

DREAMVERTISING

Brands and advertisers are looking to guide our dreams. The commercial exploitation of dreams is becoming a reality.

For as long as humans have inhabited the earth, we have viewed dreams as an extension of our reality. And for whatever reason, ancient civilizations, too, were set on hijacking them. Historical texts indicate that dream manipulation was practiced by the Egyptians and Babylonians, the Greeks and the Romans continued the custom of dream incubation [1].

Dream incubation or targeted dream incubation (TDI) is a modern field of science where sensory cues like sound are used to shape or “prime” people’s dreams. Dream incubation refers collectively to the practices, rituals, techniques and efforts that an individual applies to intentionally evoke helpful dreams.

Derived from the Latin verb incubare (in-‘upon’ + cubare ‘to lie’), the term connotes the support and nurturance. Targeted Dream Incubation is known as a “protocol for reactivating memories during sleep in a manner that leads to incorporation of the targeted memory, or related memories, into dream content”. In other words, scientists are studying which segments in our sleep pattern are the easiest to “break into” and influence dream content [2].

In a clinical setting, TDI can be used to change negative behaviors, like smoking. In marketing, it is being used to inspire brand affinity. Controlling our dreams to focus on one specific topic is no easy feat. Studies have shown that the best time to introduce targeted information to an individual’s sleep is during the first phase called hypnagogia (an intermediate state between reality and sleep). TDI aims for the moment when the brain has begun to enter the dream-state but the senses are still engaged and, crucially, subjects can still hear. At these times when an individual’s sleeping brain is receptive to external stimuli, they introduce smells, sounds, flashing lights or even speech to influence the content of our dreams. The sounds played during this time can be used as a gateway to the sleeper’s mind, thus enacting the TDI.

Anheuser Busch has exclusivity to Super Bowl advertising sewn up, so in January 2021 Molson Coors found a very different way to target Super Bowl fans. Using TDI advertising Molson Coors collaborated with dream psychologist Deirdre Barrett of Harvard University to produce the Coors Big Game Dream film and soundscape, designed to cause viewers to have pleasant dreams set in mountain scenes – that just happen to sway people toward Molson Coors products. Coors invited willing participants to watch a “dream inducing video” created with the help of a sleep scientist that included images and sounds of “waterfalls, mountains, and of course, Coors” before they fell asleep, according to a press release by Molson Coors. The company said this approach would trigger “refreshing dreams” of Coors which would, in their imagination, encourage dreamers to make the purchase after they woke up [3].

Sounds are pleasant enough in context, but Massachusetts Institute of Technology neuroscientist Adam Haar believes these practices in a marketing context are scary. While they are known to interfere with our natural nocturnal memory processing, they also could pave the way to more sinister ends. For example, back in 2018 Burger King had more devilish plans. Its “nightmare” burger for Halloween was “clinically proven” to induce nightmares.

While dream incubation has practical uses, it is only a matter of time before tech companies that make watches, wearables, apps and other technology that monitor our sleep start to sell that data for profit, or use those tools to hack our dreams while we slumber. Worst of all, you probably will not even remember it.

“The Coors dream advertisement was not merely a gimmicky marketing campaign; it was a signal that what was once the stuff of science fiction might quickly become our reality,” the researchers wrote. “We now find ourselves on a very slippery slope. Where we slide to, and at what speed, depends on what actions we choose to take in order to protect our dreams.” We must also look at smart devices like Alexa which can actually function on their own if they want to or if they are guided by a larger governing body. Devices like these will be able to play anything that they want if the advertisers purchase advertising time on these devices. These devices can also be used to detect details like the sleep pattern of people, behaviours, song preferences etc. that could help them influence dreams in the company’s favour [4].

Apart from the problem of privacy breaches, it is also an issue of free will. Humans have the right to make informed choices; however, the popularity of dream incubation will result in the exercise of manufactured choices. People are open and vulnerable to suggestions during sleep. Using this unconscious state, companies can push any of their products to unsuspecting and naïve consumers.

Planting dreams in people’s minds for the purpose of selling products, not to mention addictive substances, raises important ethical questions. There are fine lines between using dream incubation for creative purposes, and using it for manipulation. The moral line dividing companies selling relaxing rain soundtracks to help people sleep from those embedding targeted dreams to influence consumer behavior is admittedly unclear at the moment.

There are many promising avenues for marketers to pursue the goal of Targeted Dream Incubation. Today, many researchers and companies are actively developing technologies for “Brain Computer Interfaces” (BCI), the devices that enable direct communication between a brain and an external device. There are literally dozens of companies investing in BCI technologies including Neurable, NextMind, Kernal, and Paradromics, Elon Musk’s company, Neuralink. In the future, Marketers can potentially utilize the data obtained from Brain Computer Interfaces. For example, if brain waves show someone is anxious or troubled, then targeted advertisements can be sent to that person for products to reduce anxiety. From a business perspective, this is a huge opportunity for advertisements [5].

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PLACE BRANDING TOOLS AND APPLICATION

The brand is one of the main advertising tools. It means a specific association with a product. Everything is branded. Clothes, appliances, food, services. Even territory.

Place branding – the first thought, picture or image appearing in mind when someone mentions any country, region or city. For the last 20 years place branding has been introduced in most Europe, American and Asian countries.