

Consuming Passions

Emotional and Unconscious Influences
on Consumer Behavior

Drew Westen, Ph.D.

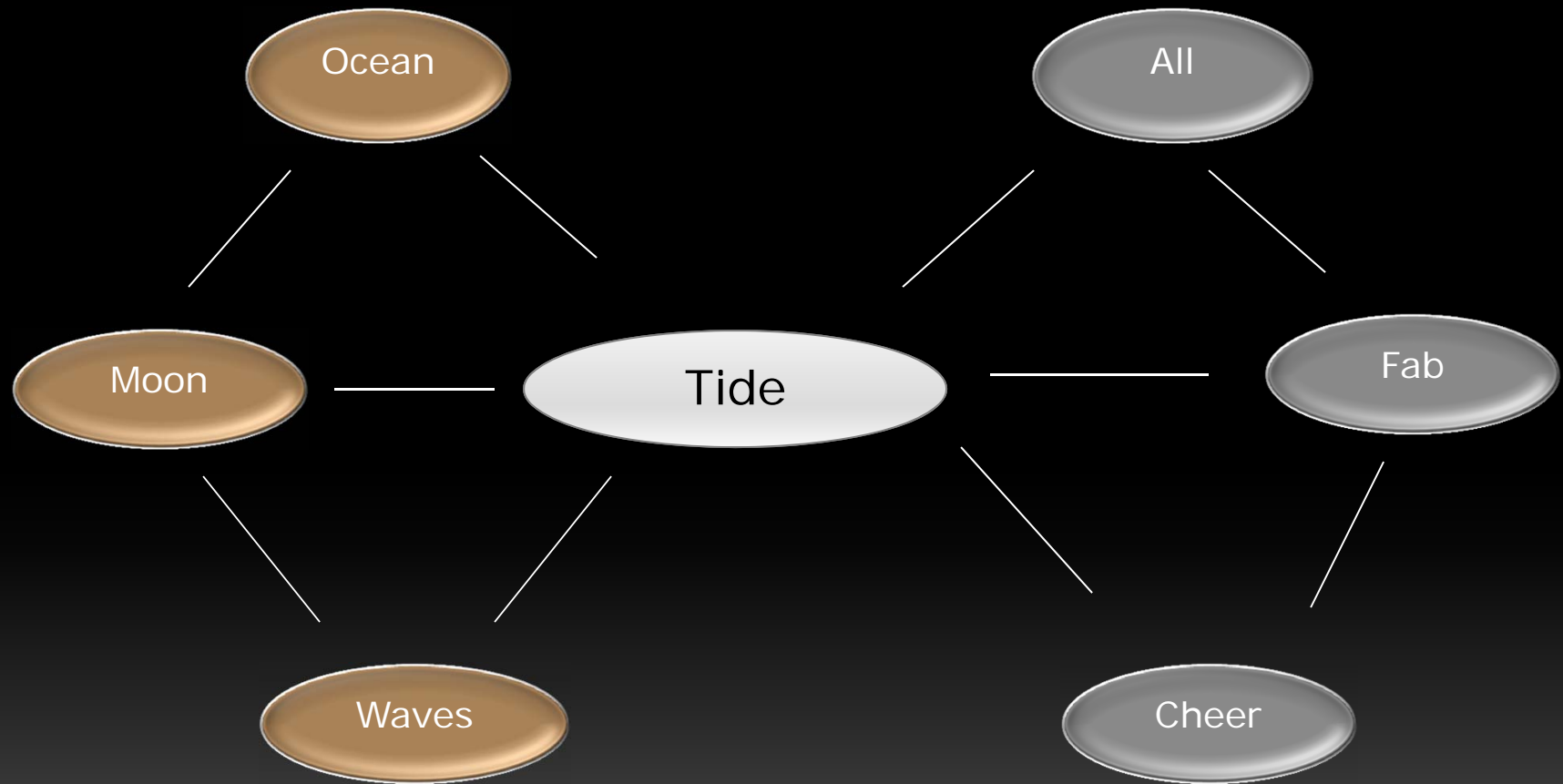
