



ATTENTION MEMORY AND EMOTION.

Why touch makes print so powerful

In association with Dr Andy Myers, Walnut Unlimited



ARE BRANDS MISSING A HUGE OPPORTUNITY?



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Dr Myers has a PhD in Cognitive Neuroimaging (fMRI). He brings the worlds of neuroscience and market research together to understand what makes successful marketing. Walnut Unlimited is a London based agency which applies psychological methods to understand how people behave. It uses biometric and brain imaging measurement and functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) to gather unique insights into how consumers think and feel.

In our increasingly digital world, print enables something unique – not only as a channel, but as an experience. It seems obvious, but print offers an opportunity for brands to connect with people physically – and, as we’ll see, that has an extraordinary and measurable effect. The power of touch is one of the reasons that print deserves much more attention from brands and agencies. We know from numerous scientific and neuromarketing studies that the sensory nature of print outperforms digital by some distance in landing and embedding key messages, and in long-term brand-building. And yet brands continue to miss out on tangible opportunity.

Print is not only under-considered and under-used by brands, but in many cases entirely eliminated in favour of digital ads.

This paper sets out to demonstrate exactly why brands should consider print in their marketing mix. We take in the body of evidence in science and research that all points toward the same neon-lit signal for brand managers: the neuroscience of human touch offers a hard-wired pathway to harnessing emotion, grabbing attention and embedding memory – all of the objectives brand marketers strive to achieve.

When we touch something, information about its texture, shape, pressure and weight is sent to our brain in just a fraction of a second. Here it becomes conscious perception. And that’s just the start of the story. These signals trigger interconnected neural networks, intertwining touch with emotion by activating unconscious memories and feelings.

And this plays into what we know about brand marketing, and the three basic things it needs to achieve to be effective:

Capture attention

Stimulate the emotions

Influence and impact our memories

These three core elements affect our decision-making, both in the short and longer term. So let’s put print to the test and see how it stacks up.

+ ATTENTION – THE POWER TO CAPTURE AND HOLD

The physical nature of print offers a compelling way to kill the noise. The mindset that we bring to consuming print is very different from how we operate online².

Every day we are surrounded by a constant buzz of information. We find ourselves increasingly busy, and life seems to be moving at an ever-faster pace.

The challenge for brands is profound. Either brands are competing for a window of attention that is transient and rapidly diminishing in size, or the overall marketing noise is so loud that people simply tune out. Digital media are feeling the impact of audience fatigue as individuals increasingly block and avoid digital ads, particularly the younger Gen Z¹ consumers.

In a comparison of digital and print, researchers concluded that reading from a screen is characterised by browsing and scanning, non-linear reading, keyword spotting and declining sustained attention³. By contrast, consumption of print is a naturally more focused activity. A 2017 study reported that over 90% of subjects said they concentrated best when reading from print, and over 80% would prefer print for studying and pleasure⁴.

And here, the physicality of print is a powerful antidote to our wandering eye. Brands solely using digital media are competing for attention against both the volume of information and the audience's flighty behaviour. When it comes to attention, print helps brands to capture and hold their audience's focus. Interestingly, paper is also better at enabling audience comprehension than digital channels.

A 2019 study showed that, no matter how good or 'page-like' a display screen, the sense of narrative is more easily lost by the reader, compared to a physical page. The sensory feedback we get through gripping the material and experiencing tangible progress as the pages are consumed one by one is deeply important; losing this visual and tactile cue means it is harder for us to locate events and to connect with a story as deeply⁵.

+ EMOTION – THE POWER TO MOVE AND CONNECT

Texture, shape, colour and smell are all elements of print that creative thinking can adapt and manipulate, enabling brands to stimulate and connect with our emotions in a dimension beyond the reach of digital tactics.

Emotion is key to human decision-making, guiding our behaviour at a subconscious level. Brands able to generate an emotional connection with their audience significantly increase the impact of their message.

Studies have shown that print generates a strong emotional response in readers.

A 2009 study⁶ used fMRI (functional magnetic resonance imaging) to look at the brain's reaction to print versus online advertising.

Fascinatingly, the print ads provoked higher levels of emotional processing. The researchers suggested this was a result of the physical material creating more emotionally vivid memories. So, why does touching something physical elicit a stronger emotional response? Put simply, we like to own things. The 'endowment effect'⁷ is a common bias where we become attached to an item just by having it in our possession. Studies have found that we are more reluctant to give up an object once it's in our hands. Simply touching it gives us a sense that it belongs to us.

This trait offers an advantage for brands using print – a simple brochure can create a stronger emotional connection with the recipient than something they cannot physically touch.

FEELING A DEEPER CONNECTION

We also link physical textures with emotions. A 2014 study found that people experienced different emotional states depending on the texture of a surface. Smooth textures, for example, were able to communicate pleasantness, relief and comfort⁸.

