

Brand Awakening through better contexts

People have learned to automatically align their behavior with concrete contexts. Corona will therefore not fundamentally change their attitudes and behavior. Marketing has to adapt to this.

What is more fascinating in marketing than the elucidation of human decision-making behavior? Market research typically tries to find this out using qualitative methods. Strictly structured, objective group discussions far removed from everyday life are juxtaposed with almost esoteric couch conversations. In the case of group discussions, fundamental insights of current teachings of university psychology are ignored. Above all, the insight that people lack an understanding of their own decision patterns almost completely, so that we can rarely give marketing-relevant answers to the question of why we decide in a certain way. In couch talks there is a wild mixture of more or less comprehensible depth psychological world views - for which, by the way, there is no longer any support at German universities.

Cognitive Psychology and Behavioral Economics

It is almost as if psychoanalysis has found a better place in companies with its need for depth and meaning. And seemingly unaffected by the fact that the now dominant cognitive psychology, together with behavioral economics in the sense of Daniel Kahneman (*Thinking fast and slow*) and Dan Ariely (*Thinking may be useful, but it doesn't help*), is much more reliable in getting at the behavioral reasons that are really useful for marketing. Even Byron Sharp's bestseller (*How brands grow, what marketers don't know*) has not yet led to an adaptation of cognitive psychology in market research.

In 2018, Nick Chater, Professor of Behavioral Science, hammered another nail in the coffin of the over-psychologization of staunch psychoanalysis adherents. His book *The mind is flat* uses the current state of cognitive psychology, behavioral economics, and neuroscience to show that it is futile and disconnected from the state of science to explain human behavior with depth-psychological constructs. "We have no hidden depth to plump for, and unconscious thought is a myth. Instead we generate our ideas, motives and thoughts in the moment." According to this, our thoughts, feelings and desires do not rise up from any pre-thinking depths, but are our lightning-fast reaction to external conditions. And this is not at all arbitrary or coincidental, but based on our life experience, that is the things we have learned.

Behaviour is adapted to the context

And this brings us to context. We humans are trained to scan the environment for meaningful cues and to use them to trigger the most promising behavioral strategies. With growing experience we refine our strategies and recognition mechanisms. Thus, in the sense of Kahneman's System 1, we become smarter and smarter, intuitive re-agents. Like autopilots. But we are not controlled by the mythical subconscious, we have learned how to fly in which conditions. Just as the pilot Sullenberger intuitively managed the impossible Hudson River landing.

People have learned to recognize different behavior as appropriate in different contexts. While a brand manager wonders which beer his target group would prefer, the user asks himself in everyday terms what would be the most suitable drink in the current context. For example, when it comes to alcohol consumption and the workplace: Is it an official party or is a colleague buying a drink? Is it a company event or an after-work get-together? And not only is the question of whether alcohol is acceptable or even expected to be consumed different, but also the type of alcohol is chosen to suit the context. The daytime celebration is celebrated with a glass of sparkling wine, preferably non-alcoholic. In the evening there is wine and beer. It is always the same company, it is always the same people, but the contexts are different and the behavior is automatically adapted to them.

