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### Branded Memory Palaces

Any major chain grocery store in the United States is lined with aisles of branded and colorfully packaged foods. Companies like Coca Cola have developed the reputation of their soda so well that consumers of all ages recognize it. Some consumers may even associate Coca Cola with the image of the polar bears from the Coca Cola commercials that happily play in the artic while being refreshed by the great taste of Coca Cola. Throughout my childhood, whenever I saw Honeynut Cheerios on the shelf of the cereal aisle in Stop&Shop, ShopRite, and King Kullen, I thought of the animation of Buzz, the little bee trying to protect the precious honey for the Cheerios. Unintentionally, I have placed these unrealistic images into an imaginary grocery store aisle where each box of cereal is represented by the different characters and colors. World memory champions actually use an ancient Greek technique for memory that is similar to the way companies brand their products into the minds of the consumer. The “method of the loci” or the “method of the places” is a technique that “involves remembering some real or imaginary places such as a house with arches, a series of rooms, statues and furniture and ‘placing’ the things to be remembered in a sequential order within this environment” (Bourtchouladze 3). Later this idea would be developed into a “memory palace” where different images, like Buzz the bee, could remind human beings of objects like a box of Honeynut Cheerios. (Foer 83). Cereal companies brand and advertise their products to create an unintentional memory palace

inside the explicit memory of children in order for the children to more easily identify a specific brand.

In the Pleistocene Epoch, the brains that primitive humans possessed were molded by evolution into the “linguistic, symbolic and neurotic” brains that humans enjoy using today (Foer 78). Primitive humans needed to remember visual places such as the way back to their homes, poisonous plants that were not eatable and what animals to were easy to hunt. Modern brains are shaped by these needs and in turn are able to remember and recall visual imagery better than auditory descriptions. (Foer 78). A study was conducted by John R. Rossiter, an academic at the University of Pennsylvania, where children were tested on their ability to recall brands of cereal with visual drawings and verbal communication. The experiment set out to prove that children had a “data base” in their brains for different brands of cereals (Rossiter). 60 children from local Philadelphia schools in grades one, three and five were asked to draw a cereal box, the back of that cereal box, their favorite cereal, the cereal their parents eat and a cereal that was “healthy and good for you when you are growing up” (Rossiter). After this, the same children were asked the following questions in one-on-one interviews: “What is your favorite cereal? What kind of cereal is it? What is the cereal your parents eat? What kind of cereal is it? What is a cereal that is healthy and good for you when you are growing up? And what kind of cereal is it?” (Rossiter). With comparison of the verbal answers and the drawings of the children, results showed that brand was mentioned both verbally and graphically. By combining verbal and visual answers in a comparison retrieval, 60% of first graders, 84% of third graders and 93% of fifth graders were able to successfully recall brands for their favorite cereals. The generic cereal box drawing was even branded “spontaneously” by 67% of first graders and 100% of third and fifth graders (Rossiter). Color matching of the cereal boxes was also accounted for as a way of testing

whether or not the children recalled brands correctly. “The first graders’ color matched correctly 40% of the time... The color match rate then rose linearly to 52% at third grade and 63% by fifth grade” (Rossiter). Only three attributes were examined by the verbal testing for all the cereals; sugar (or sweetness) emphasis, nutrition emphasis, and the presence of premiums as a means of promoting the cereal were identified. According to Rossiter, visuals are equally if not more important for children when identifying a specific brand:

Visual and verbal nominations of the child's favorite cereal, for example, only corresponded in 42% of instances at age 6 to 7, 53% at ages 8 to 9, and 74% at ages 10 to 11. Visual representation therefore contains a very substantial amount of information (ranging from 8% to 44% of brand preferences) that would be missed by traditional verbal or numeric measures of children's preferences. (Rossiter)

The “visual representations” of the cereals were also proved to be “utilized in children's preference decisions without symbolic verbal assistance” (Rossiter). The specifics of each box were accurately color matched by younger children in 40% of the instances and 63% in instances for the older children (Rossiter). Obviously corporations emphasize visual representations of their brand over lengthy descriptions because visuals resonate better with children. Companies have perfected the branding technique in the same way that memory world champions have perfected memorizing.

Doctor Kenneth L. Higbee, a professor of psychology at Brigham Young University, describes in his work, *Your Memory: How It Works and How to Improve It*, how visual associative memory is formed. Essentially, visual associative memory is a memory palace. Higbee states that there has to be some type of interaction between two items (Higbee 3). Joshua Foer, the 2006 United States memory champion states that inanimate objects and animate objects

are usually put in motion to be more memorable in a memory palace (Foer 87). The visuals also need to be “clear, distinct, and strong” (Higbee 3). Foer shared that when he was in memory training, he was told to conceptualize the taste and smell of pickled garlic when he was trying to place it into his memory palace because these characteristics would make the object harder to forget (Foer 85). Higbee describes that imagining bizarre scenarios in visual association helps to make the association far more memorable (Higbee 3). Foer states that if “we see or hear something exceptionally base, dishonorable, extraordinary, great, unbelievable or laughable, that we are likely to remember for a long time” (Foer 86). Looking at major cereal brands, it is easy to see how they create these scenarios in television commercials. These commercials become the visual images that fill a subconscious memory palace. For example, Krave Cereal depicts the pieces of cereal being alive, jumping out of a Trojan chocolate bunny and eating distressed pieces of chocolate. It is a vivid interaction as each piece of chocolate runs from the crave-blinded, Krave cereal and eventually is eaten; cereal tricking pieces of chocolate and then eating them is definitely bizarre and is memorable because it can’t happen in reality (YouTube).

The memory palace that these cereal brands create are formed unintentionally as a part of explicit memory. According to Richard H. Hall, Information Science and Technology professor at Missouri University of Science and Technology, explicit memory is conscious memory that can be explained easily. Explicit memory can be recalled easily and can be made up of different aspects that can be explained (Hall). Because the branded memories exist in explicit memory, they can be recalled on command by the children when they see associated brands. Children of all ages are exposed to cereal advertisements on the computer and television. According to Yale University News, in 2012, “General Mills launched new sites for Honey Nut Cheerios and Cinnamon Toast Crunch” and “Kellogg nearly doubled banner advertising on children’s

websites, such as Nickelodeon.com” (Yale 2012). In the United States, major cereal brands are even advertising in a different language; “spending on Spanish-language TV advertising for all cereals more than doubled, and Hispanic children’s exposure to these ads tripled” (Yale 2012). Children aren’t necessarily remembering these advertisements voluntarily. Instead, the branded memories are being drilled into their explicit memory by means of constant exposure. Children then place these memories into an imaginary cereal aisle that can resemble an aisle in reality. Children see their favorite cereal in reality, recall the branded memory of that box from their memory palace, tell their parents to buy it and cereal companies have successfully inserted themselves inside the minds of innocent children.

Cereal companies exploit the technique of the memory palace to create what essentially is an artificial memory in the minds of children. Children hold memory palaces full of branded memories because of the constant advertisement of captivating animations. These visually appealing and unique memories make it possible for even the youngest of children to recall brand name cereals.

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