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WHITE PAPER

How To Disrupt: Measuring Both Fast and Slow Thinking for Brand Breakthroughs

by Dave Lundahl and Greg Stucky

How To Disrupt:

Measuring Both Fast and Slow Thinking for Brand Breakthroughs

New research shows that to create disruptive innovation, brands need to appeal to people's system 2 way of thinking as well as system 1. People flip back and forth quickly between system 1 and system 2, as well as use both simultaneously as they make their decisions. Therefore, to influence those decisions, brands must understand which cues connect to people, and with which mode, when making choices.

In recent years, marketing professionals have embraced the insight of inherent irrationality in human decision-making. This insight is derived from behavioral economics and from the work of researchers such as Daniel Kahneman, Amos Tversky, and Dan Ariely. In particular, ideas from Kahneman's 2011 book, "Thinking Fast and Slow," which explored the two systems that govern human thinking and decision-making, have been widely adopted across all aspects of marketing theory, strategy, and activation.

System 1 thinking is: fast, intuitive, and automatic, relying on implicit reactions and gut feelings. System 2 is: slow, deliberate, and analytical, requiring more cognitive effort.

There is a widely accepted narrative that most of our daily decisions are made by system 1, without conscious thought; this has led marketers to prioritize approaches that emphasize fast, implicit emotional connections with consumers. Indeed, the emphasis on system 1 has been all-consuming, in spite of most 'standard' market research still relying heavily on direct, explicit questions.

A more recent study¹ cautions that neglecting our rational, system 2 thinking is a mistake. However, this research suggests that the relationship between system 1 and system 2 is a continuum—a sliding scale with different amounts of implicit or explicit thinking triggered by different stimuli. Our research demonstrates that this is not true.

Rather than a continuum, our research and experience clearly identifies a better model where decisions are made by consumers rapidly switching between the two modes. This

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model enables brands to tailor their strategies to either nudge quick, intuitive choices or engage more deliberate, reasoned decisions for maximum impact and disruptive innovation. We have clear evidence that for people to make significant, disruptive, decisions, brands must craft strong, logical arguments appealing to slower, system 2 thinking, or create emotional surprise and hope. The key is understanding how choices are made, whether through disruptive reasoning, implicit associations, or a mix of the two.

¹ <https://www.ipsos.com/sites/default/files/disrupting-system-1-thinking-sept-2020-ipsos.pdf>

Nudge versus disruption: the challenge for innovation

Along with the growth in understanding and thinking around systems 1 and 2, we have seen a great deal of research,² particularly in public and social health, focusing on the value of using behavioral nudges to change behavior. From the perspective of CPG innovation this means appealing to the consumer's emotional and intuitive brain to make incremental improvements to a brand or product. Over time these improvements become significant, both in terms of sales impact and in terms of consumer perception.

But we are all living in volatile, disruptive times—times when brands often need to make a step change to keep up with new competitors, new markets and a fast-changing environment. Relying solely on multiple, incremental nudge-based improvements over time is not going to be enough for most organizations.

Putting the two together: How it works

The recent work here at InsightsNow furthers the idea that while a focus on system 1 is helpful to nudge consumers into taking decisions that fit an existing frame of reference, for significant, disruptive decisions, brands must also craft strong, logical system 2-based arguments. This finding underscores the need to measure both types of responses to develop truly effective marketing strategies.

The work in this area has led us to develop a patented approach—the first reliable way of measuring whether or not a reaction or an association is system 1 or system 2 within survey-based research.³ Unlike traditional “implicit” research approaches, which rely on a spectrum of slow to fast thinking

due to limited data, our technique distinctly identifies both system 1 and system 2 thinking. It provides a clear cutoff, showing the percentage of the audience in each category, offering a more accurate reflection of actual consumer behavior.

- **Calibration:** the research participant completes a series of tasks to familiarize themselves with the assessment process. Through these tasks we can measure their reaction speed, establishing a personalized cutoff that indicates when they are using system 1 or system 2 thinking.
- **Priming:** this stage prepares the participant's brain to have associations and context at the ready, typically using storytelling, presentation of concepts, product experiences, and videos. This means it is possible to measure whether the association to the memory is fast or if the brain is working to solve an incongruity.
- **Assessment:** the participant sees the primed question while a series of words, phrases or pictures are flashed quickly. They simply select the positive or negative response, at which point the next word appears. A choice faster than their individual cut-off speed is a system 1 reaction, whereas a slower one shows that the participant was disrupted and had to think with their system 2 brain before choosing.

The following case study highlights how using this approach to testing both consumers' system 1 and system 2 responses provides product marketers with deeper insights into what drives consumer choice, enabling them to make better decisions that impact the market.

