

# INCORPORATING **'FAST-THINKING'** INTO MARKET RESEARCH

Accessing the 'fast-thinking' side of the brain through digital approaches can elicit better responses during market research, says **Anna Dnes**.

# IN 2011

Daniel Kahnemann's best-selling book 'Thinking, Fast and Slow', described two different ways the brain forms thoughts: System One (Fast-Thinking) and System Two (Slow-Thinking).

He defines System One as fast, frequent and therefore almost automatic and subconscious thinking, while System Two comprises the slow – infrequent and conscious thinking that requires effort, employs logic and rational reasoning.

Through a series of experiments, Kahnemann highlights how these two different thought processes may cause individuals to arrive at different results, even when given the same inputs. Essentially he explains why we do not always behave as perfectly rational human beings.

Kahnemann's theory corresponds to the challenge the healthcare market research community has been observing for decades: that the logical, clear behaviour explained by a doctor or a patient in a market research interview is not always the same as their behaviour in the real world. Kahnemann also casts a new light on market research more generally by pointing to one of its major challenges: that it mainly engages the 'slow-thinking' side of the brain and very rarely taps into its 'fast-thinking' side.

On behalf of the pharmaceutical brands we work for, we need to ask ourselves what, as market researchers, we can do differently to overcome this challenge and get closer to our respondents' 'fast-thinking' thoughts and behaviour? One solution lies in the digital world. Short online tests have become the perfect way to harness the 'fast-thinking' part of our brains, whether employed at the start of a qualitative interview or within a quantitative survey.

Key considerations for designing digital tests to harness the 'fast-thinking' side of our brains:

## 1 Capping exposure time

To tap into the 'fast-thinking' side of the brain, market researchers simulate an environment where fast decisions have to be made. Market research settings have traditionally done the opposite, creating environments where respondents are encouraged to spend more time with information – be it brochures, medical journals, ads or messages – than they would in reality. In doing so, we put the 'slow-thinking' brain in gear and elicit different reactions to those of the 'fast-thinking' brain.

Capping exposure time limits the initial exposure time of the information to a short, fixed amount of time, so only the 'fast-thinking' side of the brain will be able to respond.

## 2 Capping and measuring response time

In an everyday situation, we typically try to make decisions as quickly as possible, rather than just quickly. This has provided an opportunity for us to turn some of the more traditional market research exercises into an online game, where decisions have to be made as fast as possible in order to avoid being 'timed out' (losing the game, so to speak). By measuring the speed of the responses on top of capping the response time, we go beyond surfacing the explicit thoughts, reactions and decisions, and identify the implicit drivers and the ease of decision taking; because the faster we can respond, the easier and more straightforward the decision is – and the harder it is for marketing to change that decision to another.

## 3 Measuring biometric reactions

When it comes to measuring biometric reactions, consumer market research firms tend to be ahead of healthcare market research in the pharmaceutical industry. Several consumer-focused market research agencies measure biometric reactions during the market research interviews. Increased heart rate, perspiration, facial muscle tension and EEG are example biometric indicators of the true reactions and emotions that lie outside of our control, meaning that they cannot be hidden or controlled by our conscious self. While the equipment today is still clunky and perhaps reminiscent of old sci-fi movies, the advent of wristbands that measure our exercise, sleep patterns etc. is exciting as it shows us that a more workable alternative for healthcare market research is not far away. Watch this space!

Can such digital tools make a difference to healthcare market research and pharmaceutical brands?

Yes. 'Fast-thinking' tests are invaluable in identifying deeper insights across a number of pre- and post-launch objectives, including:

- ▼ Identifying the types of claims or communication materials that implicitly resonate versus those that do not
- ▼ Exploring the true treatment algorithm a doctor employs in his or her decision making, rather than those dictated by guidelines
- ▼ Pinpointing the implicit barriers a brand may face in being adopted more broadly
- ▼ Uncovering the true associations and beliefs about certain brands or companies, without any feelings of politeness or restraint from the 'slow-thinking' side of the brain holding that information back.

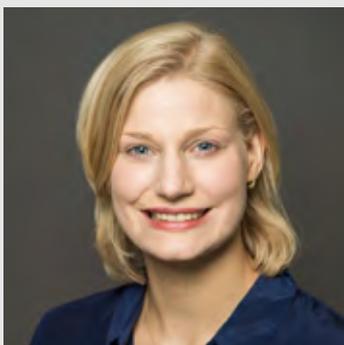
These digital tools are already making a difference to healthcare market research and pharmaceutical brands. To give a couple of specific examples, tapping into the 'fast-thinking' side of customers' heads has been instrumental in uncovering which creative concepts are likely to achieve a behaviour change from a set of strong communication concepts that were all delivering on the intended message.

Similarly, these tools have been used to identify the core benefit that will motivate a change in prescribing drugs and can form the basis of a successful brand positioning, when all pre-developed positionings have failed to resonate.

## Get inside customers' heads

'Fast-thinking' tests will never provide all the answers, but they can be the difference between good and really great market research. Plus, when taken in combination with the 'slow-thinking' elicited in traditional in-depth discussions, we can shed light on any disconnects between these two thinking modes – and the resulting conscious vs unconscious behaviour.

The outcome: more rigorous insights into how to motivate behaviour change. Be it a switch towards a brand, improving patients' compliance or changing the perception of brands in customers' minds. This movement has started to gain momentum among the healthcare companies which view deeper understanding of their customers as critical to success. In these times of needing to do 'more for less' the rate of increased usage of these approaches across companies that have embraced them suggests they are seeing a clear ROI from using 'fast-thinking' approaches.



### About the Author

#### **Anna Dnes**

Anna Dnes is a Senior Research Director at THE PLANNING SHOP, specialising in global qualitative market research. With a background in consulting, she has over seven years' experience in pharmaceutical market research. Anna has an active interest in harnessing digital technology for market research, and has led the digital new product development team for the past five years.



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