

Brain-scanning technology reveals how we process brands and products

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In a groundbreaking new study, researchers from the University of Michigan and Harvard University use cutting-edge brain-scanning technology to explore how different regions of the brain are activated when we think about certain qualities of brands and products.

The study, forthcoming in the *Journal of Consumer Research*, is the first to use fMRI to assess consumer perceptions and has important implications for the use of metaphorical human-like traits in branding.

"[fMRI] allows one to gauge, for the first time, the degree to which the underlying thought processes are similar," write the researchers.

Subjects were given 450 adjectives such as "reliable," "sophisticated," and "cheerful," and scanned while indicating whether each word was applicable to themselves and someone else. The sample group was also scanned while making similar judgments about brands they know and use. The researchers discovered that even when the consumers were judging products on unmistakably human terms, they still used the part of the brain associated with inanimate objects.

"Although we may use similar vocabularies to describe people and products, we can't say that the same concepts are involved," explain the researchers. "Companies building brand images and icons should be wary of taking the legitimately useful metaphor of brand personality too literally, since it's now apparent that consumers themselves do not."

Source: University of Chicago

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