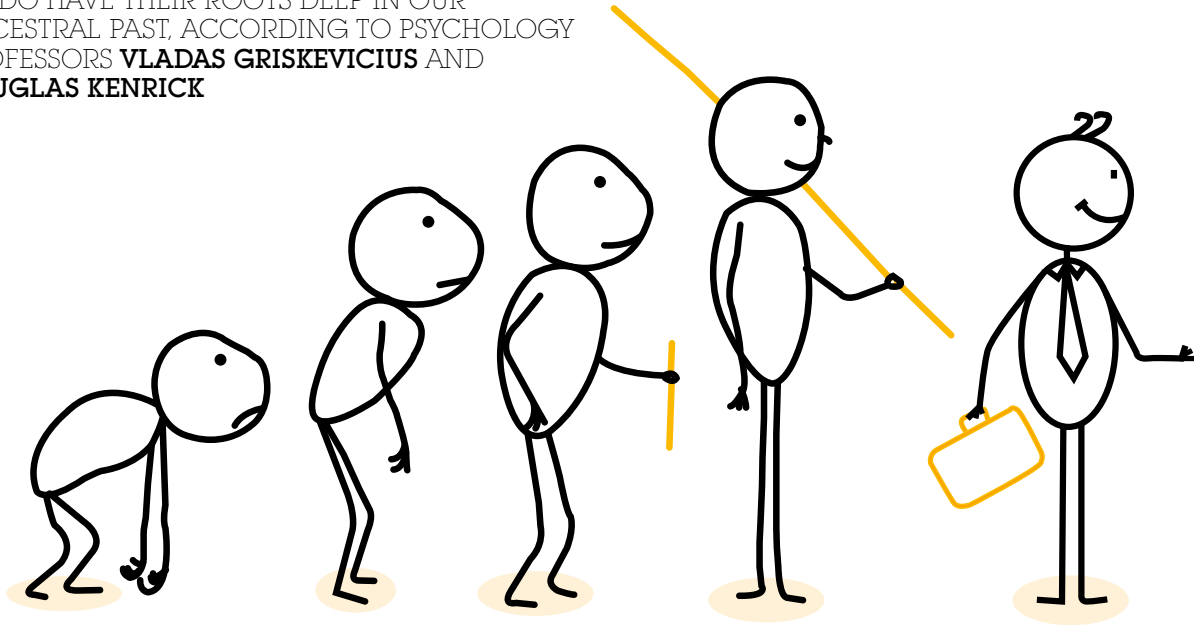


EVOLUTIONARY DRIVERS

THE REASONS WHY WE DO THE THINGS WE DO HAVE THEIR ROOTS DEEP IN OUR ANCESTRAL PAST, ACCORDING TO PSYCHOLOGY PROFESSORS VLADAS GRISKEVICIUS AND DOUGLAS KENRICK



The Ferrari has long been recognised as a status symbol of economic prosperity. Yes, they are good-looking cars, well-built and they go fast. But the reason someone buys one is only partly to do with the way it drives.

"People often have multiple motives for a behaviour, even if they are not always aware of the ultimate reasons for their choices," write psychology professors Vadas Griskevicius and Douglas Kenrick. "For example, a person can be consciously motivated to buy a sporty, luxury car because its expensive leather interior and peppy acceleration makes him feel good, and at the same time be non-consciously motivated to buy that luxury car because owning such a car can increase his desirability as a potential mate, and thereby enhances his reproductive fitness."

Griskevicius and Kenrick argue that all behaviour has both 'proximate'

and 'ultimate' causes – and that those 'ultimate' causes link to a set of fundamental challenges established far back in our ancestral past.

"Consumer researchers, like most social scientists, have typically been concerned with proximate motives for behaviour," they write. "But an evolutionary perspective highlights that there is a deeper level of explanation rooted in the adaptive function of behaviour."

ROOT CAUSES

In the paper, 'Fundamental motives: How evolutionary needs influence consumer behaviour', Griskevicius and Kenrick set out seven fundamental challenges that have faced humans throughout our history – from evading physical harm, to avoiding disease, making friends, attaining status, acquiring a mate, keeping that mate and caring for a family.