² Applying Nudge to Public Health Policy: Practical Examples and Tips for Designing Nudge Interventions Murayama Takagi Tsuda Kato 2021

³ InsightsNow Implicit/Explicit Test™

Case Study

Driving sustainable consumer behavior by understanding both modes

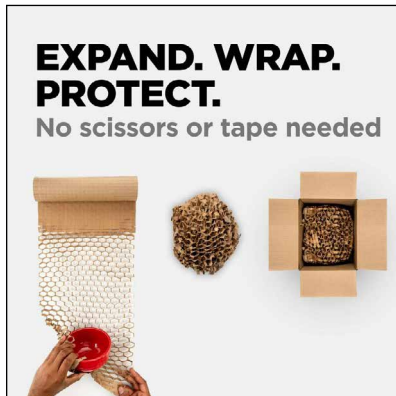
3M

Scotch®



As 3M prepared to launch Scotch™ Cushion Lock™, a sustainable packaging solution, they faced the challenge of shifting consumer behavior toward environmentally friendly products. Traditional claims testing methods often fail to capture the subconscious motivations that drive consumer choices. 3M needed a deeper understanding of which claims would not only tap into their subconscious motivations but also appeal to consumers' conscious beliefs to encourage a bigger shift towards sustainable purchasing decisions.

Using our methodology, we evaluated the effectiveness of various on-pack claims for Scotch Cushion Lock. The study involved regular purchasers of packing products and online marketplace sellers, who participated in a blind evaluation using a visual metaphor exercise. This approach allowed the research to uncover unconscious biases and preferences, providing 3M with a comprehensive understanding of consumer reactions.



The research showed:

- 1. Testing for Behavioral Insights:** The Implicit/Explicit Test™ revealed that certain claims would nudge most people to drive consideration and certain claims caused disruption. By distinguishing between claims that nudged behavior subtly and those that disrupted it more overtly, 3M was able to identify which combination of messages would be most effective in affecting choice for the largest percentage of the population.
- 2. Impact of Functional and Emotional Benefits:** The research highlighted the importance of balancing different types of benefits. Claims that communicated both the practical advantages of Scotch Cushion Lock and its alignment with consumers' values were found to be most persuasive to nudge them, while claims which highlighted novel action and sustainability created the greatest positive disruption. This dual approach ensured that the product resonated on multiple levels, making it more likely to influence purchasing decisions for the greatest number of people.

- 3. Optimizing On-Pack Messaging:** By analyzing implicit and explicit behavioral scores, InsightsNow helped 3M determine the optimal combination of on-pack claims. The selected claims not only encouraged consumers to choose the new sustainable option, but also disrupted their typical decision-making process, making them reconsider their usual choices in favor of a more environmentally friendly product.

By identifying the most effective claims through a combination of nudge and disrupt messaging, 3M created a compelling marketing campaign that resonated with consumers and promoted sustainable practices. As a result, 3M successfully positioned Scotch Cushion Lock as a leading choice for eco-conscious consumers, driving engagement and supporting the brand's commitment to innovation and sustainability.

How to be both

System 1 responses are still a crucial way for marketers to understand how people think about their brands and the associations they have. But this doesn't mean that marketers should only measure and understand system 1—the two operate together. Most significant is that system 2 is particularly important in creating disruptive brand choices.

At InsightsNow we have also demonstrated the power of measuring both system 1 and system 2 response modes for a range of clients including:

- Creating three game-winning tactics for a major toothpaste brand by identifying 'slow' responses that disrupt consumer behavior—as well as one that avoids a costly mistake.
- Uncovering the factors that helped convert from awareness to trial for a market-disrupting burger brand.
- Supporting the development of a disruptive new packaging solution for Tofurky.

In a fast-changing and disruptive environment, brands cannot afford to rely only on nudge innovations; disruption must play a role. As this research clearly shows, to make big, step changes, brands need to appeal to consumers' fast thinking AND slow thinking.

By avoiding the pitfalls of lumping implicit and explicit reactions together, our approach gives marketers a distinct competitive advantage. We identify precisely whether a decision is driven by quick, intuitive judgments or deliberate, reasoned thought. This differentiation is crucial for brands seeking accurate, actionable insights to craft more effective marketing strategies.

Understanding both types of thinking is not just beneficial—it's essential for making informed decisions that resonate with consumers on every level.

About the authors



Dr. Dave Lundahl

Dave founded InsightsNow in 2003 to drive innovation for a healthier world. He advises on product strategy and design and serves on advisory boards at Oregon State University for the Department of Food Science & Technology.



Greg Stucky

Greg specializes in research innovations, applying consumer behavior to product development. He leads new business initiatives at InsightsNow and has been featured in top industry publications such as Harvard Business Review, The LA Times and ESOMAR World.

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can transform your results?**

CONTACT THE TEAM



About InsightsNow

US-based, award-winning behavioral research and strategy firm
InsightsNow partners with brands across industries, providing strategies for marketing, branding, and product development. Founded in 2003, InsightsNow offers custom, collaborative solutions and proprietary behavioral frameworks, providing expert guidance to uncover the right answers and improve success in the market. Clients include Campbell's, 3M, Kraft Heinz, Tofurky, Ocean Spray, IFF, Tyson, and Bush's.

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