



# **On aisle time: How non-conscious decision making powers in-store sales**

# You just ran out of orange juice.

You're popping into your local grocery store to grab a bottle of OJ — and maybe nothing else. But before you've even passed through the doors, you've already made a dozen choices without realizing it. You defaulted to this store. You know where the juice is. You grabbed a cart even though you're "just running in." Welcome to the non-conscious zone.

## What is non-conscious decision making?

It's the automatic, emotional, fast-brain part of the consumer experience. You're not just making logical comparisons in-aisle — you're reacting to environmental triggers, visual design, memory and even mood. While conscious decisions are deliberate and slow, non-conscious ones are swift, habitual and often invisible to the shopper themselves.

The shopping environment is more complex than ever. Attention spans are shrinking. Brand competition is fierce. And while consumer behavioral research has become more sophisticated, many marketers still rely too heavily on what people say they'll do, versus how they actually behave.

This is the untapped power of the non-conscious brain. And the smartest marketers are starting to unlock it.

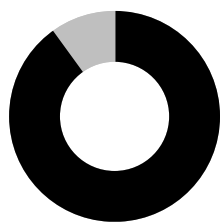
## Entering the store

**Sensory cues** shape your pace, mood and mindset the moment you cross the threshold.

- Upbeat music speeds up your stride.
- Cooler lighting subconsciously suggests "freshness."
- The scent of baked bread? Suddenly you're hungrier than you thought.

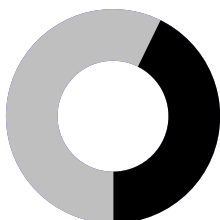
**In-store digital signage** catches your eye. A bright display flashes "Weekend flash sale on granola bars!" You barely register it, but it's enough to lodge the idea.

**Default Bias** kicks in: You turn left and head to the produce aisle. You're not here for veg, but you always start in this section.



**90% of shoppers say they're more likely to revisit a business that leverages music, visuals and scent in their stores.**

[Mood Media](#)



**43% of consumers around the globe have been inspired to make a purchase based on digital signage content they viewed while in-store.**

[Mood Media](#)

**Quad**

**"There's something uniquely powerful about testing in an in-context environment. It allows us to observe how packaging performs in real-world conditions—capturing the critical, often unconscious decisions shoppers make in the moment."**

— Shannon Anderson, Director of Client Research, Accelerated Marketing Insights at Quad







**“Understanding why a shopper looks is just as critical as knowing where they look.”**

—Shannon Anderson, Director of Client Research, Accelerated Marketing Insights by Quad

## The juice aisle

**Visual hierarchy** drives your eye to the center shelf. Eye-level = higher consideration. That's prime real estate.

- ➔ **Make it easy for them:** At Quad's Greenville testing facility, the Accelerated Marketing Insights team ran a series of packaging tests for a beauty brand. Through controlled, in-context retail environment testing, they discovered that the brand's packaging performed twice as well when moved from a lower shelf to the top shelf regardless of the design. Insights like these empower brands and retailers to make small, strategic changes that drive meaningful results and capture incremental purchases others miss.

**Familiarity bias** pulls your focus toward the orange bottle you always buy. It's muscle memory.

**Curiosity is triggered** when your gaze catches a new green-labeled bottle. It's sleek. Feels healthy. But do you trust it?

**Loss aversion** creeps in. You don't want to risk a bad breakfast. You reach for the orange bottle you know and trust.

- ➔ **Seeing isn't buying:** When testing a new green package for an orange juice brand, Quad's Accelerated Marketing Insights team saw a spike in visual attention — but not a single purchase. Through follow-up qualitative research, they uncovered that the green design was so out of place in the context of the competitive set as to cause discomfort and distrust of the brand. It's a clear reminder that attention alone isn't enough.



# The detour

You're heading to checkout, but on your way, you spot an endcap display showcasing those granola bars that are on sale this weekend.

**Almost a third of consumers (29%) frequently give in to the temptation of impulse purchases.**  
[Path to Purchase Institute](#)

Picture superiority effect kicks in. You weren't planning on granola bars. But the package has a close-up image of a gooey, delicious bar. Your eyes move before your hand does.

**"With the kind of testing we do; my team often uncovers insights you wouldn't expect. Like the fact that the likelihood of purchase increases significantly when granola bar brands include an actual photo of product on the package."**

—Shannon Anderson, Director of Client Research,  
Accelerated Marketing Insights by Quad

Scarcity bias adds urgency. "Limited time" flashes across a digital sign. Into the cart it goes.



Quad's [in-store retail media network](#) empowers brands to steer purchase decisions and build bigger baskets through innovative, well-placed digital messaging.

## Key takeaways

Your shopping trip may have felt casual, even unconscious. But here's what was influencing your every move:

- Brand loyalty
- Visual cues
- Environmental influence
- Habit and routine
- Emotional resonance
- Default behaviors

### Make the non-conscious work for marketers

Pre-market testing allows marketers to decode what consumers can't articulate.

To make non-conscious decision-making work for your brand, you need to be leveraging:

**Eye tracking:** Know exactly where shoppers look, how quickly, and for how long. Use real-time visual data to reveal

which elements attract, hold or lose attention in the blink of an eye.

**Heat maps:** Show intensity of visual attention across the competitive set or signage. Identify hotspots, cold zones and areas that need a design rethink before you go to market.

**In-context shelf testing:** See how your product

performs in a simulated real-world aisle. Test packaging, placement and competition variables before your product ever hits the shelf.

**Digital signage A/B tests:** Optimize headlines, visuals and motion for maximum attention. Run real-world experiments to see what gets noticed and what gets ignored.