These challenges fit within a framework, known as the Fundamental

Motives Framework, which maintains that "the specific ancestral social challenges faced by humans map onto fundamental motivational systems that function to help solve each challenge".

Essentially, Griskevicius and Kenrick argue that whichever motive is currently active, there will be a separate and distinct psychological system – one specific to that motive – governing how we, as consumers, respond. "Just as a Swiss Army knife has a set of different tools for solving different problems... the mind has different psychological systems and sub-systems for solving different evolutionary challenges."

Activating the self-protection motive, for instance, is likely to alter purchase preferences in such a way as to lead people to seek out products and brands that are associated with safety – a Volvo, perhaps, rather than a Ferrari. Consumers might also favour trusted, well-known brands over other products – even if the branded product is demonstrably inferior.

Similarly, disease avoidance might lead people to favour domestic holidays over foreign jaunts, and to shun more exotic foods. Meanwhile, people motivated to make friends are likely to seek out brands that help them fit in.

Griskevicius and Kenrick acknowledge that further research is needed. They write that: "Although this framework has been empirically fruitful in generating many novel hypothesis about basic psychological process and social cognition, the overwhelming majority of empirical implications for consumers' behaviour and decision-making have yet to be tested.

"Future research is poised to investigate the many ways in which fundamental motives influence preferences, choices, biases, errors and many other phenomena central to consumer behaviour."

Griskevicius and Kenrick's paper is published in the *Journal of Consumer Psychology*. The pair recently co-authored the book *The Rational Animal: How Evolution Made Us Smarter Than We Think*.

HOW DO YOU SPELL MEMORABLY?

Academics investigate the role of spelling in creating catchy brand names

Coming up with original and memorable brand names isn't as easy as it once was. Companies are resorting to ever-stranger combinations of letters in order to form new words that simultaneously convey the right message without infringing existing trademarks.

But budding brands need to be careful not to make their spellings too obtuse. Experiments by academics at City University of New York and Fordham University suggest that spelling processes matter when it comes to remembering the sound of brand names.

This is particularly important when a new brand name is mentioned in passing, either during a conversation between friends or while listening to the radio. David Luna, Marina Carnevale and Dawn Lerman hypothesise that knowing how a brand name is spelt – or being able to work it out correctly – "will increase memory for the brand".

"In practical terms, consumers may hear about a brand and immediately search for it on their smartphones. If they successfully spell the brand and find its website, the process itself would provide positive feedback, increasing the likelihood of brand storage in memory. Later, when asked to recall the brand, they could use either the visual or the sound memory traces to retrieve the name."

Based on their experiments, Luna and colleagues suggest that marketers should give hints to how a brand name is spelt by providing phonetic primes in their advertising – using the word 'fuel' for example to prime the spelling of the brand name Nuel.

The paper 'Does brand spelling

influence memory? The case of auditorily presented brand names' is published in the *Journal of Consumer Psychology*.

COMMUNICATIONS BREAKDOWN

Marketers need to bear brain age in mind when designing campaigns

Boomers and Millennials are a generation apart, but it's not only time that separates the two groups. Research carried out by Nielsen's neuromarketing company, NeuroFocus, suggests that age-related changes in the brain mean that communications approaches that might work for one generation will fall flat for the other.

According to NeuroFocus, ageing brains are more easily distracted. "Real changes to the brain begin in the mid-50s when distraction-suppression mechanisms are weakened," the company says. So while Millennials "can equally deal with the bleeding-over communication we see in most dynamic banner ads on web portals, older generations need a clear-framed, separated communication to be able to engage".

This isn't the only difference in the communication preferences between older and younger consumers, however.

In March, at the MRS Annual Conference, The Big Window's Lisa Edgar presented the results of a study she had carried out with the help of DIY retailer Homebase, which asked people to rate their preferences for emotional and rational variants of a print ad campaign.

Between the ages of 16 and 40, the majority of respondents said they preferred the emotional ads. However, respondents aged 40 and above favoured the rational variant. See *Impact*, Issue 1 2013, for more on this story.



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