Innovative Research Insights: Exploring New Ways to Connect With Consumers

A review of

Breakthrough Food Product Innovation Through Emotions Research
by David Lundahl

Reviewed by
Candice R. Hollenbeck

Breakthrough Food Product Innovation Through Emotions Research by David Lundahl brings attention to the need for a paradigm shift in terms of understanding the consumer through emotions research. Humans are driven largely by emotions, not by logical thinking. Researchers are now adopting new strategies to tap into the emotions of consumers. In his book, Lundahl incorporates his research experience with leading brands to demonstrate industry’s efforts to adapt to the new consumer in an ever-changing, dynamic, and fragmented marketplace. As noted in the book, the new consumer is highly engaged, demanding, and emotionally driven, seeking out brands that work and sharing discoveries with friends.

The food industry has historically been slow to adapt to marketplace changes. However, Lundahl demonstrates that the food industry is awakening by applying new tools
and services to develop foods and packaging for the new consumer. To be successful, those managing brands and products must build relationships with consumers and involve the consumer in “cocreation.” According to Vargo and Lusch (2004), marketing is evolving from an exchange-based model to a tangible resource model embedded in value and transactions. This logic is based on the new consumer who values cocreating products and building relationships with brands. Lundahl illuminates this paradigm shift within the context of the food industry.

The audience for this book includes anyone who is interested in behavioral research; in industry examples for generating perceptual, behavioral, and social psychology insights; and in strategy development for brands. Industry practitioners, such as brand managers and marketing researchers, would be interested in this book, as well as students in marketing and advertising. The chapters, each premised upon innovations research, are organized into the following 11 sections: Change in the Food Industry, Innovation, The Innovation Team, The Science of Emotions, Emotions Research, Strategy Development, Discovery, Define, Design, Development, and The Innovative Company. The flow of the book is from general innovative examples to a specific marketing mix, including behavioral-based tracking and decision metrics useful for adaption to the new consumer.

**Strengths**

The book has several strong points. First, readers will enjoy the incorporation of industry examples. For instance, in Chapter 3 Kettle Foods is used as an example to demonstrate brand authenticity. The brand launched a new product line to reach consumers interested in consuming organic snack foods, and the brand demonstrated authentic support to its loyal consumers by financially supporting Death Valley Natural History Association through the website that markets its Death Valley Chipotle potato chips. Although the book does not make the connection between academic studies and the industry examples used, the illustrations are demonstrative of strategies theorized in academic works. Accordingly, a sense of authenticity in a consumption context can be experienced through ownership, consumer experiences, and identity construction and confirmation (Leigh, Peters, & Shelton, 2006). Thus, many of Lundahl’s examples can be used as practical demonstrations of academic theories.

Second, helpful reader guides are included throughout the book, such as summaries of key points at the end of each chapter, tables and other visuals, and a summary of principles of behavior-driven innovations in the appendix. These inclusions are particularly useful for students, and such sources provide readers with more depth and understanding of the terms and concepts used throughout the book.
Third, the book stimulates readers to question the innovative thinking that guides much decision-making in industry, assisting them to come to the realization that innovation is a continual growth process. As consumers become more engaged in cocreating products and brands, they will also demand more personalized attention and services. In order to compete, companies must know their consumers’ preferences, desires, and engagement levels. This means that research must be ongoing.

Engagement level may be one of the most important criteria to pinpoint in the future, particularly with reference to social media. In other words, how much do consumers want to engage with companies? How much is enough, and how much is too much? As Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, and other social media platforms allow brands to engage with consumers in new ways that are more interactive and consistent, companies will in turn need to explore innovative ways to measure the effectiveness of such interactions. Lundahl’s book offers strategies for better understanding the emotionally driven consumer.

To demonstrate the power of the Internet, in Chapter 1, Lundahl discusses the example of the response to one of Unilever’s advertising campaigns. When Unilever’s Axe brand portrayed “women falling at the feet of men” in a commercial aired in 2007 after its successful three-year Dove campaign promoting “self-esteem and real beauty,” consumers reacted immediately to Unilever’s hypocrisy, expressing their anger on the Internet, including YouTube. This example is illustrative of the influence of peer-to-peer information sharing and the social-networking revolution.

According to the book, such societal changes are having a dramatic effect on product innovation and development. Consumers are no longer passive receivers of information. Conversely, new consumers are highly engaged with brands, including a brand’s overall message and meaning. Furthermore, consumers are active in the process of creating and disseminating information about brands.

Lundahl’s book offers an introduction to exploring emotions research and stimulates readers to think outside the box. According to Lundahl, “Brands must earn trust by demonstrating through their actions that they work for the consumer. Once trust is earned, consumers will more willingly hop on board to be taken to destinations that they seek” (p. 227).