Trust is another factor in fostering emotional connections and building positive brand relationships. A German study put print second only to the recommendation of friends and family as a trusted source of information, with 54% trusting printed paper and magazine ads compared to just 16% trusting ads online⁹. Meanwhile, a US study showed print ads to be the most trusted type of advertising, with trust levels at a staggering 82%¹⁰.

+ MEMORY – THE POWER TO INFLUENCE LONG-TERM

The researchers concluded this makes print advertising literally more ‘real’ to the brain which, in turn, makes it better at becoming a deeper, lasting part of the memory¹¹.

Information captures and moves us, but there can be no net gain for brands if this information is immediately forgotten. For a brand, memory is everything.

Research shows that print advertising is very effective at making strong memories. A study compared how the brain reacts to the same brand information in a direct mail compared to digital advertising. The physical format of the direct mail triggered more areas of the brain involved in integrating visual and spatial information.

The study also found that print advertising combines the power of memory and emotion. When looking at the direct mail, people experienced more activity in brain areas associated with emotionally powerful stimuli and memory. This suggests the physical ad was creating more emotionally vivid memories – crucial for brands looking to develop positive and lasting brand impressions.

In fact, the power of print advertising can even create false memories which feel ‘real’. Research found¹² that almost 80% of people who just looked at high-quality, vivid imagery of popcorn in a print ad were one week later as likely to claim they had eaten the popcorn as people who actually had. Interestingly, with low-quality imagery, this figure dropped to 30%, suggesting that the quality of the print ad makes all the difference in creating lasting memories for a brand campaign.

+ PRINT – INSPIRING ACTION

Changing the quality of the paper leads to better perceptions of a brand. It is not simply a way for a brand to communicate – it's an extension of the brand.

From the many studies reviewed in this paper, it's clear that the haptic nature of print means it delivers enhanced neurological responses in areas that affect human attention, emotion and memory. But what does this mean for brands?

How do print's advantages impact brand perception and, ultimately, sales?

Research finds that print advertising is not only more memorable, but also more likely to drive people to buy. A 2015 study demonstrated that when looking at print ads, there was more activity in the brain area associated with reward processing and desirability (commonly referred to as the brain's 'buy button').

In research by USPS¹³ comparing the brain's response to print and digital advertising, not only did subjects spend 40% more time looking at the print ad, they exhibited significantly higher responses in emotional reaction,

immediacy of recall, perceived value and subconscious desire for the product.

Findings were supported by a neuroscience study by Canada Post¹⁴ which showed that direct mail is easier to understand and remember (requiring 21% less cognitive effort from the brain), more motivating (the group exhibited 20% higher motivation responses to the print ads), and more likely to drive behaviour than digital media.

Print can also convey the brand itself. Human emotional response to touch delivers a perception of quality. For premium or luxury brands, the quality of the paper stock used in print executions will literally influence audience sentiment and perception versus their expectations¹⁵.

Uniquely, when used in the right way, print moves beyond a medium to become an extension of the brand.

+ THE FUTURE – MULTI- SENSORY PRINT

Such possibilities allow brands to harness not just the power of touch but multiple senses to create more engaging, memorable and impactful campaigns.

Printing technology is advancing, offering the full suite of sensory experiences. In print, brands can stimulate any of the senses – for example through smell, through paper that can be tasted or listened to, or through the embedding of NFC (near field communication) chips directly into the paper stock.

Multi-sensory executions have the potential to capture attention, drive stronger emotional associations with a brand and in turn embed stronger memories. Something as simple as including a brand scent in print will create an immediate, emotional link in the brain between the ad and the product.

According to sensory brand experience expert and New York Times best-selling author Martin Lindstrom, a message is up to 100% more impactful when delivered through three sensory channels than it is when delivered through one¹⁶. Here, print has an inherent advantage over screen-based media for delivering brand impact and bang for buck.

‘Our society today, because it’s so digitally obsessed, has reduced the amount of tactile interactions we have with humans in a way that is starting to be pretty dangerous’.

Martin Lindstrom
Chairman & founder, Lindstrom company

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THE POWER OF PRINT

In today's media landscape it can be difficult to be heard, but print helps brands cut through the noise. In comparison to digital channels, print focuses our attention and gains our trust. Meanwhile, science has shown that our brain response to print is very different to that from other media. Our sense of touch makes our interaction with print more than just a simple sensation: it triggers deeper emotional responses, creates more connections and forges stronger memories.

Today, print is often under-considered for the media mix. But brands are missing a huge opportunity, not least as print advertising offers greater return on investment than its digital counterparts. While we scroll past digital banners and pop-ups, print captures our attention and stays in our memories long after the ad is out of sight.

**Get in touch to find out more about how print can be a winner in your campaign.
Call Ulbe Jelluma on +32 478 600084 to book a meeting. Let's talk print.**

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