

Once more with emotion

OPINION

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To build stronger connections with consumers, brands need to get back to understanding people, not just tracking their digital journeys. Chris Binns, MediaCom's Global CSO, New Business, investigates

We live in a world of data and rationalisation, where people are defined as IDs, where their actions are laid out as the plans of mice running through the digital journey to product X, one step at a time, maybe with a little back and forth now and then.

A world where accountability has overtaken responsibility as the primary driver of marketing investment. It is a world where I can tell you that the average active journey to buying holiday accommodation is 191 minutes. But that the majority of the decision is made before those 191 minutes. Because people aren't rational, they make emotional decisions

and then post-rationalise them.

History is littered with brands and businesses that have misunderstood this. Mr Jobs didn't announce the world's first – or best – MP3 player on stage all those years ago. If you believe Pepsi's advertising, taste tests only have one result and yet Coca-Cola is a much stronger brand and business. If you look at performance on comparison sites, surely the bastion of rational, decision making, we can still see a brand effect. In fact, Direct Line in the UK, who don't appear on these sites, is thriving.

Yet we are deserting these instincts in our droves and embracing the paths that the “surveillance capitalists” are drawing out for us. Our industry is in danger of sleepwalking into the next few years, of forgetting what brands are – emotional constructs held in the minds of people and the public as a whole. The further we follow the path to rational signal-based communications, the more we ignore this.

The further into the rabbit hole we descend, the more we can no longer see the truth. That the more digitally precise you become, the more culturally invisible you are. Therein lies a problem for brands. People don't spend hours comparing products, they certainly don't spend hours deconstructing advertising in rooms with two-way mirrors. They don't think as hard about the choices they make as we would like to think. So, we need to make it easy. We need to stop ploughing into last click culture, creating wind tunnels of the same content, the same advertising in the same channels.

The job of advertising is to change someone's behaviour, but people are lazy, and the perfect market of digital, rational communications gives them the same stuff from every single brand. So how are they meant to choose yours? Any meta-analysis of the last few years would tell us this is a problem. So, a call to arms for this, the People Issue, in this world maybe we need to take a little less time to think about IDs and billions of bytes of data.

Take a little more time to think about people. To look for the pattern of behaviour that is most interesting, to understand their why and how and what kind of opportunity they

represent. To get back to understanding people and their relationship with media rather than simply plotting a digital journey and shouting at them as loud as you can. Because I suspect if we did that on the streets we would get punched in the face.

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