

Mind Science Recommended Reading List

The field of Mind Science (the study of the work of the brain, which includes Neuroscience, Cognitive Psychology, Behavioral Economics and many other related fields) is still relatively new; therefore, the majority of books are still very broad. Most of the books now available are very interesting to read; however, there are only a few that focus on the application to marketing. The few that have been written are often a mouthpiece for the writer's research methodology or for their consulting business; however, in spite of that they still contain valuable content. And there is virtually nothing published (yet) that discusses the broad applicability to marketing decision-making.

The first few books I have put in the recommended reading order assuming you are just getting started in the field. But after about the 4th or 5th recommendation, it becomes very difficult to put them in any particular order because they are covering varied and valuable aspects of mind science. So then follow what interests you the most, and feel free to come back to me for more and / or different suggestions at any point. And, of course, I would love to know about any books you come across that you believe are worthy.

1. *Blink*. Malcolm Gladwell

This is a really easy to read book about the power of our non-conscious processor. A critical caveat is that Gladwell often refers to our unconscious mind as working at the “blink” of an eye; however, scientists strongly disagree with this. Just because the idea seems to appear rapidly, it doesn't mean that the nonconscious processor has been working in a split second—it could be much longer; we just aren't aware of it. Additionally, Gladwell projects that our intuition is most often right, and, therefore, you should be comfortable relying on it. That idea is also constantly challenged by the experts. The nonconscious is amazing at generating ideas, but those ideas aren't necessarily the correct or best solution as there are many biases inhibiting accurate processing.

2. *Predictably Irrational*. Dan Ariely

This is another very easy to read book about the power of our nonconscious power, but from a different angle. Whereas *Blink* focuses on how we learn via our nonconscious mental operating system, Dan's book focuses on the mental biases or shortcuts that have such a great influence on our behavior. It also doesn't get into any real science, but Dan is a professor at Duke (was at MIT prior to that)—and is one of the most professionally published academics in the field of behavioral economics, so no need to question his attention to science.

3. *Before You Know It, The Unconscious Reasons We Do What We Do.*

John Bargh

The recently published book was twenty years in the making—and well worth the wait. Dr John Bargh is considered the world's leading expert on the unconscious mind and despite his PhD in Psychology, his expertise and sophisticated labs he runs at Yale and New York University, the book is completely accessible to a general audience. He gives us an understanding of the hidden mental processes that secretly govern every aspect of our behavior. But it isn't just a "science" book as the last quarter of the book is dedicated to the implications of the first three quarters: what it means to the reader.

4. *How We Decide.* Jonah Lehrer

This is another easy to read (but this time with a good dose of science) on how we make decisions that brings concepts from the two above referenced books together. Jonah is a Rhodes Scholar with an undergraduate degree in Neuroscience—and is clearly a very good writer. He has fallen from grace recently as he was found to have made up some details in his most recent book, *Imagine*, which unfortunately, has now been pulled from the shelves. The controversial section of that book was about something Bob Dylan didn't say, but has unfortunately put him under great criticism. Jonah has a great ability to make complex science very accessible, so it isn't so hard for me to forgive him for his past indiscretions. So I still strongly recommend this book to others.

5. *The Mind of the Market. How Customers Think.* Gerald Zaltman

This book does plug ZMET, Zaltman's proprietary research methodology, however, in spite of that there is quite a bit about applying the general science to marketing. Jerry is Professor Emeritus of Marketing at Harvard Business School, so he is first and foremost a marketer. He is a PhD in Sociology, so he also knows his science. Recently, Jerry was identified as one of the Legends of Marketing as part of the ten volume series published by Sage Publications that captures the essence of the most important contributions made in the field of marketing in the past 100 years. And I would easily say he is the academic leader in applying Mind Science to marketing. His follow-on book, *Metaphoria*, is a good reference book if you want greater understanding of deep metaphors, but I'm not sure it is a book that I would sit down and read cover to cover.

6. *Subliminal, How Your Unconscious Mind Rules Your Behavior.* Leonard Mlodinow.

This is one of my favorite books thanks to Mlodinow's wit and writing style. It is a very accessible book filled with compelling examples of how our conventional wisdom of how the mind works could truly benefit from rethinking. And many of us could benefit from reading this book more than once, as it repeatedly makes us uncomfortable in terms of just how powerful our nonconscious mind is. But with each reading it becomes more obvious and comfortable.

7. *Made to Stick.* Chip Heath and Dan Heath

Publishers Weekly describes it as, "the brothers Heath—Chip a professor at Stanford's business school, Dan a teacher and textbook publisher—offer an

entertaining, practical guide to effective communication. Drawing extensively on psychosocial studies on memory, emotion and motivation, their study is couched in terms of "stickiness"—that is, the art of making ideas unforgettable." It is an easy read while getting specific on how ideas get consolidated into long-term memory. The ideas will likely be familiar as you have heard them from me; however, they are great writers with loads of examples—and clearly they say it better than I ever have.

