

» If we talk about neuromarketing, can we talk about neurocommunication?

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The last major publishing phenomenon is a 26-page children's book. *The Rabbit Who Wants To Fall Asleep*. It has been successful because it is exactly what the subtitle says: a new way of getting children to sleep. Thus, via Amazon, it has been a true publishing phenomenon in France, a best-selling book in the UK, the top-ranked children's book in the U.S. and the most downloaded book within the category of Young literature in Spain¹.

The Rabbit Who Wants To Fall Asleep is a good example not only of tremendous publishing success but also of the application of neuroscience for a particular purpose. It is written by Carl-Johan Forssén Ehrlin, a psychologist. The author uses the word "sleep" several times, in order to take advantage of mirror neurons, which make the receiver feel as if he/she would carry out that action every time he/she hears the word in question. Likewise, he also takes into account cognitive economy, the brain's tendency to save energy, since he chose animals that are familiar to the child (rabbit) or with a connotation of slowness or nocturnality (snail, owl) as the main characters of the story. This technique is strengthened by the names he uses (Sleeping, Yawn) for them. It also fosters empathy with certain names that are familiar to the child. He knows that our brain

assimilates better what we already know and thus, the child's brain will not be activated whenever he hears his name, which will help him fall asleep.

We are experiencing a true communication revolution². The way in which information is spread and consumed has radically changed as well as the way in which different players interact, either citizens, brands or politicians³. The technological revolution has democratized information by multiplying exponentially the number of sources the consumer can access. And the more information we have, the more options and the greater the competition between companies⁴.

The citizen-consumer is becoming more and more demanding and participative⁵, even rebellious⁶. The consumer demands flexible solutions according to his personal needs, since he knows that, among all the commercial offers, he will find someone who shall provide what he really seeks⁷. However, his necessities have not changed dramatically⁸. The consumer has always wanted books to help children fall asleep. But, suddenly, among the millions of children's books, he finds one that meets his requirements better than the others. And he purchases it. And he recommends it.

The example of *The Rabbit Who Wants To Fall Asleep* shows us that, in order to stand out, the seller has to offer more precise and meaningful solutions, closer to what the consumer is looking for. The big question is: how can we know what the consumer really wants? The answer to it can be found in neuroscience, a new ally of marketing and communication, as the author of this children's best-seller discovered.

A deeper knowledge of the functioning of the human brain can help us have a better understanding of the true necessities and tastes of consumers and thus, establish a better communication with them. Neuromarketing has had a very successful first application, though limited, of this knowledge. Its use has only started to be

¹ Alvarado, E. (2015). 'El conejito que quiere dormirse' despierta a medio mundo. *El Mundo*. <http://www.elmundo.es/cultura/2015/09/07/55e49668ca4741cc358b4587.html> [Accessed 10 Sep. 2015].

² Castells, M. (2010). *Comunicación y Poder*. Madrid: Alianza.

³ Gutiérrez-Rubí, A. (2015). *La transformación digital y móvil de la comunicación política*. Fundación Telefónica y Editorial Ariel (Grupo Planeta).

⁴ IBM Study <http://www-935.ibm.com/services/us/gbs/bus/html/ibv-the-smarter-consumer.html>

⁵ Ernst&Young Study

⁶ El Consumidor Rebelde Study. *Mikroskopia*

⁷ Marketing, O. (2015). *Six Trends That Will Shape Consumer Behavior This Year*. [online] *Forbes*. Available at: <http://www.forbes.com/sites/onmarketing/2014/02/04/six-trends-that-will-shape-consumer-behavior-this-year/> [Accessed 10 Sep. 2015].

⁸ Brooks, D. (2011). *The social animal*. New York: Random House.



explored recently, with a broader approach: neurocommunication.

Professor Donald B. Egolf, from Pittsburg University, was one of the founders of this new discipline⁹. Professor Egolf helps us define neurocommunication as the research in neuroscience and behavior applied to the optimization to the communicative process. In other words, neurocommunication investigates how the citizen-consumer thinks and behaves with the purpose of developing more precise and efficient communication actions. The end of the neurocommunication is knowledge, not manipulation. The application of science to pursue communication should never deceive the humans, but better understand what they want to talk in a closer and more personalized manner.

But what do we know about neuroscience and how can we apply it to communication?

