

Cocktail dresses, beer and brand perception

By  John Laurence

6 Mar 2015

You've probably seen the popular meme on the internet of a picture of a cocktail dress with the question of the colour of the dress...

My wife and I are unanimous: It's clearly white and gold.

But I show it to my son who tells me it's black and blue.

What's happening here?



Image from: <http://www.wired.com/2015/02/science-one-agrees-color-dress/>

It's been said that: "There is no truth. There is only perception."

We often hear that our perceptions of the world are not reality. Our brains use the available information to paint a picture that doesn't necessarily fit with reality, but we believe it does. The truth is that nothing in our brain is truly objective and brands influence these perceptions.

Ever heard of Schlitz beer, for instance? Well, believe it or not, for a while in the 1950s it was the best-selling beer in the US.

So, what happened to it?

Without branding, most beers taste pretty much the same

In the late 1960s, as part of a battle for dominance with Millers and Anheuser-Busch, they decided to increase their profitability and volume by using a new method of brewing that cut the process time down to half that of Budweiser's. But by the mid-1970s rumours were spreading about the drop in quality and they started losing market share.

In order to try and recover from the suspicion around the quality of their product, they decided to demonstrate their product against rival beers Bud and Miller. They took the bold move of gathering 100 Budweiser fanatics and letting them blind-taste the two beers live at the NFL Super Bowl, to decide which one they prefer.

This may sound like the move of a brand that has huge confidence in their product quality. But actually, the truth is that without branding, most beers taste pretty much the same. Even the erstwhile CEO of SABMiller, Graham MacKay, stated that, "After a pint, you would be hard pressed to tell two lagers apart in a blind tasting".

The Schlitz team knew that if they were deprived of a brand to cue the beer fans, they would have no better likelihood than pure chance to choose their favourite beer. And that's precisely what happened. Exactly 50 of the Bud fans chose Schlitz as the better tasting beer.

This was seen as a triumph for the Schlitz team, who claimed that half of all self-confessed Bud fans felt their beer tasted better. Unfortunately for them, a number of subsequent marketing blunders meant that even with this glory, the brand continued its decline into obscurity.

Brands help our brains process information

So, what's this got to do with brains? Well, our brains are what scientists often call 'cognitive misers'. This may sound like they are lazy, but what it means is that they are super-efficient organisms that don't use processing capacity unless they really need to. They use cues from the environment to help make decisions. The lack of light source cues in the picture of the cocktail dress, for instance, makes it difficult for your brain to interpret the colours of the dress. [Click here for more.](#)

You can instantly recognise thousands of brands and know what they stand for. Now try and imagine making a conscious decision on every product or service that you ever purchased. A simple collection of colours and shapes can significantly sway your decisions in life. Brands allow you to effortlessly weigh a decision for a product against its rivals. And just like the cocktail dress, reality only exists in the eye of the beholder.

The important thing here is that this process is effortless and implicit, meaning it usually does not take conscious thought to evaluate them. The process occurs below the level of consciousness and is usually nothing more than a feeling towards a product that can be difficult to articulate.

And so, the process of advertising is largely about paring a brand with a positive experience so that the non-conscious mind will gravitate towards it in a purchase situation. When you see a brand later on, your brain uses the brand as a cue for decision making, almost like a weighting to move towards or stay away from that product as evidenced by the feeling

you have towards it.

Just like the picture of the cocktail dress then, a large part of the marketer's job is to ensure that their brand is portrayed in the right light.

ABOUT JOHN LAURENCE

John is MD of HeadSpace Neuromarketing and is an experienced marketer with over 15 years in the marketing and advertising industry. As well as having worked in marketing research, he has headed the marketing divisions of two blue-chip global brands in South Africa and has developed strategy for several well-known brands. Contact him on tel +27(0)83 230 8764 or email john@head-space.biz.

- The attention economy - 13 Nov 2018
- How emotion affects advertising - 25 May 2017
- Brand trust - It's in the eyes - 3 Aug 2015
- A stranger to your selfie - 24 Jul 2015
- How do you boil a frog? - 21 Jul 2015

[View my profile and articles...](#)

For more, visit: <https://www.bizcommunity.com>