



Applied neuroscience: MTV - Capture viewers' subconscious responses

Helen Rose and Professor Gemma Calvert

Admap

September 2014

Title: **Applied neuroscience: MTV - Capture viewers' subconscious responses**
Author(s): **Helen Rose and Professor Gemma Calvert**
Source: **Admap**
Issue: **September 2014**

Applied neuroscience: MTV – Capture viewers' subconscious responses

[Helen Rose and Professor Gemma Calvert](#)

MTV and Neurosense

Admap: Applied neuroscience

This article is from the [September 2014 issue](#) of Admap, which focuses on the application of neuroscience in marketing.

MTV partnered with Neurosense to conduct a neuropsychological implicit association test with its audience to uncover the true feelings of MTV viewers towards the MTV brand globally. The study found that viewers who engage with MTV across multiple platforms are more deeply and implicitly engaged with the brand, and that this increases exponentially the more platforms they use.

The business problem

Launched in 1981, MTV has global reach across multiple platforms and is one of the top 20 most recognised brands in the world. In a time of fragmenting platform use and content proliferation, MTV wished to understand how the brand was perceived among its youth target audience internationally. The challenge is that consumers today are not always the most reliable source of information: "The trouble with market research is that people don't think how they feel, they don't say what they think and they don't do what they say" (David Ogilvy). Combined with the wealth of quantitative and qualitative research data that it collects about its audience every year through analytics, surveys, focus groups and ethnographies, MTV wanted to go beyond understanding what its audiences say and how they behave, to uncover how they really feel towards the brand.

The specific objectives of this research project were to:

- Conduct a sensitive, audience-directed insight study that could articulate how the core MTV viewer really feels about the channels/brands at a more profound level than explicit research can report on.
- Understand what drives consumer engagement with the MTV brand across multiple countries.
- Understand the cross-cultural differences in terms of how different audiences perceive the brand.
- Paint a picture of what MTV brand fans look like and how they behave.

Research solution

Downloaded from [warc.com](#)

MTV and Neurosense devised a three-part online neuropsychological research project that incorporated: explicit questions relating to viewing habits; brand usage across multiple platforms and demographics; an implicit reaction time task (using Neurosense's proprietary tool, BrainLink) to capture respondents' subconscious or implicit responses to the MTV brand, compared with nine other international media brands in ten countries; plus a psychometric emotional profiling questionnaire that captures people's particular skills, knowledge and capabilities across multiple dimensions.

This approach was ideal because of the scalability: it allowed for the capture of subconscious feelings across countries, online, to budget and without the requirement for complicated neuroscientific equipment.

The study was conducted with 2,000 respondents (viewers and non-viewers of the MTV brand) and in ten countries across Europe, Asia and Latin America. The implicit association BrainLink test measured five basic human psychological rewards deemed relevant for testing brand engagement among youth: dependability, functionality, social inclusion, enjoyment and individuality. To access and measure viewers' implicit feelings/ engagement towards the competing media brands, the task required respondents to react rapidly (in less than a second) to media brand logos (targets). Just before each target appeared, one of 35 brand equity words (belonging to the five dimensions identified above) appeared briefly on the computer screen. In this way, it was possible to measure the strength of implicit association between equity words and media brands, based on a statistical comparison of respondents' reaction times. In this study, engagement was defined as an attachment or feeling that attracts and holds fast the attention of a respondent. To capture implicit engagement, a comparative engagement score (on a scale of one to ten) was derived from the responses to positive equity words across the five dimensions.

Results, insights and added value

MTV is a brand with fans. Analysis of the global media competitor engagement scores showed that MTV's audiences are more emotionally engaged with the MTV brand than with the other international media brands. This holds across all dimensions and countries tested. Subsequent analysis of all the individual attributes collapsed across countries and across all international brands revealed that the top attributes most strongly associated with MTV are (in rank order of the statistical effect size): forward-looking, engaging, dependable, amusing, pleasurable, trendy, unique, efficient, friendly, and relaxing. The MTV audience has a unique emotional profile. Multivariate analysis of the individual questions from the emotional profiling questionnaire found that, compared to non-viewers, MTV fans are more highly communicative and flexible in their thinking – specifically focusing on problems in the community, country and world and what they can do to rectify them; they are statistically more enthusiastic, open-minded, informed and free of bias or prejudice than non-viewers. MTV's multiplatform channels drive stronger engagement. For MTV's youth audience, the greater the connection and control they have, the greater the level of engagement. Multiplatform viewers exhibited more than twice the level of engagement of TV-only viewers, scoring 7.1 and 2.9 on the engagement scale, respectively.



