



„Neuro“ and Generation are Really Great for Promoting Marketing. Not.

Lately, I have often stumbled over old wine in new bottles, which are distributed via compliant specialist media and are adorned with a lot of big words. Now is the time for me to speak up and I will show three examples that concern this matter. With most of these, my blood pressure will most likely rise, or I will die of laughter.

1. “New” insights of neuro-marketing: It even happens to the established WARC database¹. On their own admission: “Your global authority on advertising and media effectiveness”. What happened? A NEURO-marketing webinar has taken place in Singapur this July. It was called “Understand the brain to deliver marketing effectiveness”.

SINGAPORE: “*Marketers should carefully consider what parts of their messaging they want consumers to remember, bearing in mind they will forget most of it within 48 hours, according to a neuroscience expert.*” Unilever has taught the same thing to me when I was a young marketing assistant, in a time in which no one thought about the word “Neuro”. I am almost embarrassed when I think about how much time has passed since then.

“The act of forgetting happens only in the first two days, and after a while, the metaphorical 10% tends to stay there over time,” said cognitive neuroscientist Dr Carmen Simon during a recent webinar hosted by marketing automation software company Marketo. Simon advocated using neuroscience to get people to move in marketers’ favour by recalling – and ultimately acting on – the marketing message. She advised marketers to keep it simple as taxing the brain too much can interfere with memory: “The brain is a cognitively lazy organ,” she said.

I will spare you from the other simple suggestions by Mrs Simon. There must have been some younger listeners that have followed her pioneering neuro-insights with open mouths. But, apparently, Mrs Simon has never heard of the pre-digital promotional rule, which says that one should focus on ONE main message in advertisements. The consultant of former US President Bill Clinton, James Carville, has pinpointed this in 1992 using the KISS rule (keep it simple, stupid): “It’s the economy, stupid”. An effective rallying cry against the recession of the Bush administration.



2. Now the exciting generation marketing: Have you heard of “adulting”²? A great word which shows how the English language likes to transform nouns into verbs. It’s about nothing more than growing up, which is usually finished once someone is of age. This new word is commonly used to talk, especially in social media, more or less humorously, about the formerly called coming of age process. There have also been some books about this topic, like “Adulting – How to Become a Grown-up in 535 easy(ish) Steps. So far, so entertaining.



And you bet, there have been some consultants³ who have hopped onto this train and are now declaring this generation of millennials to be a completely new generation, which apparently deals differently with the process of growing up. Therefore, they have to be talked to in another way than we have addressed the older generations with which this process was apparently clearly determined. Just a side-note: It was also a process for me, which was not over by the time I turned 30. Every time someone tries to sell me the idea of this new generation which is so different, I put on my sceptical hat (De Bono⁴). I do this because the evolution does not run from generation to generation. There are enough scientists who prove that our genetic equipment has been the same over the last 30.000 years. (We are actually

quite able to adapt to the changing environmental conditions in an epigenetic way.) And that’s what I want to talk about.

Millenials are not different humans that behave in new ways. They behave in new ways, because the environment has changed and the process to adapt to this is quite frankly reasonable. Another context is more important than so-called new individuality. When student debts are pressing and living space becomes rare and too expensive, it is sensible to leave your parent’s mansion at a later date. This is not a sign that tells us that millennials are essentially less autonomous. It is better to understand these contexts than to look for causes in the change of personality of a generation.

3. Another point when it comes to generation marketing: A headline on LinkedIn^{5/6} declared that millennial couples often talk about money! “A lot”. More than Gen Z couples and a lot more than those of the Baby boomer generation. Where does this come from? Are millennials, once again, different? I took a closer look at this study. If one applies common sense, one will quickly realise that, once again, it’s about the context, which explains why these three generations differ so much when it comes to talking about money. Millennial couples are faced with more decisions. Student credits, establishing a home, a car, real estate, creating a family, changing jobs, pension plans, financial investments, etc. Today, Generation Z couples have fewer things that need to be covered, but the beginning autonomy comes also with financial challenges.



So, what about Baby boomer couples? They often have settled their finances by now. The house is built, children have left, retirement can be planned. We have to realise that we are dealing with different stages of life. Modern couples grow up on a more equal footing, this is partly why they discuss financial issues more easily than today's pensioner generation, and we should keep this in mind. I am taking the risk and still declare that context is the better way to explain the different behaviours when it comes to generations.

4. Now, for something exhilarating: From time to time, studies pop up that will bring a smile to your face⁷. For example, why heterosexual men allegedly have more sexual partners (14) than heterosexual women (7). Explanation? Many men are quite liberal when estimating how many women they have conquered, especially in studies. This will also strengthen their experience of self-efficacy immensely. He is such a glamour boy. Women actually count their sexual partners and are often better in remembering the exact number. Another thing is that a woman with many

different sexual partners is often shunned by our society, so bragging is not something that will reward them. Scientist therefore estimate that the real numbers are actually a bit higher than what women state. Another example for societal contexts at work.

So, the lesson is clear: If you are once again confronted with varying behaviour, do not only think about personalities, but especially pay attention to context. For example, people are buying different brands, when contexts are clearly distinguishable. For instance: more expensive brands when good friends come to visit.

Sources:

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Book recommendations:

By Ralph Ohnemus:

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

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