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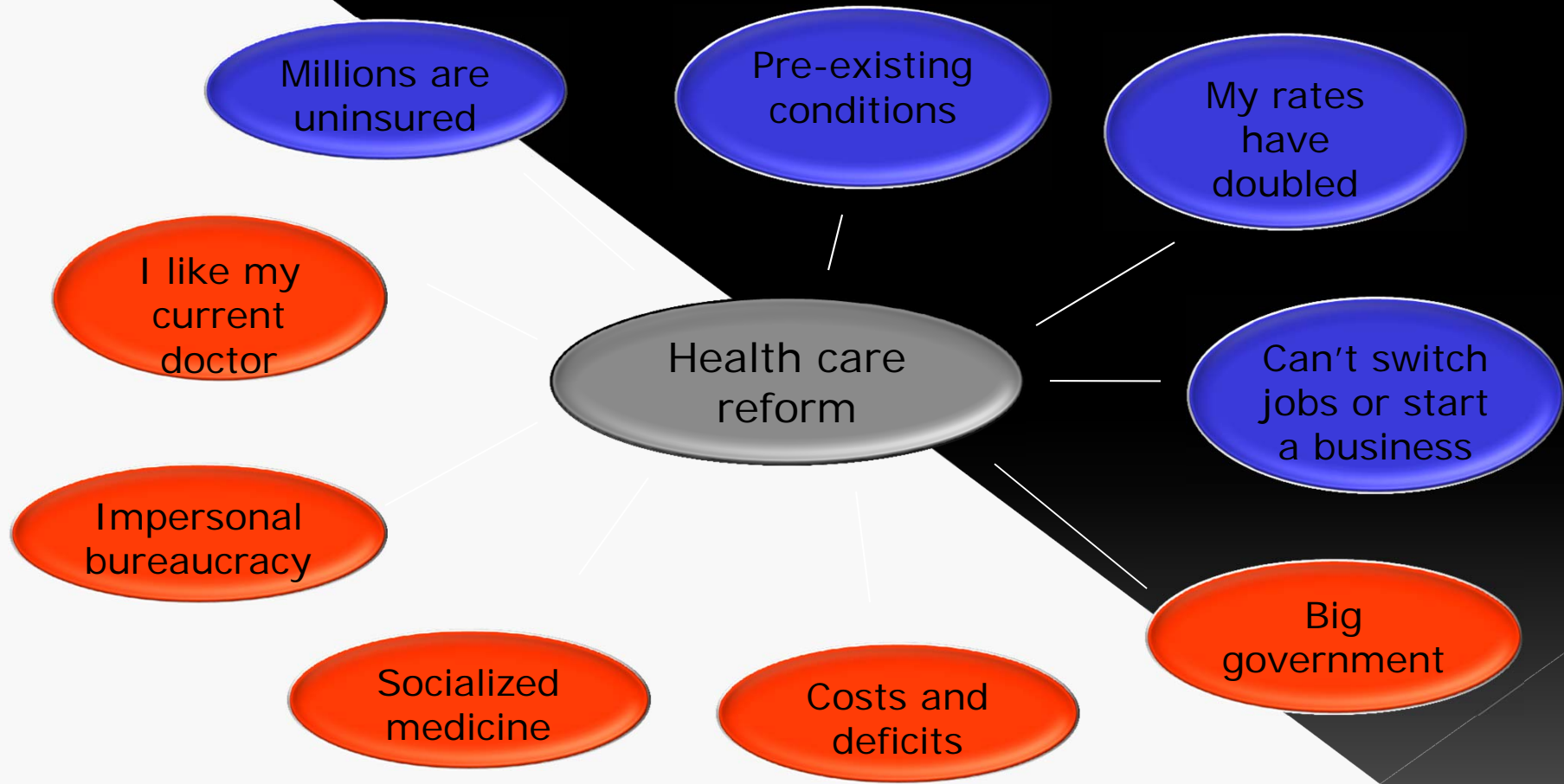
An experiment



What networks are active at Fox?

