

**F**lorian Klaus of K&A BrandResearch thinks it's time for a new psychology in market research. The cognitive turnaround, which was already

planned decades ago in scientific psychology, is missing, at least in this country.

What is needed is a realistic cause-and-effect understanding of people's behaviour.

The cognitive turn in scientific psychology describes the slow change from behaviorism to today's predominant cognitivism, i.e. the change from the study of the observable external behavior of humans to the much broader view of their information processing processes. One of the central criticisms of classical behaviorism was that it did not take into account intrapsychic constructs such as thoughts and especially emotions. In cognitive research, these are integrated on an equal footing. The quasi archetypal counterpart of the behaviourists, psychoanalysis as the most important representative of so-called depth psychology, increasingly ran into the void with its criticism.

It all happened roughly between the 1960s and 1980s. The term *Cognitive Turn* was introduced by William Dember in 1974. While central depth psychological concepts and terms such as trauma, drive and especially the unconscious found their way into our society and language, the scientific basis for this continued to melt away from. Today, psychoanalysis has all but disappeared from the German university scene. Only two of the 106 state universities in the country still have a psychoanalytically oriented chair or department (as of 09/2020). If we look at clinical psychology - the university basis of psychotherapy - Freud usually fills only an introductory chapter of a textbook.

The fact that, in contrast, therapeutic practice is only gradually being conquered by cognitive behavioural therapists (instead of psychoanalysts) is mainly due to long training courses, strict demand planning guidelines for new admissions and the former majority of analytically working therapists.

Therapists together who continue to operate their practices.

In psychological science, on the other hand, the era of contending schools has ended. Today, a cognitivist platform prevails, which combines elements of different currents. Among them, of course, are concepts that have their origins in depth psychology, but significantly modified. And without an ideological superstructure.

### Meanwhile in Market Research

Psychologists who move from academia to market research are experiencing a medium reality shock in Germany. While current

quantitative measurement instruments can be easily adopted in commercial questionnaire construction and ultimately every brand image statement is based on psychological assumptions, qualitative market research always presents a richly skewed picture.

Speaking in extremes: On the one hand, there are strictly structured group discussions remote from everyday life, in which people are asked more or less plitudinously why they bought one product or brand and left another to the left.

With such approaches, we violate quite banal findings of all psychological disciplines: Especially our knowledge that people largely lack an understanding of their own decision-making patterns. People can only rarely give marketing-relevant answers to the question of "why" we decide in a certain way.

# Weg mit dem Psycho-Ballast

Wanted: the update on psychology in marketing

: Away with the psycho-balast

## The author

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On the other hand, one experiences almost esoterically exaggerated individual explorations that are backed with a wild mix of depth psychology. In part, psychological market research simply seems to serve a purpose other than its original one. Sometimes it's less about insights and more about a soothing contrast to numbers, data, facts: Depth, meaning, a little voyeuristic frisson in between. There is then talk of need-continents, iceberg peaks, under which the unconscious, the subconscious or the preconscious may be concealed. Of phallic symbolism, unsatisfied aggressive tendencies, sublimated conflicts or the transmission of mother-, father- or archetypes of various continuing degrees of kinship. We indulge in analogies, meaningful metaphors, neologisms that unite supposed opposites, fairy tale images, and so on and so forth. This is undoubtedly exciting, can be fascinating, especially in personal presentations, and, used correctly, can also inspire new ideas. However, this has nothing whatsoever to do with the level that psychology has reached as a science today and which has meanwhile been honored with two Nobel Prizes - or more precisely: Nobel Prizes for Economics.

### What progress can look like

New hope for a realistic, tangible approach to psychology that could be used for marketing germinated most recently with the rise of behavioral economics and, in particular, Daniel Kahneman's research around Systems 1 and 2, described in the book "Thinking. Fast and Slow" (2010). Together with Byron Sharp (How Brands Grow, 2010), his work is certainly capable of establishing a long overdue Cognitive Turn in psychological market research. Yet the reception in Germany remains timid and is far too often limited to anecdotes about particularly spectacular biases in human decision making. Kahneman, Sharp, Gigerenzer and many others apparently move too far outside the established market research establishment for it to be so easy for the majority to follow their arguments.

Nick Chater's book "The Mind is Flat" (2018), on the other hand, reads like a lightheartedly packaged cold turkey for over-psychologizing and at the same time pushes open a door to honest, effective psychological market research. In the original, which is currently only available in English, the Professor of Behavioural Science at Warwick Business School formulates: "We have no hidden depths to plumb, and unconscious thought is a myth. Instead we generate our ideas, motives and thoughts in the moment." Behavioral economics and neuroscience vividly demonstrate how futile and disconnected from the state of science it is to attempt to explain human behavior with depth psychological constructs. Because these simply do not exist in real life. On the contrary, our behavior can be explained much more coherently and easily with a growing and increasingly elaborate knowledge of experience. Humans are wired to scan the environment for meaningful cues and use them to trigger the most promising behavioral strategies. With growing experience, we refine our strategies and the recognition mechanisms of these cues as behavioral triggers. In this way, we become smarter and smarter intuitive re-agitators.

Depending on the particular everyday context, such as different touchpoints. We leave the stage to Daniel Kahneman's System 1 thinking, the energy-saving ideal mode of our brain. When we lack experiential knowledge or clear environmental cues, the exhausting System 2 willy-nilly kicks in. We are now actually trying to become good old homo economicus. According to Kahneman, this burden fortunately only hits us in a few percent of daily decision-making situations. In contrast, target groups decide situationally and intuitively where the questions of market research usually come in. Instead, the state of the art in science should encourage us to free market research, especially its qualitative methods, from misleading psycho-ballast. If we take science seriously, there are two clear tasks above all for exploratory market research: To create a broad (not: deep!) cause-and-effect understanding of cues that guide people in decision-making contexts. To derive strategies from this understanding that can be used to build brands into intuitive behavior. It's time for an update on psychology in marketing. Best of all, it's fun. Pragmatic, contextual psychology is real-life, authentic, usable. In the words of Nick Chater, "We are ... constantly improvising our behavior based on our past experiences ... recognizing this can be liberating!"

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### Literature

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