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The Brands American Men And Women Desire Most

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Men and women don't always see eye to eye, except for this: What brand do they mutually desire most? Southwest Airlines. That's according to a recent study conducted exclusively for *Forbes*.

According to the second-annual study just released by Buyology, a strategic neuromarketing firm, and uSamp, a provider of technology and survey respondents used to obtain consumer and business insights, women and men have the strongest affinity for the low-cost airline among all major brands.

"The brands at the top of the Most Desired report have the strongest ties with the consumers we measured, and therefore, they have the ability to be more effective and efficient than their competitors," says Gary Singer, Buyology's chief executive and founding partner.

The study looked at men's and women's relationships with many of the nation's biggest brands. By examining the strength and types of those relationships on both a conscious and nonconscious level, using the tools of neuromarketing, Buyology found that men and women are generally drawn to different kinds of brands, and for different reasons. However, this year they agreed on a few winners.



The Dallas-based airline Southwest earns the coveted top spot largely because of what they represent: accessible, affordable memories. The airline gives experiences that money cannot buy, and its clever campaign featuring real life employees plays on the emotions of feeling taken advantage of by the bigger airlines, Singer says. “While its competitors have cut services and charged for previously free services, Southwest has continued to provide its customers with awe and delight, [at an affordable cost].”

It’s even more important in tough economic times to understand what is driving consumer behavior on a deeper level, Singer says. “When brands understand how consumers feel, they can adjust their marketing accordingly. Southwest is a great example. They understood that consumers felt taken advantage of by most airlines, they capitalized on this, and they’ve built stronger relationships with consumers as a result.”

Google ranks No. 2 among women for inspiring senses of “awe” and “exploration.” Among men, however, Google is No. 7 and evokes feelings of “awe” and “superiority.” The final brand to appear on the top 10 list for both genders: Dove. It ranked No. 4 among men and women.

“At first glance, it might be surprising to see that Dove is a top brand for men, but consider this: Dove is one of the few personal care brands that many men had in their homes growing up,” Singer says. “Dove is one of the strongest heritage brands in skincare. And instead of becoming outdated, they’ve successfully leveraged their heritage status into their new Dove for Men product line. Dove owns moisturizing. A benefit that is compelling to men and women alike. And they understand that the best way to get both genders to relate to their brand is elegant simplicity in their products, packaging and messaging.”

Previous studies have used neuromarketing to probe consumers’ relationships with brands, but Buyology claims this one is the first to do so by tapping into both the conscious and nonconscious brain. The firm’s researchers say that 85% of the decisions we make every day occur on a nonconscious level.

“There is universal agreement that the majority of decisions we make as humans, beyond our decisions about what to buy, is steeped in our non-conscious; emotions, instinct, intuition, memories and personal experiences,” Singer says.

Buyology and uSamp identified and evaluated consumers’ relationships with brands using four key parameters, or “primers.” These “neurotypes”—awe, superiority, harmony and exploration—were paired to give a total of 16 possible combinations. All of the brands studied, 220 in all, were also matched with a numerical “signal strength” to determine consumers’ connection to them.

The research was conducted from February 6-10, 2012, and drew on data from more than 4,000 consumers.

“Neuro-insight has become one of the hottest areas for a reason,” Singer says. “Nine out of 10 new products fail, which shows that consumer research needs to change, and this is now possible because science has given us the tools to more deeply understand consumer behavior.”

The Buyology and uSamp research yielded some surprising findings. Bed Bath & Beyond, for instance, is No. 5 among men, with a harmony-harmony combination. Meanwhile, Lexus elicits a superiority-superiority connection for women, and ranks No. 9.

Men love Bed, Bath & Beyond because it’s full of fun gizmos, Singer says. The easy-to-navigate layout and clearly labeled departments also appeals to them. “If you think of Bed, Bath & Beyond as a home store, you might be surprised that it’s so highly rated among men, but we believe that men love this brand because it offers them a highly organized retail environment and cool tools.”

As for Lexus, Singer says, “The brand is smart, accomplished, elegant, innovative and brilliantly engineered and marketed. Women know what they want and Lexus clearly delivers.”

Men find automakers desirable, too. Cadillac and BMW hold the No. 2 and No. 3 spots, respectively. “Cars have mattered to men as long as they’ve been around,” Singer explains.

“Successful car brands have capitalized on what they represent to men; freedom, control, status, and power. What’s not surprising is that there are two auto brands on men’s list and women have only one.”

Consumers have relationships with brands, and the value of the relationships is that they provide context that either amplifies or diminishes everything, Singer says. “Think about it this way: If you have a really strong relationship with a technology brand, you are going to pay attention when they introduce new products. Everything they do, you see through a particular lens. Relationships literally change business.”