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Associations to health care reform



The role of emotions

- Lessons from evolution:
 - Our first reactions to a stimulus are generally “gut level” emotional reactions
 - We are motivated by positive and negative emotions
- Lessons from politics: What moves voters?
 - Feelings toward the parties and their principles (the brand)
 - Feelings elicited by the candidate (the product)

Implications for branding and advertising

- What associations does your brand currently activate?
- What associations do you want to activate or deactivate with your advertising or content?
- What emotions does your brand, product, or content currently elicit, and what do you want to elicit?
- How do we get there from here?

The Challenge

- Networks are unconscious
- How do we measure unconscious networks and gut level emotional reactions to ads, taglines, text, stories, blasts, banners, logos?
- How do we do it in a cost-effective, efficient way?

Limitations of traditional methods

- Consumers are often unaware of why they make the decisions they make
- But they'll tell you anyway
- *You can't ask conscious questions about unconscious processes*

A solution

- Use **reaction time** to measure unconscious associative networks
- Use responses to words and images presented **unconsciously** to measure unconscious, gut-level emotional reactions
- Conduct your study in an environment that allows for large numbers of respondents you can get to quickly and efficiently: **the Internet**

Mapping Implicit Networks: All in the milliseconds

- What's on our minds (chronically or recently activated) grabs our attention unconsciously
- This simple fact gives us access to consumers' reactions to brands, ads, text, images, logos, etc.
- A simple example: What color is this word is printed in?

RED

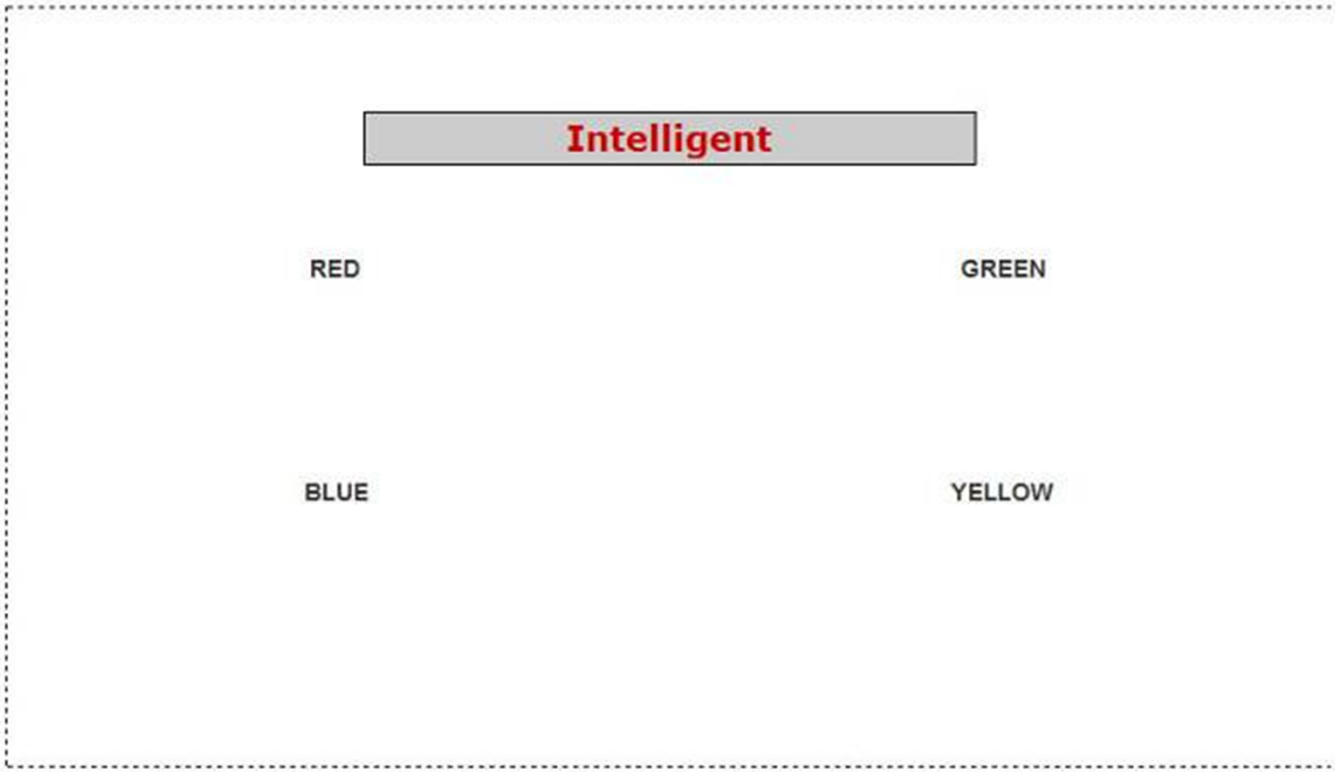
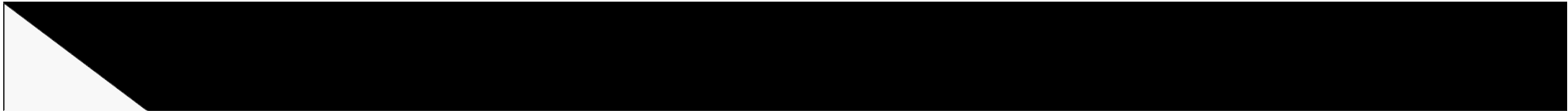
- A not-so-simple example: What color is this word printed in?