8. *Decoded*, Phil Barden

A long-time marketers (Unilever, T-Mobile) view of how best to apply the basic mind science to the marketing. At times it might seem a bit formulaic, but Phil does a very good job of explaining the science and linking it to marketing decision-making. Whereas you might not want to follow his models, his writing is very clear and fairly easy to read. It is the first book from the viewpoint of a marketing practitioner, so it is very accessible.

9. *Consumer.Ology. The Market Research Myth, the Truth About Consumers, and the Psychology of Shopping*. Philip Graves

Amazon describes the book; "Philip Graves, one of the world's leading experts in consumer behaviour, reveals why the findings obtained from most market research are completely unreliable. Whether it is company executives seeking to define their corporate strategy or politicians wanting to understand the electorate, the idea that questions answered on a questionnaire or discussed in a focus group can provide useful insights on which to base business decisions is the cause of product failures, political blunders and wasted billions. Consumer.ology exposes some of the most expensive examples of research-driven thinking clouding judgment, experience and evidence – from New Coke to General Motors, from Mattel to the Millennium Dome – and instances of success through ignoring market research, such as Baileys and Dr Who. It also shows organisations the tools they should be using if they want to understand their customers." If you are a market researcher this is a "must read"—otherwise, it can fall down lower on your stack.

10. *Thinking Fast and Slow*. Daniel Kahneman

With many accreditations including selection by New York Times Book Review as one of the best books of the year in 2011, it is considered a landmark book in social thought. It is a powerful and now fairly well read book on a key aspect of how our mind works. It is focused on how our nonconscious and conscious operating systems work individually and in concert. Whereas, it is a much easier read than his academic books, some may still find it a bit tough going. My favorite quote remains "disbelief isn't an option" as he is referring to how many people don't believe that they would act similarly to the participants in the studies he shares. He goes on to say, "You must accept that they are true about you."

11. *The Undoing Project*. Michael Lewis

The fascinating story of the friendship between Daniel Kahneman and the late Amos Tversky. As Lewis traces the friendship, he includes a lot of the relevant

science, presented in an easy to understand format. This is a much easier read than *Thinking Fast and Slow*, and, of course, much less science. The story of their friendship is truly engaging—and details the beginnings of Behavioral Economics as we know it today.

12. *Contagious*. Jonah Berger

A very well researched and well written assessment of what makes ideas go viral. Berger is a professor at Wharton Business School at University of Pennsylvania and clearly outlines the 6 or 7 factors that influence contagious-ness. These factors are very similar to the factors that influence what ideas get encoded into long-term memory, which would make sense as a core driver of both is engagement. And we remember and talk about that which is engaging to us. As marketers we have always known that engagement was important; however, it is only now that we are understanding what it takes to create something that is engaging.

13. *Unconscious Branding*, Douglas Van Praet.

A long-time advertiser's (Deutsch LA) view of how best to apply the basic science to marketing, but more specifically advertising. There are loads of advertising examples, which are explained by how our mind actually works. About two-thirds of the book is dedicated to applying this knowledge with his seven-step process. Whether you buy into the recommended seven steps or not, this section is full of good ideas regarding communication development that are grounded in the new knowledge about mental processing.

14. *Surprise, Embrace the Unpredictable and Engineer the Unexpected*.

Tania Luna and Leeann Renninger.

This is an easy to read and fascinating book on the emotion of surprise. You probably don't even need to read the whole book to understand why surprise is such a valuable emotion and the various phases of a surprise—that could help one work through ways to create it. The headline is that when we are surprised, it means we were wrong—either in a pleasant or unpleasant way. Because of being wrong, we get a spike in our brain waves that focus all cognitive resources on figuring out why we were wrong. This becomes a powerful enabler to not only memory encoding but also to creating a real need to tell others about the surprise.

15. *Herd, How to change mass behavior by harnessing our true nature*.

Mark Earls.

Mark is a “recovering planner” as he quickly defines himself when talking to him. His experience in agency world clearly prepared him well for his current work of understanding how groups behavior impacts marketing—and how marketers should be paying attention to it. It is another easy to read book with many insightful recommendations.

Others worthy of consideration:

1. *I is an other*. James Geary. Great book on metaphors.
2. *Social Animals*. David Brooks
3. *The Power of Habit, Why we do what we do in life and business*. Charles Duhigg
4. *Switch, How to Change Things When Change is Hard*. Heath Brothers—their second book
5. *The Art of Choosing, the Subtext of life*—Sheena Iyengar
6. *Nudge*. Thaler and Susstein (similar to Ariely's work)
7. *The Feeling of What Happens*. Antonio Damasio (he and LeDoux are the kings of emotion)
8. *Pre-Suasion*. Robert Cialdini