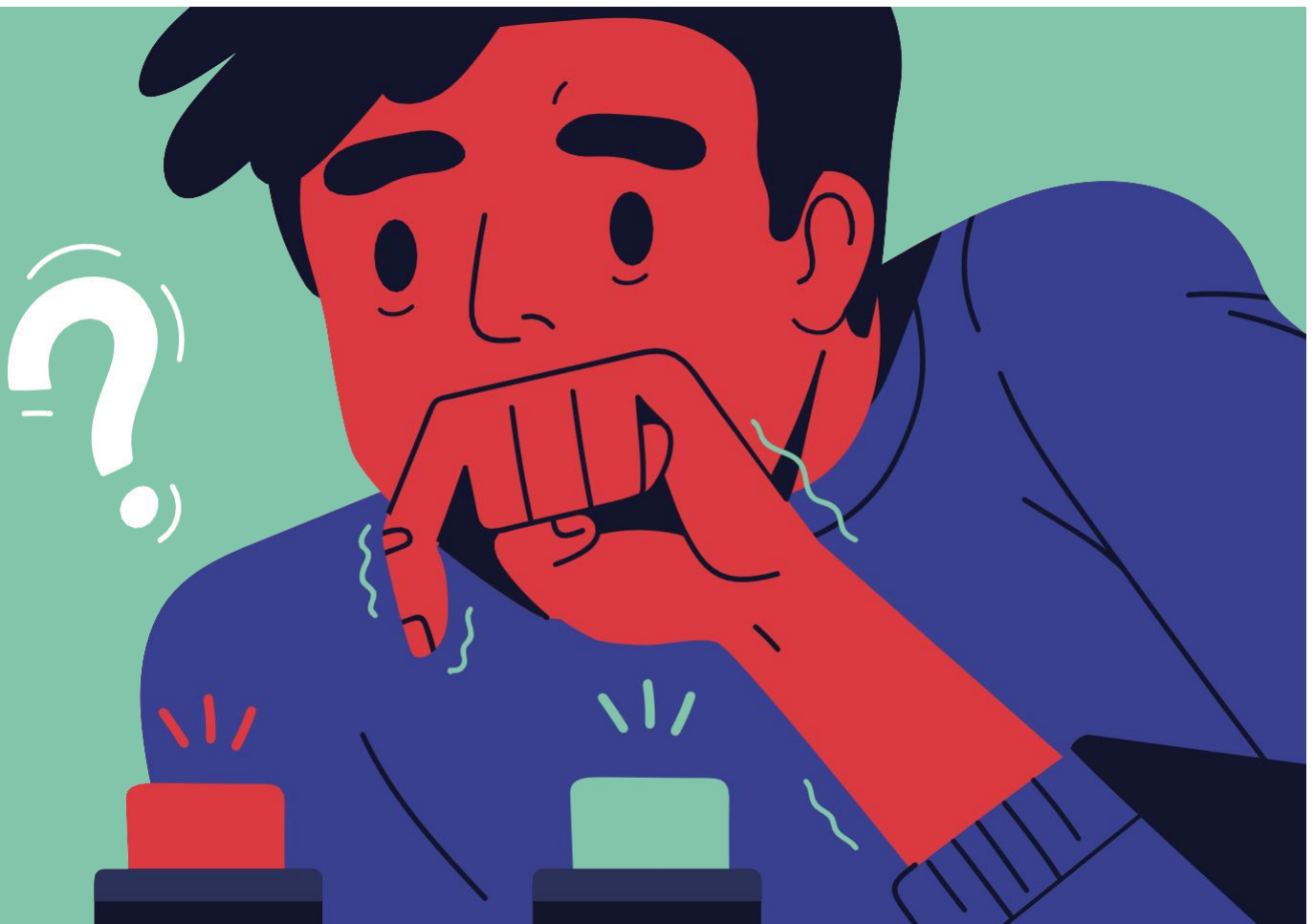
Do you ever drink a sparkling wine? Which sparkling wine

marke do you like to buy? These questions are often asked. But how relevant can the answer be? Here, people think in terms of the brand, but the connection to real life is missing. For everyday sparkling wine consumption, perhaps Rotkäppchen sparkling wine is suitable.