THE BRAIN AND HUMAN BEHAVIOR

We can summarize what we know about the relation between the brain and the human behavior in three premises:

- **Emotions in command**¹⁰. Professor Damasio was one of the forefathers of the study of emotions in relation to behavior. Today we know that emotions are responsible for our decision-making process¹¹ and influence our memories and experiences.
- **Basic instinct**. The brain is a machine designed for the survival of our species¹². Most of the actions that take place in our brain are the result of a biological objective, not necessarily primary. For instance, it can be defined with terms of status or prestige referring to the position of the individual as part of a group within the social order. Let us think about the brain's predisposition to detect moving images, for example. We usually pay more attention to the movement than to motionless objects; our brain has not evolved much since the times when we needed to detect potential predators in the bushes before it was too late.
- **Principle of least effort**. The human brain is our most energy-consuming organ but the human body does not like to make unnecessary efforts and thus tends to economize its functions¹³. The majority of the processes it carries out are involuntary. And, what is more surprising, most of our thoughts about the world around us and about ourselves are result of an unconscious process.

USES IN THE FIELD OF COMMUNICATION

Since basic human needs have not changed over time, any communication strategy should involve identifying these needs as precisely as possible to adapt its actions to them.

The tool we work with is the speech. Any strategy based on neurocommunication should pay special attention to words. We know a lot about the power of words within the brain as illustrated, for

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example, in the work of Lakoff “*Do not think of an Elephant!*”¹⁴. One of the most striking and controversial discoveries of neuroscience were mirror neurons¹⁵. Today we know that when people read or hear a word the same area of the brain is activated as if that person was experiencing the meaning of the word itself. To oversimplify the process, if the reader sees the word swim throughout this paragraph, his brain will become ready to jump in the pool.

Knowledge of mirror neurons helps us develop the storytelling, but also aids us in the design of its format. Thanks to neurocommunication we know that stories and games are the key to human learning in relation to the people and emotions around us¹⁶. When a story gets to us, we tend to have fewer arguments against the message that it is conveying. We believe more

easily and integrate into our memory the story that is charming us.

And how can we make the story captivating? Through emotions, empathy and familiarity. The brain processes information better when it does not go against our way of thinking, but matches it¹⁷. If the story achieves the aforementioned condition, it will generate greater credibility and an enhanced connection with the receiver. The clearest example is the humanization of animal or inanimate objects in the stories of Disney or Pixar¹⁸. We would feel no empathy for an inanimate watch, but a clock with a face, which talks, feels, sings and, above all, makes us laugh, is certainly something that will generate empathy. Humor helps us assimilate concepts more rapidly and makes the speaker more charming and believable.

In relation to the processing and construction of the reality in the brain, neuroscience has studied how opinions and prejudices are formed and in which way they affect judgements and, in general, the picture we have of the world. This knowledge, based on the brain's cognitive economy¹⁹, is quite useful to understand the generation of the perceived reputation and how it can be affected by negative information, for example, a crisis. In this process, memory and the remembering and forgetting processes introduced by the Ebbinghaus studies play a key role²⁰.

There is still much to investigate and explore in relation to the functioning of the brain and its uses in the field of communication. Neuromarketing has opened the way but still has few uses.

Gone are the days of propaganda and manipulation, attempting to deceive the public. Today we need to listen. In a world dominated by information the different is made by the better understanding of the consumer-citizen to offer exactly what they want in an open and transparent manner,

Communication professionals must lead the development of neurocommunication. But this effort to explore the human being also concerns institutions and companies, which should join the process. The benefits are clear: we will not merely contribute to the enhancement of human knowledge, but will establish better communication solutions tailored to the needs of the various audiences, thus saving time and resources.

And this is just the beginning.

⁹ Egolf, D. (2012). Human communication and the brain. Lanham, Md.: Lexington Books.

¹⁰ Damasio, A. El error de Descartes.

¹¹ http://elpais.com/elpais/2015/07/03/ciencia/1435944232_074611.html

¹² Darwin, C. The origin of species. ; EKMAN, P. Telling lies

¹³ Kahneman, D. Attention and Effort

¹⁴ Lakoff, G., *No pienses en un elefante* (“Don't think of an Elephant!”), Ed. Complutense, Madrid, 2008

¹⁵ Iacoboni, M., *Mirroring People. The new science of how we connect with Others*, Farrar, Straus & Giroux, New York, 2008

¹⁶ Christopher Chabris and Daniel Simons. The Invisible Gorilla

¹⁷ Ian Begg, Victoria Armour y Thérèse Kerr, “On believing what we remember”, Canadian Journal of Behavioural Science 17 (1985), pp. 199-214.

¹⁸ Creativity Inc

¹⁹ Kahneman, D. Pensar rápido, pensar despacio.

²⁰ Ebbinghaus, H. (1913). *Me EBBINGHAUS, H. (1913). Memory. A contribution to experimental psychology.* Nueva York: Columbia University



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