



Why Context appears like a Magician, who Influences our Mind with Subconscious Impulses

Recently, a noteworthy article appeared in the magazine "Gehirn und Geist" 4/18, which could possibly be declared as clickbait-worthy: "10 Things You Should Know About Yourself"¹. The content has been researched thoroughly and the necessary sources have been provided. Once again, the fact that we as humans are unable to sufficiently and objectively self-reflect about our behavior, is proven. It is shown how much our actual behavior differs from our mindsets. One simply cannot think about this too often. Still, our self-perception continues to lead us to believe other things.



What has stuck with my, after reading the article, was the fact that it mentioned many examples in which context acts as a subconscious, but heavy influence on our own behavior.

Especially in marketing, we tend to underestimate the force of certain situations. We know about emotions, motivations, dreams, wishes and the like, which is why we almost automatically assume that a human being tries to consistently behave according to his or her motivations and mindsets.

In ourselves, we can see individual behavior, which is ultimately a big illusion. We dismiss the force that comes with social contexts. Only from time to time, we realize how much these things can influence us. For example, if we are standing in front of our wardrobe, we usually try to imagine how other party guests will react to what we will possibly wear. It is not uncommon that this leads to changing multiple times before going out.

Have you ever been in a situation in which you had to take an exam? Granted, this is not extremely original. But interesting. Let's say, you want to deepen your knowledge in Italian and you take a placement test for an online language school. Especially intelligent people will try to get the best result possible. For example, by taking more time than what has been scheduled. Some might possibly google a few words that, of course, have been on the tip of one's tongue. You do know the word, so where is the harm in looking it up? Because of this, one will ultimately damage one's learning curve, because the result will be too high and the resulting course might be too difficult. But we continue to manipulate this image, the one we present of ourselves, to show a flattering result, especially with respect to ourselves. We do not realize that we have been cheating. The context of the exam controls us. This is also the case with subject groups in market research, they automatically adjust their behavior to the situation –



what they do not realize is that they rationalize things, to present their flattering self-image. This is one of the main reasons why we love psychodramatic works, here we can remove the automatism that forces us to make us appear more flattering.

Another example? Our values. Approach marketing is currently in trend. Do values influence our behavior? Is the connection maybe weaker than we think? Assuming you are probably short on time and because of that you will hurry to make your next appointment. In this case, we can pass a homeless person in the freezing cold and at the same time think that we are extremely compassionate and generous. This experiment has also been conducted with students, who had to go from one faculty to another. On their way, they met an injured person. So, who stopped to help? You guessed it, helping the person was not influenced by the students' values, but by the sense of being in a hurry, or not. Context often acts as a magician that controls us on our last meters.

Psychologists explain this context as framing from time to time, because the framework conditions of a situation often influence how to behave. Let's assume that there are two restaurants with the same equipment. One is called '52' and the other '7'. This will influence the average level of the check! Unknowingly, we will perceive the price as relatively cheap in context of '52' and we will spend more. Nobel Prize Winner Richard Thaler shows this in his bestseller 'Nudge'². He understands Nudge as the conscious composition of contexts to promote the desired behavior. If fruit is for example easy to reach in the canteen and sweets are behind the counter, one could label this as a composition.

Our "Self" is therefore not a thing, no status, it does not have true essence, it is a process, something that is constantly adapting to changing contexts and situations. Something that goes hand in hand with this is the fact that we often perceive ourselves as more qualified, ethical and stable than we truly are. This slightly embellished self-perception helps us to better cope with the ups and downs of our life.

This shows why it is of great importance to transfer the significance of the context onto the work with brands. The decision to buy is situational, that is what we know, but we also frequently ask our target audience what they recall when they hear the brand's name. Marketing professors Byron Sharp and Jenni Romaniuk however urgently recommend to define the typical usage contexts in one's own category and subsequently ask the users which brand they think of in a specific context³. For the things we put in our shopping basket usually change within different contexts.



What kind of marmelade do we think of in the context of a family breakfast? Does this change if we have a relaxed breakfast with a partner? What kind of sparkling wine do I think of in the context of a Sunday brunch, but not a birthday party?



With these kinds of questions one is able to better consider how our brain stores information. Never in a virtual brand drawer, always extremely well connected — linked by context. This is efficiently organized, because we do not need a list of brands every time we go shopping, to look at it and check the items. We 'know' from experience which brand will suit us in different situations.

This is what doctors do with their patients. They experience a context made up of a certain type of patient, age, mood, a few measured values, complaints, etc. By doing this, an already familiar therapy will come to mind, which is rarely questioned. Take your prescription and send in the next patient. The German Healthcare System supports these quick decisions.

Even today you can type numerous contexts into Amazon and you will be presented with a surprising amount of product ideas. Could be for a bachelorette party, or a topping out ceremony. Some contexts will deliver bewildering results. A work outing appears to have an erotic element, which I certainly was not aware of.

So, start defining the relevant approach paths (contexts) in your category and fill the most important ones with the matching brand signals.

Sources:

1. <https://www.spektrum.de/magazin/warum-selbsterkenntnis-so-schwierig-ist/1539961>
2. https://www.buecher.de/shop/ratgeber--lebenshilfe/nudge/thaler-richard-h--sunstein-cass-r-/products_products/detail/prod_id/29752332/
3. https://www.amazon.de/How-Brands-Grow-Emerging-Services/dp/0195596269/ref=cm_cr_arp_d_product_top?ie=UTF8

Book recommendations:

By Ralph Ohnemus:

Markenerleben. Die Strategie im Hyperwettbewerb und Informationstsunami > [order here](#)

Markenstaunen. Gewinnen im Informationstsunami > [order here](#)





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