Findings from the project have identified a twofold strategy for growing and nurturing brand fans, with brand engagement being both physically and emotionally driven. First, multiplatform access is key. For the majority of the Viacom audience who go beyond its TV channels, their positivity and engagement with its brands rises exponentially. Second, emotional alignment of consumer and brand is also very important. By aligning the passions of your brand with those of your consumer, there is a resulting multiplier effect in creating a fan base that is emotionally engaged with the content and the experiences they have on these platforms. By offering insight into the relevancy of the MTV brand in the new media age, the project has also demonstrated that the MTV brand is an effective media partner for reaching youth target audiences. The project won the 2012 IAB Europe Branding Research Award.

Deeply held beliefs about MTV have revealed for the first time that the audience is emotionally engaged and aligned with MTV's unique environments and content offerings. The project was unique in being able to get beneath the surface of what drives consumer engagement for the MTV audience and also revealed a unique personality profile that has informed both media and content strategy. The implicit approach employed in this study complements the wealth of explicit quantitative and qualitative research data that MTV collects about its youth target audience every year. By using neuropsychological tests that tap into viewers' psyches, this research has shown that, globally, youth are more emotionally attached to and engaged with MTV than many of the other international media brands tested. The commercial relevance of this finding is clear. Engaged audiences tend to be more proactive advocates than passive viewers and, by association, are more likely to engage with, and become advocates of, brands that are advertised on the same platforms, giving rise to a 'halo effect'. By tapping into its viewers' implicit feelings and revealing the depth of their engagement with the brand, MTV can offer significant benefits to brands advertising on its platforms.

The observation that viewers who engage with MTV across multiple platforms are more deeply and implicitly engaged with the brand, suggests that advertisers can gain maximum penetration by advertising on more than one MTV platform, enabling them to take advantage of viewers' and fans' emotional engagement with the brand, which increases exponentially the more platforms they use. Finally, by extracting consumers' implicit feelings about the MTV brand using a wide range of emotional attributes and collecting data across multiple countries, MTV has gleaned deeper insight into the perceived brand benefits across different cultures. This is being used to inform future marketing and creative strategy to ensure that the brand remains relevant to the constantly evolving youth consumer in the 21st century.

This project has demonstrated the value of being able to capture viewers' subconscious reactions to brands, particularly those that are very well established and are, as a consequence, often taken for granted. In these cases, it was found that standard

qualitative/quantitative alone is unable to provide a complete picture of how consumers really feel about our brands because they are unable to articulate or comment on why it is that they engage at a deep emotional level.

Helen Rose, MTV's insight director, international, says: "Using neuropsychological research techniques enabled MTV to understand the deep emotional drivers of its consumers for the first time. The insights – both explicit and implicit – have been embedded into our marketing, communication and creative strategies, as well as helping to inform specific measures for multiplatform campaign reporting for clients of MTV. We have since conducted other projects that have employed neuropsychological techniques, and continue to utilise these types of tools to inspire our consumer understanding to better support the goals of the wider business."

About the Authors

Helen Rose is insight director, creative services international at MTV.

Professor Gemma Calvert is founder and managing director of Neurosense, a global leader in Implicit Online tests that enable clients to tap into the non-conscious attitudes and emotions that influence consumer purchasing behaviours.

Read more articles on applied neuroscience

[The application of neuroscience in marketing](#)

Thom Noble

[Amex: Recognise conceptual closure](#)

Stuart Peters and Richard Silberstein

[De Hypotheker: Pretest using fMRI](#)

Leslie Hogeveen and Martin de Munnik

[Feeding America: Recruiting angels](#)

Michael E Smith, Patty Goldman and Stephanie Rath

[PepsiCo: Testing product launches](#)

Stephen Springfield Sr and Aaron Reid

[Hovis: Researching autopilot purchase](#)

Matt Hunt and Phil Barden

[Fox Sports: Measuring Double Box television](#)

Peter Leimbach and Dr Carl Marci

[Bud Light: Facially coding Bud fans](#)

Nathan Byrne and Tim Llewellynn

[From novelty to must-use](#)

Horst Stipp

© Copyright Warc 2014

Warc Ltd.

85 Newman Street, London, United Kingdom, W1T 3EU

Tel: +44 (0)20 7467 8100, Fax: +(0)20 7467 8101

www.warc.com

All rights reserved including database rights. This electronic file is for the personal use of authorised users based at the subscribing company's office location. It may not be reproduced, posted on intranets, extranets or the internet, e-mailed, archived or shared electronically either within the purchaser's organisation or externally without express written permission from Warc.