as an Audi. An Audi is as good as a Volvo. Ask a car enthusiast and he will take them apart and map them poles apart on true technical performance. But how many top business magnates who form the TG are enthusiasts? They are not purchasing a high-end car but a high-end social leveraging accessory. The torture tests, maneuverability and driving pleasure claimed in advertising, in reality become another vehicle for their chauffeurs and a tool for the tycoon to discriminate peers. If they are serious car enthusiasts, they will drive it themselves. However, if you apply the buying system to track the decision-making process, the prospect is challenged with an oversight at 3 stages - the search, consideration and experience stages will nudge him to evaluate what others will make of him owning this particular brand. Will it complement my professional status? Will it enhance my social acceptance? Will I be able to inflict maximum social pain (in refined English it will be envy) in others? Ultimately his decision will be based on - is this a good enough yardstick for them to measure my success? The power of the oversight has been around and is as old as marketing, but has not been brought to the forefront to determine the brand proposition. It is raising its head and will gain greater significance in categories that literally are on the brink of fabricating the insight for consumers to connect with their proposition. Think about the 'coke side of life'. It's a nice statement in the area of fun. Isn't it from the insight that youth like to have fun? Is this fact or an insight? Does it proposition you? Whereas Pepsi's "new generation" and the recent "dare for more" platforms, really make a lot of sense with youth today. They have deeply understood how youth want to have fun. The celebration of irreverence in youth makes it honest, believable and beneficial to them. Don't go too far, look within your own children - behind their cute, innocent exterior, lies a rebel. A rebel created outside his home environment where life is a lot more hostile. There is a lot of pressure within youth and there are factional groups that are creating oversights that determine the insights in these categories.

THE BIG AIRLINES MISSED THE BUS: Take the world's top airlines for example. Millions of dollars are spent on advertising and branding and they all look the same with different names. They all serve the same food, land at the same airports, their seats recline at the same angle, they all have caring, beautiful hostesses and they all fly the most advanced fleet. So what is in it for the passenger? Nothing different really! Insights could be in the area of safety, connections, pampering, recognition, rewards and experience which have evolved into consumer fact. Having run short of propositions, a recently launched global airline began to treat passengers as their "guests" - a wide departure from being a passenger. They didn't offer anything extra from what the others did. The ultimate net difference that the airline's marketing team achieved was to get some help from the English language. The failure of this category is that it is constantly living in the old-world. The airline industry's product development has largely been on manufacturing-led business insights rather than passenger insights. In this category you need both and they can't exist independent of each other. The product has evolved at a faster pace by being technically advanced - larger, faster, more comfortable, luxurious, fuel-efficient, less noise, etc. From a passenger experience point of view however, they are stuck with the same as any other airline. Why? Because of the over reliance on insights which are fact. The arrival of Easyjet and Air Asia were gaps created by bigger airlines not looking at the pace of

evolution in the new consumer, who had different ideas on how they wanted to book their flights and when they wanted to fly. The oversight - wanting absolute independence and control of their travel at a cost they can decide on. The bigger airlines simply overshot the runway with emotional in-flight trimmings, when passengers were actually looking at an "out-flight" experience. Today, the bigger airlines that should have recognised this much earlier, are scrambling to launch their own brand of "Easyjets" and are way off schedule.

THE INFLUENCE OF X-BOX AND PS2 IMPACTS THE SPORTING WORLD THROUGH AN OUTSIGHT: The advertising for Puma- "until then". I consider it a master piece in advertising during the last quarter. The insight in the category of performance shoes could be "I want to bend it like Beckham". Puma goes way beyond the consumer realm to create a differentiation. The weirdness of futurism is bringing about greater intrigue and participation through electronic gaming and the movie world. The brand's commercial predicts that regular sport will be so competitive in the future; players will grow legs like Pumas to out perform competition. "Unitil then" Puma assures that their shoes will have the animal's instinct to perform. Puma identifies the oversight relevant to the TG and transforms it into an insight to take advantage of the possible change before it becomes an insight. Apart from the oversight what is clever about the idea is its non-reliance on insight driven endorsements in a category where endorsements are cliché - insights make advertising correct but oversights make it a discovery. What will be interesting to see is how Puma will raise their game in the next advert. Its one heck of a leap they will need to take.

