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**The passion to the human – and other neurochallenges
of modern communication:
an interview with Professor Julien Intartaglia**

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**Страсть к человеку и другие нейропроблемы
современных коммуникаций:
интервью с профессором Жюльеном Интарталья**

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– Professor Intartaglia, as one of the leading European researchers and practitioners in the field of cognitive communication, you are always among the first to find and solve the most significant problems in modern communication. What do these newest changes mean for researchers of cognitive communication?

– After the Covid-19, traditional media are experiencing an unprecedented crisis. According to Edelman's Trust Barometer (2021), for 59% of peoples surveyed, journalists and reporters try to mislead peoples by saying things they know to be false or exaggerated.

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In addition, they encounter some issues to reach younger generations (Z, Delta etc.) since they learn via digital – through social medias for instance. According to some professionals (e.g. BFM TV, 2022), it seems that TikTok is for example used as a search engine instead of Google. Also YouTube has become the first audiovisual media for young peoples.

This observation brings us back to the Chomsky & Herman's works (2008) who demonstrated that the media were at the service of a power in place, and that there was an information crisis. In this context, alternative media are emerging with independent journalists on platforms such as YouTube, thus avoiding any dogmatic and religious vision of thoughts.

Within a marketing context, some brands are adopting a moralistic posture with the aim of making the consumer feel guilty about what they are consuming and their impact on environment, while they are promoting the solution: new products acceptable in this well-thinking society even though they aren't scientific proved (for example, the electric car sold as a solution for the mobility of peoples).

It seems that consumers' free-will is an illusion as Libet's experiment demonstrated that in the past!

– You are the author of scientific researches (and bestsellers) of cognitive aspects of advertising and marketing, which are published almost every year to reflect rapid changes. How would you describe the main scientific problems in this field today?

– The main issue in advertising is the consumer's attention. The boss of French channel TF1 Patrick Lelay used to say that the purpose of a media is to sell available brain time. In a context of continuous flow of information, the problem has accelerated since we are exposed from morning to evening to 10,000 advertising contacts!

How can brands still emerge in a market in which products are all the same, or product benefits are no longer perceptible by the consumer? Current research in neuroscience applied to advertising allows us to understand more precisely how consumers process information and how they make decisions. Thus, 21st century communication is moving more towards objective ad's effectiveness and it will rely more on consumer brain deeper understanding!

– To what extent are cognitive research and projects interdisciplinary today? Has this direction been formed as an independent one in science?

– Understanding consumer behavior means taking into consideration knowledges coming from several disciplines (psychology, sociology, neurosciences, marketing, etc.). I often explain that the consumer is like a black box in a plane... We are not born consumers, we become consumers. We are the result of socio-cultural contexts, we belong to various groups such as family, friends, and schools etc., which will impact our consumption choices and determine who we are.

In addition, we are psychologically different, obstacles and motivations are not the same for the same product category for instance. Our relationship to the world, to objects is different. Cognitive psychology and neuroscience provide insights into the mechanisms of influence, which are mainly unconscious!

In the implicit project at Harvard, I like to quote the fact that 95% of our thoughts, judgments are mainly acquired unconsciously. This is yet another challenge of modern communication: understanding these knowledge and using it to sell, seduce, persuade for commercial, politics purposes and so on... Otherwise, working on customer behavior means taking an interest in humans to understand them in their routines and habits because we are behaving ourselves automatically, just using our reflexes and our beliefs.

– ***Cognitive research is tech driven “by origin”. How do new technologies, the Data Turn and global datafication affect communication (for example, creating a portrait of the audience, evaluating effectiveness, etc.) and its research?***

– Indeed, technologies allow us to go deeper in our investigations but that's not all. We must not forget that behind a research, there is a researcher and a team with values, with cognitive biases that make the research “weak” in terms of the interpretations that can be made of the results.

As far as I am concerned, I am quite a fan of portable tools used in neuro-marketing such as eye tracking (consumer's attention), electroencephalogram (EEG for emotion's tracking), skin conductance for physiological parameters.... But as I say, these tools do not represent much without human intelligence that will be nourished by knowledge from the disciplines I described above (psychology, sociology, neurosciences, marketing, etc.).

