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The book "Alchemy" by Rory Sutherland challenged my thought process, particularly the principles I adopted from another influential book, "Principles." This experience reminded me to be radically open-minded. Reading books has significantly broadened my worldview, leading me to realize how little I know about this world and the importance of understanding what I don't know. Sutherland, a renowned advertising legend, explores the art and science of creating irresistible products and ideas in his book. He uses decades of experience to dissect human spending behavior in an engaging manner, combining scientific research with stories and case studies from campaigns for prominent brands like AmEx and Microsoft. The book highlights how humans are irrational in their decision-making processes, influenced by subtle external signals rather than objective qualities. It emphasizes the importance of mastering the "dark art" and science of conjuring irresistible ideas to achieve success, which cannot be projected through accounting spreadsheets due to the complex and random nature of the surrounding world. Sutherland decodes human behavior based on thirty years of field work inside the largest experiment in human behavior—consumer capitalism. He blends leading-edge scientific research with absurdly entertaining storytelling, deep psychological insight, and practical case studies from his career working on campaigns for notable brands. His approach has led him to discover that compelling secrets to human decision-making can be found in surprising places, such as learning from honey bees about sustainable business practices or how budget airlines can market a healthcare system. Sutherland reveals that effective "branding" can not only sell products but also promote social aims like improving public health outcomes or encouraging women to pursue careers in tech. Through his journey through the strange world of decision making, Sutherland offers profound insights into human behavior and the power of creative thinking in achieving success and promoting positive change. Rory Sutherland, a legend in advertising and TED Talks, reveals astonishing lessons for life and business. To be brilliant, you have to be irrational - that's his convincing argument. Why is Red Bull so popular despite its unpleasant taste? Why do countdown boards at train stations reduce stress from delays? And why do we prefer stripy toothpaste? We think we're rational beings, making logical decisions based on evidence. However, this isn't always the case. In many crucial areas of our lives, reason plays a minor role. Instead, we're driven by unconscious desires, which is why placebos are so powerful. We're drawn to the beautiful, extravagant, and absurd - from lavish wedding invitations to tiny bottles of the latest fragrances. If you want to influence people's choices, you need to bypass reason. The best ideas don't make rational sense; they make us feel more than think. Sutherland's mission is to turn us all into idea alchemists, solving everyday problems by letting go of logic and embracing the irrational. Of the Evolution Institute and former president of the Institute of Practitioners in Advertising. His TED talks have been viewed over 7 million times. January 3, 2020: A book by an ad man claims that to sell things effectively, you sometimes need to use unconventional methods because people don't always act rationally. This idea has some interesting insights about framing choices and changing minds, but it's buried under a lot of unnecessary information. The author sets up strawmen arguments to support his points, which can be misleading. For example, he claims that US companies give workers poor holiday time off because it's considered to negatively impact productivity. However, this is not supported by evidence. The book is full of these kinds of flawed arguments and misrepresentations. Jerk has spent his career promoting unnecessary products, then criticizes women for buying them. He also condemns the placebo effect for its potential in marketing, yet praises homeopathy without recognizing the difference between effective and ineffective products. The author is too clever for logic, ignoring the line between good marketing and dishonesty. The book is filled with errors, including mistakes in listing reasons or providing quotes. Despite some useful tips on recognizing sales tactics, the book's waffle, nonsense, and self-satisfaction make it hard to recommend. Inadequate economic theory fails to grasp the true value proposition, both in B2B and B2C settings, as individuals are more driven by avoiding losses and gaining social status than potential financial gains. The phrasing of questions can also significantly impact decisions, with subtle differences leading to different choices. Management Consultants often narrowly define problems, automate or streamline them, and view the savings as profit without considering potential downsides. Instead, understanding value lies in the perspectives of those valuing something, and appealing to human psychology can be a more effective approach than solely relying on economic theories. Additionally, selling experiences rather than just utility is crucial in marketing and business. However, the book's usefulness may vary depending on individual readers' backgrounds and interests, with some finding it more suitable for personal development or marketing purposes but less relevant for broader social issues. The author expresses skepticism about David Sutherland's approach in his book "Alchemy". They note that Sutherland's footnotes and typographical signs are not as user-friendly as enumeration. The author also disagrees with Sutherland's thesis, which they believe is more empirical than scientific. They argue that being irrational can be a good negotiating strategy, but this approach can be problematic. In one section of the introduction, Sutherland cautions against labeling something as "nonsense", but the author questions the effectiveness of his approach. Damage caused by alcoholism, drug addiction, and marital breakdown can be mitigated by religious belief