

On marketing and speed

 By [Edward Fisher](#)

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Scientists have discovered a synchronisation issue in the human brain that affects perception and could potentially have implications for areas ranging from media placement to quality control. [video]

Losing a key in sight

You are rushing to complete a project for a client; hastily you whip through it in a final check - you even get a colleague to check the content before handing it over. Alas, the client still finds a glaring error. What went wrong? How could both of you have missed such an obvious mistake?

Whether it's hunting for errors in a document, looking for something specific online, or trying to find your car keys, the mechanism that is most likely to create a black-hole in your perception is exactly the same.

In short, the system that controls motor skills and the system in charge of perception in the human brain often operate at different paces. Perception is often unable to keep up. This is why it is entirely possible for you to pick up and move your car keys while you hunt for them, without ever having actually noticed.

For marketers, there are powerful lessons to be learnt in understanding how concentration influences what their target market sees - or in this instance, does not see.

A need for a lack of speed

[Grayden Solman at the University of Waterloo, Canada](#), says that, in an experiment conducted at pace, participants missed the object they were hunting for 10-20% of the time. This error rate remained unchanged, even when participants picked up the object during their search.

Seeing and internalising what is seen are not the same thing. The more of a rush participants were in, the more likely they were to miss the object - even if they handled it.

For example, traditionally websites that have a high traffic rate are regarded as prime locations for advertising and branding. Yet, consider that home pages with high traffic volume are often the worst performing pages on a site when it comes to display advertising.

This can be attributed to the fact that people are in a rush to navigate away and find what they were after in the first place. The

speed of interaction results in poor ROI on the ad.

Although things such 'time on site' and 'length of exposure' have always been fundamentals in the set of marketing measurement tools, as we understand more about how concentration and internal state impact on retention, these criteria may become increasingly important.

The information overload myth

Surprisingly, attention is not compromised by the amount of material we are subjected to - rather it is the pace of information that makes us 'switch-off'. In the aforementioned experiment, Solmen demonstrated that, when overloading the participants' short-term memories with additional information, there was no significant increase in the error rates.

This goes against the traditional assumption that the amount of information we are made to process causes us to 'switch off'. Instead, it is the physical speed with which information flows that is more likely to cause our attention to be fractured.

Gorillas in the midst

If you have never seen the groundbreaking experiment on selective attention called the 'Invisible Gorilla' by Christopher Charbris and Daniel Simon, it's well worth watching.

The Invisible Gorilla experiment asks viewers to watch a video and count how many times a basketball is passed at speed between members of a particular team. At the height of the frenetic activity, a gorilla walks on to the screen, beats its chest and then exits. About 50% of viewers miss the gorilla completely.

Chabris and Simon proved the premise that a hurried state of mind makes you overlook critical pieces of information. So what are good media for marketers to target people in a more relaxed state?

37 minutes of coffee

As the speed at which we conduct our lives increases due to faster bandwidth, more rich media, greater processing power and even travelators at airports and malls - the more catching the viewer in the right state, as well as length of exposure, is going to count in favour of marketers. Tired, rushed and stressed people mean less chance of retention.

By this rationale, it could be argued that if a company is targeting business travellers, then advertising on the coffee cups they are likely to buy may yield greater ROI than airport billboards.

The coffee is associated with a heightened state of awareness (providing it's not decaf - which we feel belongs in the bin anyway) and travels with the traveller. The average length of exposure to a coffee cup is 37 minutes (information compliments of [Tag8 Media](#)), while a billboard in a concourse on average enjoys a mere eight seconds of exposure.

A concentration of friends...

Perhaps notions regarding concentration and state help explain why social media is becoming so popular among organisations as a means of attracting prospects. A greater time on-site and a more engaged and relaxed state are common occurrences when interacting with friends.

This, coupled with social advocacy, improves the chances of someone taking time to interact with an ad, or company, and enter into a conversion process. Naturally, the latter doesn't mitigate the extreme importance of the content being relevant to those viewing it.

Thanks for your time...

As we decode more information on how the brain works, we learn some surprising insights that can possibly be very beneficial in helping marketers improve how they target their campaigns. Questions about what state viewers will be in when they are exposed to an ad and where maximum length of exposure can be realised are experiencing a resurgence in importance.

Of course, when it comes to the human mind, findings are constantly being redefined and so you may choose to disagree, or in fact you may not even be reading this piece any more. Something more pressing may have caught your attention.

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