



Neurosensing the Consumer

Advances in neurotechnology have given clinicians some powerful tools to diagnose and treat individuals with neurological diseases and disorders. Much of the same technology now offers marketing professionals some interesting new capabilities for understanding their customers and the neurological basis for consumers' behavior. It's not out of the question that these nonmedical applications of neurotechnology will offer additional partnering opportunities for neurotech manufacturers currently in the medical device space.

We spoke recently with A.K. Pradeep, founder of the neuromarketing research firm [NeuroFocus](#) and author of *The Buying Brain*. Pradeep said that although his firm has a significant amount of intellectual property surrounding neurosensing and marketing applications, there may be opportunities for inventors and entrepreneurs to submit novel technology applications to NeuroFocus. He also believes that NeuroFocus may be able to offer healthcare companies technology and software that would be helpful in diagnosing neurological disorders or targeting patient populations most appropriate for a particular therapy.

There is much ongoing research regarding classification of individuals using neurosensing and neuroimaging. Researchers at the University of Illinois and Ohio State University recently reported in the journal *PLoS ONE* that they can predict "with unprecedented accuracy" how well someone will do on a complex task such as a strategic video game simply by analyzing activity in a specific region of the brain. The findings offer detailed insights into the brain structures that facilitate learning, and may lead to the development of training strategies tailored to individual strengths and weaknesses.

We've commented in the past about the dangers of unwarranted and unchecked governmental abuse of neurosensing technology [[NBR Nov10 p2](#)]. But we see developments in neuromarketing and consumer classification in a different light, so long as the individual has the option to participate or not, and the final say on how, if at all, their brain data is used. It is up to marketers to incentivize consumers to participate, much as travel or retail websites incentivize their customers to share personal information or buying history with them.

There is a big difference between a market research firm gathering from consenting consumers EEG data to be used in aggregate to formulate ad campaigns or shelf space design and a government agent who "taps" into

someone's brainwaves—just as there is a difference between a supermarket collecting an opt-in consumer's purchase history and a government agent accessing your reading habits without your consent.

Neurotechnology offers benefits for both the patient and the consumer. Vigilance and adherence to the constitution offers citizens protections from abuse.

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