Losing sight of insights is bad enough, but in today's world, losing sight of the oversight is an offence of the marketing kind. Insights are created by social changes that influence dispositional change. Most of these changes are now taking place outside the immediate consumer realm. The point in emphasis is, when dwelling into consumer insights, we need to consider the external environment and look beyond the consumer's immediate realm. Particularly in faster-paced categories to find the perfect fit for the brand's proposition and the consumer's desire.

The sheer influence of brand planning is the failing catalyst: The significant role of brand planning in strategic development in renowned advertising agencies world over has developed and sharpened itself to perform at an extremely efficient level. But the issue brands are facing with this level of proficiency is that planners are mining insights from the same gem pit, cutting and polishing them to be embedded in ideas that look exciting, fresh and vivid. Whilst exciting, fresh and vivid are important they simply do not adequately position brands neither do they proposition and engage consumers in the manner they should in the new world. This is one reason that insights are not helping brands to discriminate from one another in the new age. The emergence of oversights in communications is eminent and could hold sway in advertising and brand ideas in the future.

The End of Insight

In an entirely different sphere the end of insights is predicted by Steven Strogatz the applied mathematician from Cornell University. In the book -What is your Dangerous Idea edited by John Brockman, this what he says about the failing effect of insights on how order Emerges from Chaos in the Universe, Nature and Daily Life " I worry that Insight is becoming impossible, at least in the frontier of mathematics. Even when we're able to figure out what's true or false, we're less able to understand why"

An argument along these lines was recently given by Brian Davies in the notices of the American Mathematical Society. He mentions for example, that the four colour theorem in topology was proved in 1976 with the help of computers, which exhaustively checked a huge but finite number of possibilities. No human mathematician could ever verify all the intermediate steps in this brutal proof, even if someone claimed to, should we trust him? To this day no one has come-up with a more elegant, insightful proof. So we are left in the unsettling position of knowing that the four-colour theorem is true but not knowing why.

In his own field of complex-systems theory, Stephen Wolfram has emphasized that there are simple computer programs known as cellular automata whose dynamics can be so inscrutable that there is no way to predict how they will behave. The best you can do is simulate them on the computer, sit back and watch how they unfold. Observation replaces insight. Mathematics becomes a spectator sport.

He goes-on to say that if this is happening in mathematics, the supposed pinnacle of human reasoning, it seems likely to afflict us in science, too-first in physics and later in biology and the social sciences(where we 're not even sure what's true, let alone why). When the End of Insight comes, the nature of explanation in science will change forever. We'll be stuck in an age of authoritarianism, except it will no longer be coming from politics or religious dogma but from science itself.

OUTSIGHT

Whatever is happening in mathematics is also happening in the brand and consumer world too. The great divide between manufacturer and consumer is interceded by the language of advertising, the pinnacle of consumer reasoning. Outsights- it is not a new theory (at least not yet) but a point-of-view to stimulate new thinking. The over-indulgence with insights is not significantly creating the communication breakthrough for brands. When you look at the macro perspective of a brand, you need to look around the peripheries for the oversight that is lurking to change the potency of an insight. The greater influences of "outsights" are too premature for consideration in some categories, so insights will be what you should go by. Whilst in others, the time is now. It is happening in personal care, automobiles and political brands to name a few. Change is inevitable. Marketing and advertising professionals of the future will be able to hold their jobs if they can develop the skill to see impending changes outside their immediate brand realm. Honing on this change will lead to fresh and groundbreaking thinking of ideas for the future. In the future, a brand will be a brand only if it fulfills beyond functionality. Functionality will be copied, adapted and interpreted at a faster-pace, making it competitive, only until copied. Outsights will be mostly emotion-inspired and will be the unique advantage of brands of the future.

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