RED

- It turns out that this works with any stimulus, not just colors

How do we apply this technique in practice?

- We present a message (e.g., text, blast copy, logo, cover, storyboard, animatic, rough cut, ad)
- We work with brand managers to identify a set of words they hope are triggered or fear may be triggered
- The words are printed in colored ink
- The respondent's task is to ignore the word and instead simply click on the color in which it is printed
- If a word has been activated by your message (e.g., **EXCITING**), it will slow respondents down



An example: A study for CNN

- We conducted a study in April 2008 for CNN's *Anderson Cooper 360* on political attack ads
- The conundrum: People claim that attack ads do not work on them, yet they seem to be effective
- How can that be?

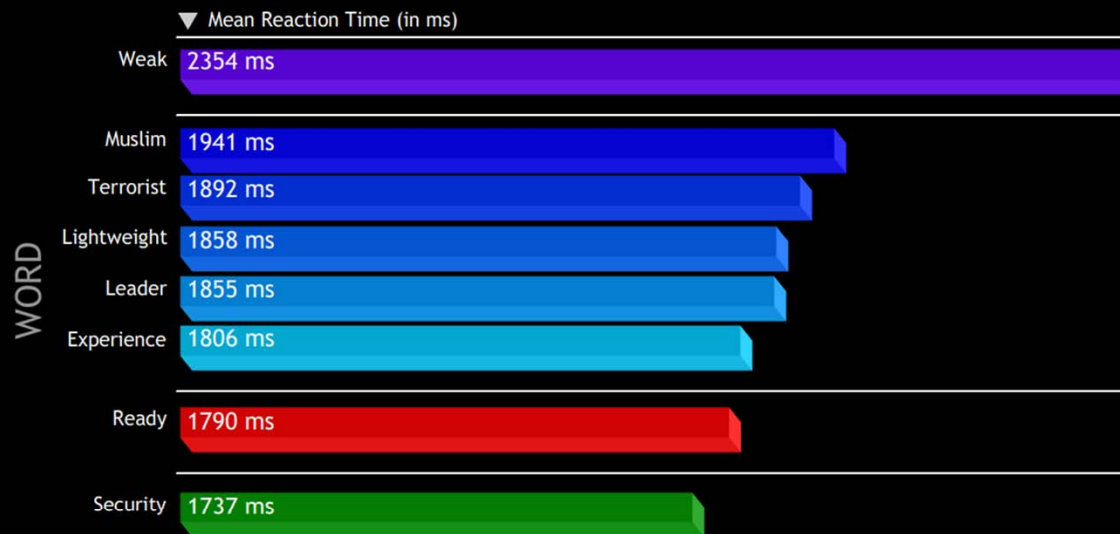
CNN: April 2008



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STRENGTH OF ASSOCIATIONS TO OBAMA IN CNN STUDY: APRIL 2008

Hillary Clinton's 3AM ad
Reaction Times are to Obama

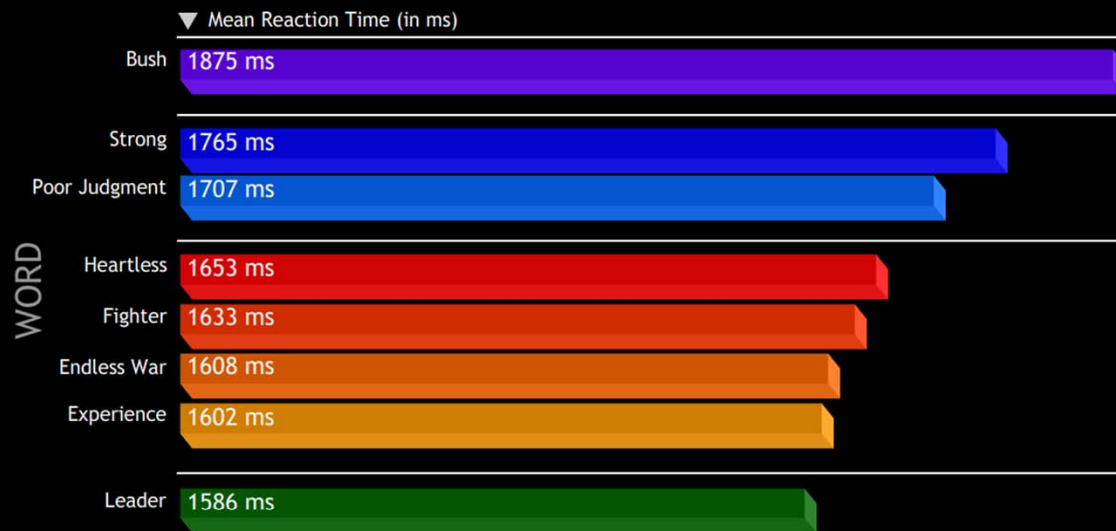


Critical ms about 60ms

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STRENGTH OF ASSOCIATIONS TO MCCAIN IN CNN STUDY: APRIL 2008

Attack Ad on McCain for 100 Years in Iraq Statement



Critical ms is about 55 ms

Unconscious priming: What you don't see can affect you

- The old idea that subliminal suggestions like “Drink Coke” can be used as mind control is false
- But people do register images, words, and sounds unconsciously (outside of awareness)
- This presents a powerful tool for assessing gut-level emotional reactions to products, ads, text, logos, taglines, etc.

Measuring gut reactions

- Respondents focus on the center of the screen (an X)
- We present a stimulus at a fraction of a second (unconscious prime)
- Immediately afterwards we present a consciously perceived stimulus
- Respondents then answer a series of questions
- They think they are responding to the conscious stimulus

When the conscious mind and unconscious reactions provide conflicting signals

- Millward Brown asked us to help evaluate a tricky ad for Skoda, a car produced by Volkswagen in Europe
- They were interested in whether the ad promoted
 - brand awareness
 - specific associations to the ad
 - positive emotional responses to the car
- We presented the Skoda ad on the Internet, followed by the Implicit Networks Test and the Implicit Emotions Tests

