



Absorption

How Messages Morph Into Meaning And Value In The Mind
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Engagement is all the rage these days. And appropriately so. Marketers and content creators all seek the right route to forming the closest connection with consumers. The search for how and where to make that hook-up has dominated the pages—Web and otherwise—of our industry for the last few years, with no end in sight to the pursuit.

So if you think (or believe you know) that you've succeeded, congratulations. You're engaged with your audience. Presumably both parties have consented. Hopefully there are benefits for both fiancé and fiancée. Engagement, after all, is intended to lead to marriage and a consummation of some sort. Commercial, in this case.

But the very word itself conveys a built-in limitation both to the concept and the outcome of your efforts.

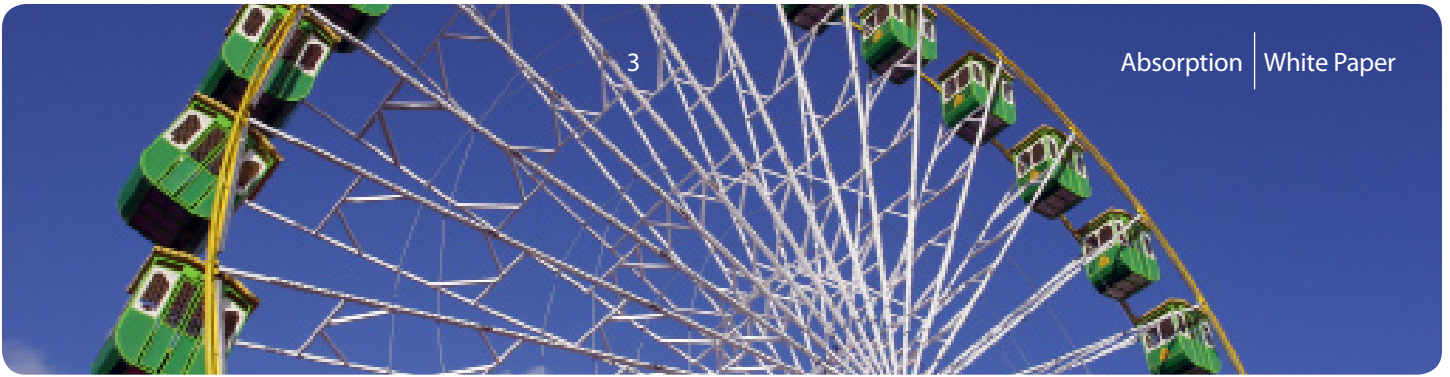
50% of all real marriages end in divorce. Even though brand/consumer marriages fare better, of course, engagement may not be the ultimate marker of successful marketing if you're looking to build or sustain your brand for the long haul.

There's a better concept. And I would argue, a greater goal to go after. I'm not anti-engagement by any means. In fact, we measure it daily at the core brainwave level for a wide variety of leading companies. But I'm more in favor of absorption.

Engagement brings you to the threshold. Absorption carries you beyond, to the state where your message or other material has been fully taken in by the consumer's brain.

Absorption is the ideal because it signifies that the consumer's brain has not only registered your marketing message or your creative content, but that the other centers of the brain that are involved with emotions and memory have been activated as well. The latest advances in neuroscience have revealed that all three of these key elements—attention, emotion and memory retention—are essential to the formation of what we call 'persuasion'—which in turn means purchase intent.

Absorption is important to strive for because, when it is achieved, it brings added brand benefits. Specifically, there are three more metrics that we track when we measure and analyze brainwave activity. They are derived from the initial categories of attention, emotional engagement, and memory retention. Flowing from those, even fuller degrees of absorption take place when persuasion is attained; awareness is raised; and novelty is achieved.



As described, persuasion translates into purchase intent. Awareness is self-explanatory.

The third, novelty, is a fascinating concept in and of itself. We interpret it as your message's ability to instill a set of defenses in the consumer's brain against competitive messages. In that sense it is perhaps the final step in the absorption process. When you have attained it along with the others, you have created the optimum environment within the brain for your brand or creative content to resonate, be remembered, and acted upon.

The obvious analogy that the word 'absorption' conjures up is a sponge. And it's an ideal, if somewhat simplified, image of how the brain functions in both a biophysical and neurological way.

At any given moment your brain takes in as many as 100 million individual stimuli from your five senses. When fully activated, your brain consumes the equivalent of a wine bottle's worth of blood a minute as it records and reacts to those stimuli. Those processes occur in many different sectors of the brain—we track up to 128 of them simultaneously. All are ultimately critical to achieving the state of full absorption of a marketing message. And full absorption is (or should be) the gold standard for any marketing campaign, creative content, retail store environment, product or packaging design, price point, or any other of the many categories that neurological testing can measure today.

From the consumer's point of view, absorption occurs when your marketing message or creative material or store setting is so interesting and pleasing to the brain that the brain takes it all in, fully and willingly. (FYI, there are five dozen clear do's and don'ts when it comes to creating visual stimuli that the human brain finds interesting and/or acceptable.)

Full absorption is also when your message or materials or retail environment, etc. return the highest rate of impact and value for your investment. But neuroscientific research demonstrates that you cannot, and will not, reach that goal consistently and most effectively unless and until you understand how the brain actually functions, and you shape your messages/materials/environment accordingly.

For example, as I cited above, we have identified 67 specific 'best practices' that should be implemented when words and images are presented on a screen (any screen, from a TV or PC to a mobile phone or movie theater). They are the result of advanced neurological research into various brain functions, and especially research that has delved into the mysteries of diseases like Alzheimer's, and brain conditions



like ADD/ADHD, obsessive/compulsive behavior, and bipolar disorder. Follow these best practices, give the brain what it wants and likes most, and you stand the best chance of success for your brand and your investment. Your message or materials will be absorbed directly into the consumer's subconscious, where we can measure them for their effectiveness at the level devoid of any 'outside' contaminating influences like education, language, cultural ethnicity or other factors.

As the media marketplace continues to metastasize, and consumer choices and behavior channel into an ever-growing number of separate streams, from mobile search to screenings of 3D features in theaters, achieving absorption takes on new challenges.

The good news on the neuromarketing front is that the key developmental events leading to the modern human brain occurred over one hundred thousand years ago. It is an extremely versatile organ capable of feats of comprehension that still stagger those of us who have studied it. But it is also remarkably identical in human beings in terms of its structure and how it works. That is one of the major reasons why neurological testing is such a powerful and scientifically sound means of measuring absorption. The universality of the human brain allows us to make highly accurate projections and draw extremely specific conclusions and recommendations based upon the results we obtain from capturing and analyzing brainwave activity. And we can do that by measuring a relative handful of people.

Absorption is one of the brain's most fundamental functions. It is a process that no doubt evolved as a means to help ensure sheer survival. When there are saber tooth tigers in your neighborhood, taking in as many stimuli as you can is a pretty good idea.

Survival in the marketplace for marketing messages or movie trailers reflects a different order of importance, of course. But if it's your multi-millions at stake, striving for absorption is still the smartest move to make if you'd like to avoid becoming lunch.

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