The challenge facing companies is giving significant control to consumers. This can be a win–win strategy for companies. As brands are built to serve consumers, consumers will then fully support the brand. This strategy can streamline marketing research efforts by allowing consumers to be part of the brand building and marketing process, thereby giving them what they want.
Weak Points

There are three main areas where the book could be improved. Upon reading the title, readers may select the book with the goal of gaining a better understanding of the food industry as a whole. However, the book does not provide depth in terms of specific cultural and societal changes affecting the food industry (e.g., Food and Drug Administration regulations and macrocultural shifts such as the organic movement, the green movement, the obesity epidemic, the health-conscious consumer, and the rise of savvy consumers who can use Internet-based resources for self-education and awareness). Rather, it provides strategy-based solutions for businesses whose goal is to uncover the emotions driving consumer decision making.

The book is peppered with interesting case studies involving Burger King, McDonald’s, ConAgra’s Healthy Choice brand, Coke, Pepsi, Frito-Lay, and Proctor & Gamble, among other companies. But the book could have been improved had Lundahl woven the case descriptions around important societal changes in the food industry or made predictions of future strategies related to cultural shifts. For example, in Chapter 2 Lundahl discusses Pop Rocks to illustrate how sensory stimulation and pleasure differentiated the brand from other candies. The candy contained tiny air pockets that created “crackling” sensations and a “popping” noise to affect consumers emotionally by providing a surprise experience.

Although this worked for this brand, will it work in the future? For instance, it would be interesting to project into the future about the state of the consumer mind. Because all brands are aiming to integrate sensory stimulation, what is the maximum level of satisfaction? Can consumers become overstimulated? Will consumers continue to seek enchantment for more entertainment and greater sensory experiences (see Ritzer, 2005)? Or will consumers reach a point of overload?

The book is in line with other popular volumes that point to the emotions as drivers of consumer decisions such as Martin Lindstrom’s (2010) Brand Sense: Sensory Secrets Behind the Stuff We Buy, Dan Ariely’s (2010) Predictably Irrational: The Hidden Forces That Shape Our Decisions, Paco Underhill’s (2000) Why We Buy: The Science of Shopping, and Brian Wansink’s (2010) Mindless Eating: Why We Eat More Than We Think. Lundahl cites several of these books and others such as Malcolm Gladwell’s (2000) Tipping Point and Erik Qualman’s (2010) Socialnomics. However, if the book were more clearly situated within the macrochanges occurring in the food industry, a better distinction and unique contribution could be expounded upon for readers. As it is, Lundahl’s book reiterates many of the concepts laid forth by preceding books.

A second area for improvement would include providing more specific ways of conducting research to uncover behavior-driven innovations, specifically in juxtaposition to scientific methods used in a university environment. The author states in the preface that
“the application of scientific methods is not the same in industry as in the university” (p. xiii). More depth and clarity around this notion would be particularly useful for graduate students in marketing research entering the workplace as well as for faculty members preparing their students for entering industry.

Chapter 7 is dedicated to introducing useful research techniques such as social dialogue research, activity-based research, knowledge mapping, theme building, and theme score cards among others. However, readers, particularly academics, are not provided with sufficient clarity in terms of how these techniques are different or unique when compared with traditional qualitative and quantitative techniques (see Hudson & Ozanne, 1988).

In other words, how have research techniques changed to adapt to the new behaviors in the marketplace? Are researchers using a mix of qualitative and quantitative techniques? For example, the tenets of “theme building” (p. 123) seem to be extrapolated from the broader rubric of qualitative research (see Spiggle, 1994). Academic readers would benefit from knowing how techniques such as theme building and “theme score cards” (p. 124) build upon or extrapolate from qualitative and quantitative methods with scientific underpinnings. Are the techniques proposed in the book scaled-down versions of what is taught in academia, or are the techniques tweaked according to each situation?

More important, how are issues such as validity, reliability, and trustworthiness measured or evaluated? In addition, although there are several cases that demonstrate innovations, the cases do not provide depth in terms of how the research techniques unfolded (e.g., benefits, drawbacks, additional application scenarios). Furthermore, some techniques, such as understanding the brain through functional magnetic resonance-imaging research, are mentioned only briefly, leaving the reader yearning for more specifics regarding putting techniques into action within a different context.

A third area for improvement would include more discussion of how the emergence of social media has influenced food choice and selection. Lundahl clearly conveys that consumers today have more immediate access to information that shapes how they select, seek, share, and react emotionally to brands and products in the marketplace. However, readers would benefit from more specifics regarding experiences with brands and products via social media.

Social media is mentioned briefly throughout the book, but readers would benefit from more illustrations and specific uses of social media for innovations research. For example, Chapter 5 discusses crowd sourcing as a way to assess the performance of advertising and as a means for generating insights into the behavior of consumers, but the discussion ends there. More insights regarding the role of the Internet as a vehicle for product promotion and as a stimulus for emotional connection via social media would be useful for readers.

For instance, one advertising venture of the food and beverage industry is advergaming, whereby popular snack food and soft drink companies invite consumers to engage with their brands through gaming via the company website and through mobile
technologies. How is advergaming influencing emotional connections to the brands? In addition, there are increasing concerns over children’s privacy. Initiatives such as the Children’s Advertising Review Unit and the Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act are worthy of discussion regarding this topic. As brand advertisers enter the social media landscape, they will need to adhere to special responsibilities when marketing to children and youths, whose use of the Internet and social media is growing (Engel, Bell, Meier, Martin, & Rumpel, 2011).

References