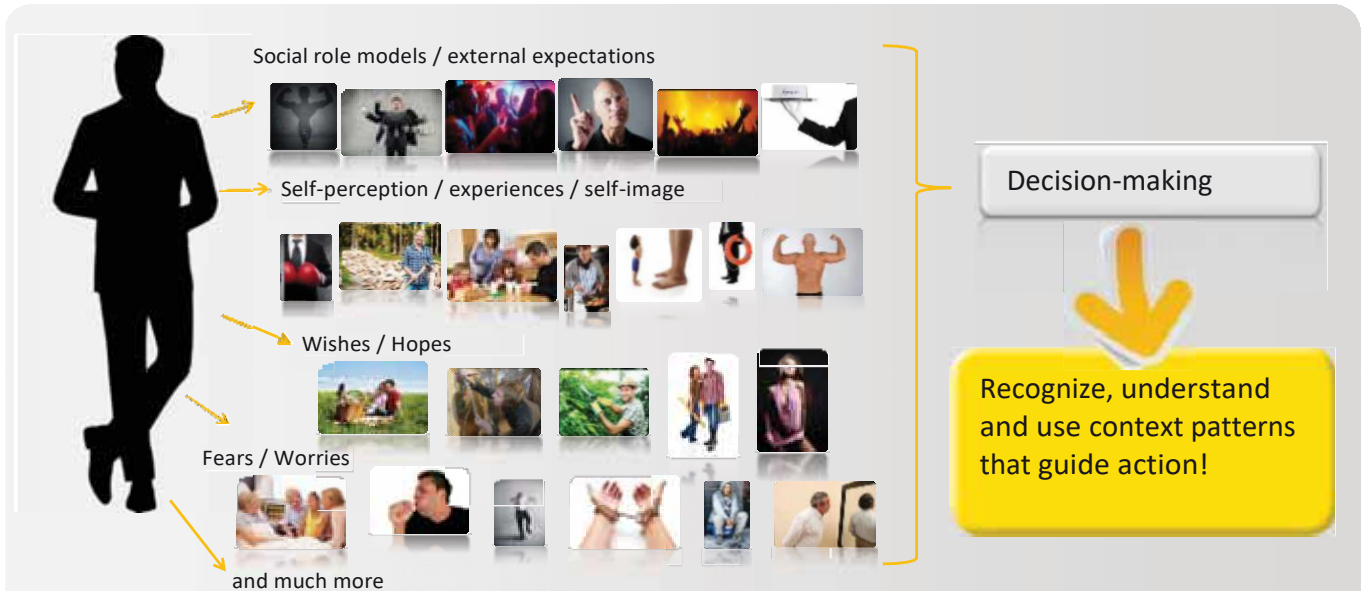
But when it comes to a milestone birthday, it has to be Mumm or Fürst Metternich, while it's better not to order Faber sparkling wine for a date.

Corona does not change behaviour in the long term

Corona is not just a context. In too many studies, people are asked what will be important to them after Corona and how they will behave in the future. Management consultants quickly postulate what all has to change in marketing now so that one can still reach the changed consumer or business customer. However, people are not even able to validly forecast the "why" question regarding their future decision-making behavior. This means that both the surveys and the consultants' deductions have no forward-looking basis, even if they sound so beautifully plausible. Behavioural scientists know what has changed after the past major crises such as 9-11 or the financial crisis. Nothing. People, once their personal worlds returned to normal, went back to behaving in their contexts the way they had before the crisis.



Understanding decision-making behaviour in context



Marketing should look at the specific contexts of the target group and align their communication accordingly

Theodor Fontane would probably say, "Against a stupidity that is in fashion at the moment, no cleverness can stand." Anyone who hastily assumes that the Corona context is now fundamentally changing people's attitudes and behaviour is treading on thin ice. Anyone who speaks of a new sense of "we" instead of "I" orientation, who posits sustainability as the new deciding factor in all decisions or who, following Tönnies, predicts a sustained interest in animal welfare, has not looked in a refrigerated counter for some time. We humans are and remain closest to ourselves. In surveys, topics with social relevance are far ahead; when it comes to shopping, habits and wallets speak louder. Unfortunately, the heroes of everyday life have no prospect of more appreciation and higher salaries, no matter what was applauded from balconies.



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Understanding target groups correctly

Marketing should therefore look at the specific contexts of the target group. Marketeers have to think very practically about how brand buying can be expanded in other contexts. Those who think in contexts will come up with realistic working brand concepts more quickly. Because there are many areas for which Corona has brought advantages. For example, in the food trade, which is currently outstripping canteens and restaurants. Because seasoning sauces help to cheer up the sometimes dull Corona routine? Not at all. When families are burdened with childcare, homeschooling and home offices, what takes the pressure off and makes you more efficient? Convenience. Convenience. And what did many commuters use to eat on the road? Fast food. So it's no wonder that home offices also rely on learned labor-saving behaviors.

In the end, won't Corona permanently change anything? Yes, absolutely. Everything that makes people's lives significantly easier will remain. Markets have to understand that consumers have learned to automatically align their behavior with specific contexts. Companies can therefore reach them better if they relate their benefits to concrete contexts. ■

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