

Max | Mindset

2025

GETTING TO THE
HEART OF BUYER
BEHAVIOR

WHITE PAPER

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The success of a product, service or brand hinges on the effectiveness in communicating its value to the consumer.

Companies make significant investments in getting their messages out to the market, but if the underlying message fails, the investments are worthless.

Thankfully, market research can ensure that marketing investments translate into sales, and our **MaxMindset™ solution** uses proven science to provide a clear roadmap for developing persuasive communications that make a real impact.

MaxMindset™ has guided communications in a variety of circumstances, including product launches, brand positioning, introducing a new feature, and encouraging adoption of new innovations. We have applied our approach in a wide variety of categories ranging from banking to dog food, and in B2C, B2B and non-profit situations. This communications research solution answers commonly asked questions by clients, including:

- **What features** will differentiate our offering from competition?
- What are the **deeper motives** – needs, emotions and values – that drive demand?
- What **language and symbols** should we use in our communications?
- **How do we craft a message** that will make an impression and motivate consumers to action?



Many of the typical methods used to answer these questions result in frustration. For example, qualitative interviewing methods (e.g., focus groups, dyads, interviews) offer ambiguous findings and leave room for subjectivity.

An important idea not **communicated persuasively** is like having no idea at all.

BILL BERNBACH, Advertising Pioneer

Survey methods are more objective, but fail to convey the emotional depth and language to craft messages that truly resonate (and often result in going back to the market with follow-up qualitative research). **MaxMindset™** is an efficient approach that provides the clarity and depth needed to create communications. Advantages include the following:



Scientifically valid: The approach is science-based, relying on an established theory (means-end) that is proven to predict behavior. It explains behavior at multiple levels from tangible to more emotional, and connects the levels. This means that messages resulting from this method will drive action and deliver better results.



Efficient and reliable: **MaxMindset™** is a survey-based solution, which offers the advantages of greater reliability, efficiency and speed.



Free of subjectivity: The results are structured and derived quantitatively, which ensures objectivity for those charged with creating messaging.



Actionable: **MaxMindset™** provides a framework for developing creative outputs and identifying specific elements and linkages that should be stressed, which makes it easier to develop compelling communications.

MaxMindset™ is based on an established theory of consumer behavior, Means-End, which has been proven to explain consumer choice.

The theory holds that while individuals may base choices on tangible features or attributes, their choices are driven by satisfying higher order needs that ultimately tap into overarching values that govern choices within a category.

Any choice can be explained by a means-end chain that links a tangible, differentiating feature with increasingly abstract needs.

The feature that is the basis for a choice offers an immediate functional benefit, which in turn satisfies a higher order psycho-social need, which ultimately taps into a deeper value. The theory recognizes that we are constantly making choices as consumers, professionals, members and citizens, and in the process, we seek to satisfy tangible and emotional needs that are consistent with values.

The operation of the theory can be explained with an example.

A client in the nutrition sector wanted to market a vitamin formulation. The buyers of the product indicated that they preferred the particular brand over competitors because it contained all-natural, organic ingredients. When asked why this mattered, most consumers felt that these ingredients would have greater efficacy in releasing energy and nutrients to their body. This in turn made consumers feel more productive. Ultimately, this tapped into values including a desire to be a success in life and a good parent.

Means-end is not just an interesting theory.

The science reveals how the various elements should be used to motivate individuals to action. An effective communication piece will portray multiple elements in the value chain and will draw linkages between one or more elements. The greater degree to which the elements and linkages are apparent to consumers, the more motivating the message will be. Often, companies expect advertising or other types of communications to be effective because they have a high production quality, but find they fall flat when introduced to the market against competing messages.

Often, companies expect advertising or other types of communications to be effective because they have a high production quality, but find they fall flat when introduced to the market against competing messages.

A careful parsing of these failed messages may reveal that the differentiating features and higher order benefits are not clearly portrayed and/or the communication fails to draw linkages.

In the example of the vitamin formulation, an effective ad would stress the all-natural ingredients and would connect this feature to the benefits of greater energy, and ultimately, a feeling of being more productive.

The ad would also convey the values this proposition taps into, such as showing imagery of an energetic parent.

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How MaxMindset™ Works

MaxMindset™ is a survey-based solution that employs a structured laddering approach to ferret out key decision attributes and associated benefits and values. It is worth stepping back to talk about laddering research in general. Classic means-end studies rely on a comprehensive laddering methodology whereby skilled interviewers elicit full means-end chains linked to consumer decisions. These types of interviews are typically done in-person or by telephone with a web interface. Such studies provide high quality insights, and we often conduct this kind of research for clients.

