

College of Business Book Review by Mary Beth DeConinck

Title: "Buyology: Truth and Lies About Why We Buy"

Author: Martin Lindstrom

Publisher: Doubleday

Length: 216 pages

Price: \$24.95

Reading Time: 4 hours

Reading Rating: 9 (1 = very difficult, 10 = very easy)

Overall Rating: 3 (1 = average, 4 = outstanding)

"Buyology" (that's right, not biology) is about science but a different kind of science. Author and Danish consultant, Martin Lindstrom addresses the "business science" of neuromarketing. Lindstrom's book explores the mind of today's consumer by trying to uncover "what truly influences our decisions to buy in today's message cluttered world."

The author spearheaded a global research study that took three years, seven million dollars (funded by eight unnamed companies), ten professors and doctors, two hundred researchers, and an ethics committee to complete. This study involved scanning the brains, via MRI/Magnetic Resonance Imaging, of two thousand volunteers as they were exposed to various ads, logos, brands, products, etc. Lindstrom explores various areas to determine what "seduces our interest and drives us to buy." According to his research "eight out of every ten products launched in the U.S. are destined to fail." He claims that companies don't understand consumers and that by tapping into their brains one can uncover what motivates them to buy.

One of Lindstrom's favorite questions is "does product placement work?" For those wondering, product placement is when a branded item shows up on the screen whether it be in a movie or television show. Who can forget Reese's Pieces claim to fame alongside "E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial". Today, those viewers who are hooked on "American Idol" are inundated with Coca-Cola, Ford Motor Company, and Cingular Wireless (since bought out by AT & T which is what appears on the show now) products. Each of these companies spent an estimated \$26 million a year to have their brands featured on one of the most popular and highest rated television shows. Not only do Coca-Cola and Cingular Wireless run ads during commercial breaks but they also display their products during the show itself. Ford Motor Company doesn't "share the stage with contestants" as they only run ads. Subjects in the research study were exposed to branded and unbranded logos, ones they had seen both before and after watching "American Idol". To make a long story short, the results showed Coca-Cola was much more memorable with viewers than Cingular Wireless and Ford was more or less forgotten. After viewing the show, subjects remembered less about the Ford commercials than they had before entering the study. Why? Lindstrom concludes that Ford doesn't play a role in the show itself whereas Coca-Cola does via their cups sitting in front of the judges, bottle-shaped couches, and red walls in the contestant's so called waiting room.

Martin Lindstrom's book is filled with stories about how we respond to other brands (Marlboro, Nokia, McDonald's, Nike, Calvin Klein to name a few) and attempts to uncover answers to even more questions such as:

"How powerful are brand logos, does subliminal advertising still take place, is our buying behavior affected by the world's major religions, what effect do disclaimers and health warnings have on us, and does sex in advertising work and how could it possibly get more explicit than it is now?"

He predicts that traditional marketing research—that of questionnaires, focus groups, surveys, etc.—are on the way out and neuromarketing will become the wave of the future to predict the success or failure of a company's products. And as its popularity and demand increase (yet to be seen), neuromarketing will become cheaper, easier, and more available. Lindstrom believes that neuromarketing can uncover the "buy button" that is uncovering those products with the "highest chance of succeeding by pinpointing the consumer's reward centers and revealing which marketing efforts were most stimulating, appealing or memorable and which ones were dull and unforgettable."

Lindstrom has written a book that is thought provoking, yet controversial. Many companies, consumers, and readers may or may not "buy" into it!

Mary Beth DeConinck is a professor of sales and marketing in the College of Business at Western Carolina University. Her interests include advertising, sales, and negotiations. For previously reviewed books, visit us at our website at www.wcu.edu/cob/.