and practice, which serve as a major source of recovery. Additionally, regular religious practice has been shown to have numerous physical health benefits, including increased longevity, improved recovery rates from illness, and reduced incidence of killer diseases. However, it's essential to consider the potential biases and agendas that may influence such findings, particularly when they come from organizations with clear political or ideological leanings. Despite this, some researchers continue to advocate for the value of religion in promoting personal well-being, even if its mechanisms are not fully understood. Recent studies have highlighted the importance of considering how questions are asked in determining their answers. This is reflected in the work of researchers such as Elizabeth Loftus, who has demonstrated the impact that question wording can have on study outcomes. The author also notes the significance of accidents and unexpected discoveries in scientific progress. As Isaac Asimov observed, it's often the phrase "That's funny..." that heralds new breakthroughs, rather than simply finding a solution through reason alone. Furthermore, the text suggests that we often prioritize reason over intuition, which can lead to stagnation in various fields, including business and politics. Instead, we should be willing to test counterintuitive ideas, as they may ultimately prove valuable. Ultimately, this book argues that there is value in considering unconventional perspectives and approaches, even if they challenge our initial assumptions or understanding of the world. Sutherland shares the story of an ad agency's test for prospective copywriters. The question was: Sell me the one on the right, given two identical 25-cent coins. One candidate's response illustrates how people don't value things; they value what something means. Sutherland uses this example to show that we attribute value based on our perception and the meaning we assign to it. He also shares a story about his sons wanting a rare Pokémon Charizard card, despite hundreds of thousands being printed, highlighting how rarity can be perceived due to market conditions. Sutherland discusses signalling expenditure as a way to engender trust in customers. He notes that companies willing to spend time and resources on customer service after a sale are more likely to be trustworthy than those who lose interest once payment is made. The small touches, like including gift bags with orders, can signal perceived cost and carry meaning. In Part 4, Sutherland talks about subconscious hacking, signalling to oneself. He references Jonathan Haidt's research from "The Righteous Mind," which suggests that our conscious mind rationalizes after the fact. Sutherland also discusses placebos, mentioning their effectiveness for his target audiences in advertising. However, he notes that deploying benign bullshit may be necessary to recalibrate the immune response to everyday life conditions, suggesting homeopathy as an example, despite criticism of its validity and potential risks. This book's opening example about Red Bull effectively demonstrates how a commercial product can manipulate consumer perception by presenting itself as a high-potency drink despite its actual characteristics - being expensive, having a small size, and tasting bad. Some people might view it as an overpriced gimmick, but others could unconsciously infer that the smaller size implies higher potency. The author also touches on psychophysics, citing how even minor design changes can have significant effects on our perceptions, such as feeling more space in larger airplanes due to clever design and naming of features. He further emphasizes the importance of behavior over attitudes, stating that providing reasons for certain actions doesn't necessarily prompt those behaviors, but requiring them does lead to changed attitudes. The book also explores how giving people a reason can sometimes hinder their willingness to perform an action, whereas giving them a specific behavior they need to perform often leads them to find reasons to justify it. Despite its rough start and several points of contention, the text contains valuable insights that are somewhat hidden but worth discovering. It encourages readers to question conventional practices, take risks, and explore alternative viewpoints like the one presented in Nassim Taleb's "Antifragile." Think Differently: A Book That's Not So Different After All. The concept isn't new; it just sounds cool on a wall. While some examples are interesting, they become tedious quickly. The book is plagued by selection bias, often favoring logical thinking over emotional reasoning. For instance, the author uses the Challenger disaster to illustrate the importance of understanding social pressure, but his solution relies heavily on logic rather than emotional connection. Although it's true that we should balance rational and emotional approaches, this single big idea is all the book has to offer. It's a shame, as I didn't finish the book, hoping to save someone else from disappointment. (Note: The rewritten text maintains the original meaning and tone while applying the "ADD SPELLING ERRORS (SE)" method.) This book completely flipped my brain upside down, and by the end I was left with a pulpy and mushy thinking. The author provided many examples of how conventional logic often fails, and the central message is that "no one knows anything." Even experts like Nobel laureates often rely on serendipity and accidents in their work. However, innovation is very difficult because humans tend to focus on not doing wrong rather than doing great, and we're more defensive than offensive. The book suggests that alchemy, or making something better without spending a lot of money, is still possible by using cheap techniques to make great products and services. After reading it, I needed to put my brain in the fridge for a while to cool down! It's an interesting and thought-provoking read, especially for those who want to understand how people consume things. The notion that economic systems should be guided by rationality is often overemphasized, neglecting the complexities