The major drawback of this classic approach is its high cost, which is due to the need to interview respondents one-on-one directly, its reliance on highly trained professional interviewers, and a rigorous quality control process to ensure that the results are usable for structured analysis. An additional drawback stemming from the high cost is that clients must often rely on a smaller sample size, usually 50 to 150 interviews (versus 300 to 1500 that is more typical of MaxMindset™ studies). In practice, we have found that only companies with large research budgets could afford this kind of research.

The final output of a MaxMindset™ study consists of one or more value propositions for each target segment.

Each value proposition consists of a dominant value chain that serves as a basis for positioning the product, brand or behavior.

These value propositions provide the jumping off point for developing communications that are anchored in tangible and intangible buyer needs.

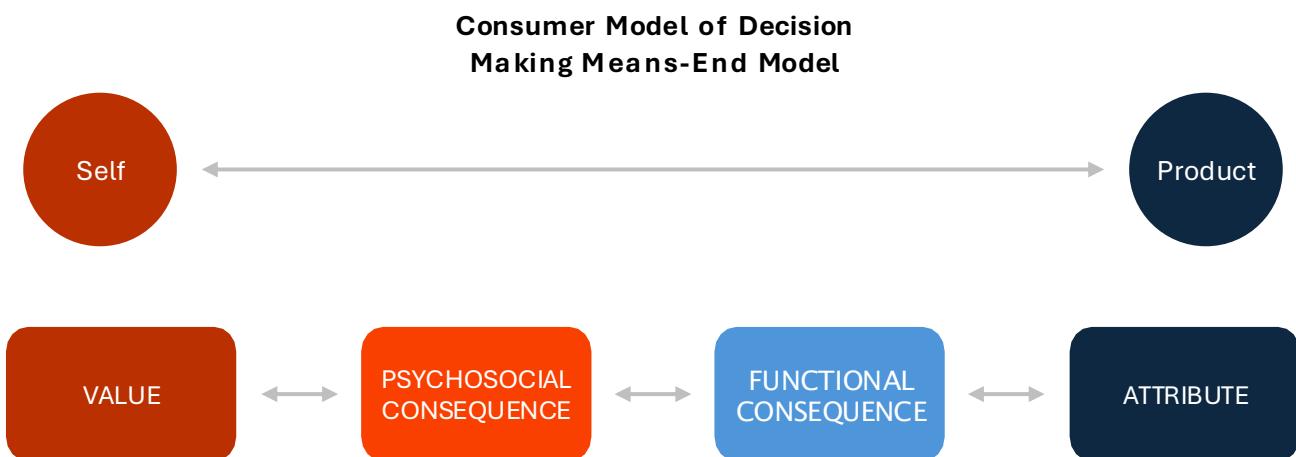
A typical study will yield two to four value propositions emphasizing different benefits. These are tactical in nature, providing a clear roadmap for the marketing team to craft creative executions. The figure below illustrates a value proposition for a credit union that explains why a consumer may choose the client for an account over a competitor. The value proposition is based on two differentiating features (that drive consumers to choose the credit union over a bank): minimal fees and flexible business approach. Both of these benefits link to the benefit of avoiding surprises, i.e., increased certainty about finances.

These functional benefits in turn link to the psychosocial benefit of control, which in the end matters because the consumer is concerned with focusing on important life goals.

One way of viewing this value proposition is that it defines consumer need at different levels ranging from the tangible to intangible. A consumer may explicitly tell us she is drawn by the minimal fees and flexible approach of a credit union, but what is she really buying?

The answer is greater certainty in financial management (e.g., low likelihood to get hit with surprise fees caused by failing to comply with the rules, and if there is a fee, an expectation that credit union will be understanding and waive it).

At another level, the consumer is buying control over her finances. And ultimately, the decision to go with the credit union satisfies a life value – goal focus.



Using MaxMindset™ to Develop Communications

MaxMindset™ provides a ready-to-apply framework for developing communications.

- 1) **First, it identifies three outcomes that should be associated with the product, brand or behavior.** Creative execution should stress how the choice delivers at least two of these.
- 2) **Second, it should stress linkages between these outcomes in order to reinforce the “we message** –for example, instead of saying “don’t hit you with lots of fees” and “we bring certainty to banking” and “we give you control,” it is more powerful to say “we don’t hit you with lots of fees, which makes banking predictable and gives you control.”
- 3) **Third, MaxMindset™ identifies the important value orientations that should be stressed symbolically in communications** –for example, a visual might show a picture or tell a story about someone achieving a goal, such as buying a home.

To provide greater clarity, MaxMindset™ also provides input on how consumers perceive different benefits or values, such as symbols that represent a value or examples of a benefit. To sum it up, MaxMindset™ offers clients a powerful tool for developing effective communications.

The method works in a range of situations, including C2C and B2C, and for guiding messaging for products, services, non-profits, brands and adoption behaviors. The approach is anchored in science, objective, actionable and efficient, but most important of all, provides clients with deep insights to drive a successful communications strategy.



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