At the Institute ICME at HEG Arc Neuchâtel in Switzerland, we are specializing in the analysis of consumer's attention and emotions and especially the understanding of human behavior. We carry out a large amount of applied research for companies, NGOs, which requires us to be pragmatic and therefore to go beyond the limits of academic work (student recruitment, experimental products, etc.).

– ***Nobel laureates Daniel Kahneman and Amos Tversky essentially investigated the mechanisms of decision-making by an economic person in the context of various sciences. Today, it's the main problem for researchers and pros of mass communication. Professionals are moving from ‘hard’ FOMO marketing to ‘soft’ nudge communication. Which model works best in crisis?***

– There are two scenarios. Either we emerge because we have money and we have significant media pressure with a high degree of repetition, or we emerge with a disruptive approach and we are able to surprise our audience!

Afterwards, Kahneman's work finally teaches us that we are human beings with automatic behaviors. We mainly use our system 1 – the fast thinking way. We are more emotional than rational! Another challenge lies into the understanding of the nature and the source of our behavioural reflexes.

Our habits take years to be built, so we have to be patient to change behaviors. Nudge is an interesting approach to enter into a soft and light persuasion in appearance.

– ***Today, the main ‘hero’ of mass communication and marketing, and its research is the audience, or rather, a specific person. How to describe the portrait of a modern prosumer?***

– Indeed, nowadays, the consumer can be both a consumer of goods and a producer of content through social medias for example. After that, we must not forget

that we are programmed to consume rather than to create content in this consumption's society.

Everything is done to titillate our reward circuit, to play on our desires, avoiding us to think, make us to consume more and more entertainment. The brain area called “striatum” plays an essential role since it is defined as a motivation center involved in anticipating or providing desire and pleasure.

As Seth Godin mentions, our world is made up of tribes of citizens, consumers! Each of these tribes has its own logic of operation and its members have common and individual characteristics. As marketing researchers, we have to give greater understanding of these tribes in terms of media habits, information processing and buying decision process. That's a big challenge since we are so different!

– *Your research and projects are always distinguished by a high level of social engagement – unlike most projects labeled as “neuromarketing” ones.*

– How do I choose a research project? I'm just open-minded... There is nothing that scares me in terms of research. I like to get out of my comfort zone in order to launch a project, for example using a new tool in neuroscience with an expert integrated into our team for this specific mandate. Then we get new applied knowledge dedicated to others mandates or researches in the future and it's amazing!

The world in which we live has become so complex, that I am trying on my humble level to understand it and it goes through once again by reading, developing new knowledges and competences. In our Institute at the business school of administration in Neuchâtel, we are conducting several studies in various markets: for instance a national insurance company trying to measure their national ad campaigns on TV, billboards, social medias; a national health project about the impact of social media on young consumers food habits and behaviors; a study about car's consumers in Switzerland (habits, behavior), etc.

– *A successful researcher of communication is always associated not only with great technology but with a person. What qualities should a scientist in the field of cognitive science have?*

– I will give some key words to be a researcher on consumer behavior: the passion of the human in the sense of understanding it and never taking it for granted, being patient because behavioral changes take time, being able to think and thinking outside the box, stay open-minded and don't put up barriers... and read as much as possible in various fields!

My ambition is to position my research in public health affairs (tobacco, alcohol, nutrition, climate, etc.) because there are BIG challenges to come, particularly on the dimension of changing behaviors more sustainably towards the well-being of individuals.

In my latest book *Neuro-communication: Le cerveau sous influence* published in April 2022, I propose a new model of persuasion based on 4 powerful mechanisms that makes anyone do or think anything even though peoples aren't aware of what it make them to think or behave in this way...

Interviewed by Marina G. Shilina / Интервью провела М.Г. Шилина

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Интарталья Жюльен, доктор наук в области информации и коммуникаций (Университет Экс-Марсель, Франция), декан Института коммуникаций и эмпирического маркетинга (ICME), Бизнес-школа управления в Невшателе, Швейцария. Специализируется на изучении механизмов влияния рекламы на установки и поведение потребителей, в частности молодежи. Работал в различных рекламных агентствах как эксперт по корпоративным коммуникациям. Является участником ведущих международных конференций. Автор более 100 профессиональных и научных публикаций; последняя книга «Нейрокоммуникации: мозг под влиянием» (2022). Ведет канал *Brain & conso* на YouTube и аккаунт в TikTok, посвященный новостям, общению и маркетингу.