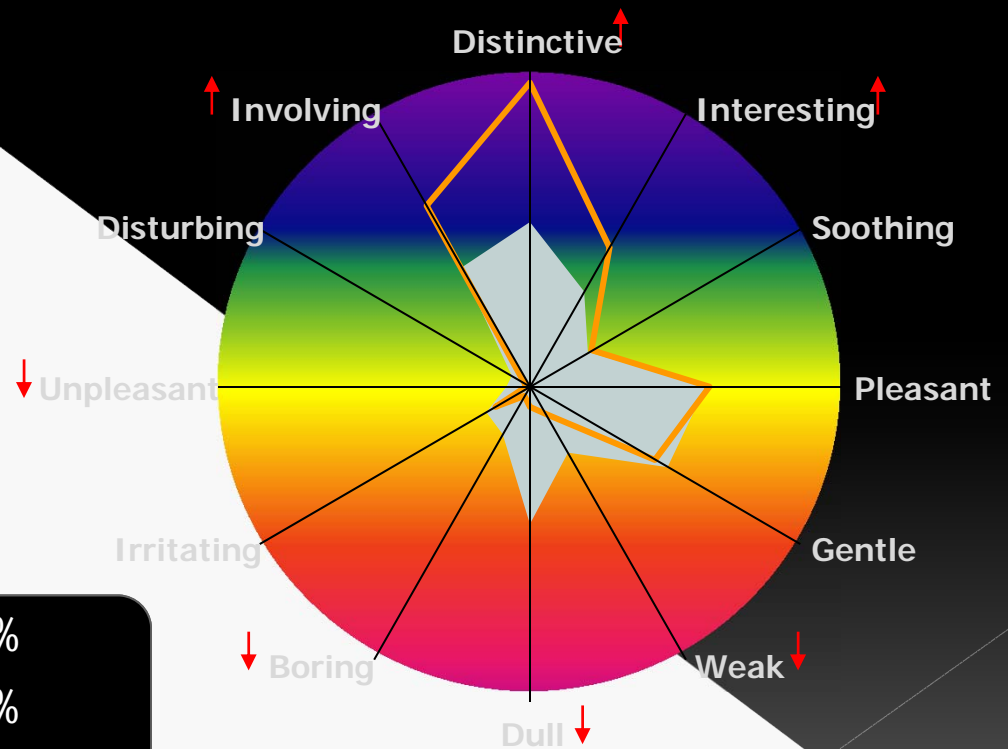
Millward Brown Results: Link

MBUK Online Finished Film Norm

Car Bakers Total

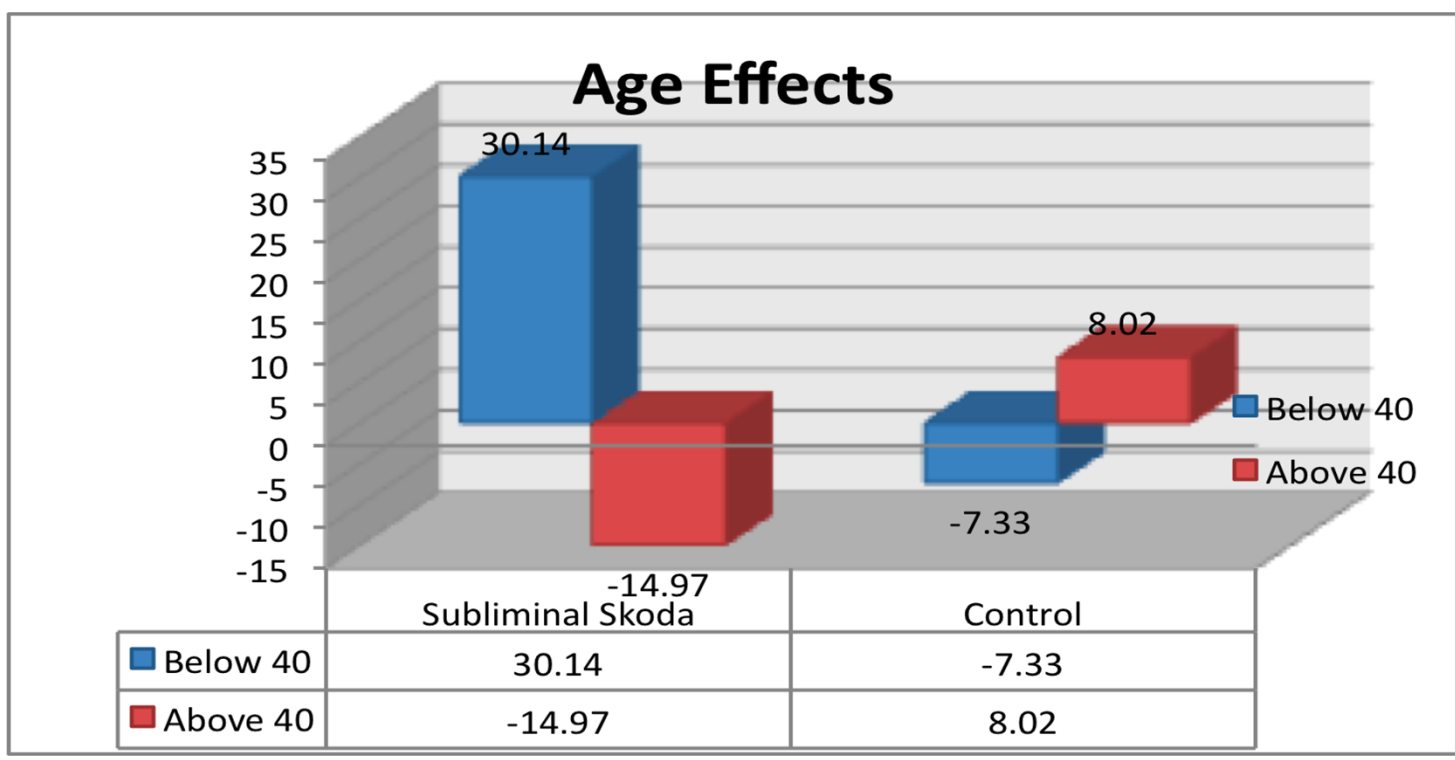
Enjoyment	Top 1%
Involvement	Top 15%
Branding	Top 30%
Memorability	Top 10%

Positive Emotion	Top 10%
Message (prompted)	Top 20%



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The Implicit Emotions Test (“gut reactions”) told a very different story



What did the undetected age effect mean?

- Skoda was originally manufactured by an Eastern European company and was of inferior quality
- In fact, it was a joke in Europe
- Then VW took it over and remade it, and it became a VW
- **Consciously**, people now saw Skoda as well built
- **Unconsciously**, those old enough to remember it as a joke retained negative associations towards it
- Gut level reactions do not go away easily
- Implications for Skoda:
 - Market to younger consumers
 - Emphasize the engineering for older consumers in an evocative way
 - Address older consumers' ambivalence: "This isn't your grandfather's Skoda"

The bottom line: Predicting behavior

- Decades of psychological research demonstrate that self-reported attitudes are poor predictors of behavior
- A deceptively simple discovery (McClelland and Weinberger)
 - When people are making conscious choices, conscious processes are decisive
 - When they are "running on auto-pilot," unconscious processes are decisive
- In domain after domain, both conscious and unconscious processes predict behavior, but they each provide incremental information
 - Unconscious motives predict entrepreneurial success over 20 years
 - Unconscious prejudice predicts jail time, behavior, and amygdala response
 - Unconscious emotional responses predict heart disease, relapse in depression, and alcohol consumption
- Our political studies suggest that unconscious processes are strong predictors of voting behavior, often counter to conscious responses

Conclusions

- Moving consumers is about associations, emotions, and the stories that make them “stick”
- Don't ask people what they can't tell you
- You don't have to

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