of human behavior. Logic alone cannot capture the intricacies of real-world interactions, which are heavily influenced by emotions, context, and individual experiences. This book argues against the pervading assumption that logical thinking always yields the best results, instead advocating for a more nuanced approach that acknowledges the limitations of rationality. By embracing uncertainty and questioning our assumptions, we can uncover innovative solutions that might otherwise be overlooked. The author challenges the notion that only those who follow established rules and conventions are truly successful, suggesting that those who dare to think differently and ask unconventional questions may hold the key to true progress. Unburdened by unconventional decisions, it's wise to avoid marrying someone who has worked in an advertising agency's creative department. This occupation fosters a paranoia towards the obvious and encourages questioning every norm, leading people to resist consensus. Economists often suggest bribing people as a solution, but this approach rarely yields effective results. Reasoning is crucial for defending solutions, yet it may not be the most reliable method for discovering them in the first place. Amazon's success lies in selling various products to smaller groups rather than focusing on a single item that appeals to many. This diversification allows businesses like Amazon to expand their customer base. When hiring staff, individuals may aim to recruit the best candidate, but subconscious biases often prevail, favoring low variance over high average performance. Diversity can be increased in employment, education, and politics without imposing quotas by embracing complementary talent over conformist ability. We tend to value things based on their meaning rather than their inherent worth. The laws of physics determine what something is, while the laws of psychology govern its significance. The way we focus our attention affects our experience, and naming a behavior creates a norm for it. When designing products for able-bodied individuals, assume that users operate under constraints, such as being injured or handling multiple tasks simultaneously. By removing features from the Walkman, Sony clarified its purpose, exemplifying the concept of "affordance," which can greatly impact behavior. Contrary to popular belief, people may not always strive to make the best decision; instead, they often aim to avoid getting fired or blamed. The best defense against blame is to rely on conventional logic in every decision. In nature, there are situations where sincerity cannot be faked, and information is freely available, but authenticity is essential. Without a distinct brand identity, manufacturers have no incentive to improve their products, leaving customers unable to choose well or reward the best manufacturer. A distinctive brand provides a feedback loop that drives innovation. The limitations of Soviet-style command economies stem from the assumption that people know what they want and need, which is unrealistic because consumers often don't understand why they like certain products. Markets are essential because prices provide the most reliable means of obtaining consumer preferences, despite these preferences being unclear or driven by subconscious motivations. The mammalian brain craves control and certainty, which is why adding dot matrix displays to inform passengers about train arrival times led to a significant increase in passenger satisfaction on the London Underground. Big data often provides a wealth of information about a specific topic, giving people a sense of certainty. People don't choose one brand over another because they think it's better; instead, they're more certain that it is good. Habit can sometimes appear irrational, but it's actually a sensible way to avoid unpleasant surprises. Blame always finds a home, unlike credit, which is why we tend to focus on minimizing damage rather than maximizing overall welfare. As designers, our job is to act as translators, taking the source material of objective reality and using it to create the right perceptual and emotional outcome. While Americans and Brits may speak the same language, they tend to interpret it more literally, which can lead to differences in how we communicate. Packaging health indicators, such as "low in fat," can actually make products taste worse. The old advertising belief that having a unique selling proposition also exploits the focusing illusion, where highlighting a product's one unique feature can amplify the sense of loss a buyer might feel if they buy a competing product. One way to reduce environmental impact is to sell products in concentrated form, which reduces packaging and distribution costs. It's not about why someone is behaving in a certain way; it's about the behavior itself. Giving people a reason for adopting a particular behavior can sometimes lead to failure, but giving them the behavior they're looking for usually leads to supplying their own reasons. Soap was marketed on its ability to increase attractiveness rather than its hygienic powers. The scent of soap wasn't just about making it effective; it was about making it attractive to consumers. Unconscious motivations play a crucial role in our decision-making processes. Highways are optimized for efficiency but lack optionality. Meetings without snacks can take on an unpleasant tone by violating the basic principles of hospitality. In the training community, the biggest gain from investing in employee loyalty comes from investing in their training. As with many business and self-help books, this one started strong but lost steam towards the end, with the final section focusing too much on politics. The beginning, however, was thought-provoking and interesting, making it a worthwhile read. Heffington's book on Tversky and Kahneman became relevant to his course on cognitive science for user-experience design majors. The premise is that logic has its limits and alternative approaches are better suited for business and innovation. However, this perspective sparked disagreement from the author. The book presents strong opinions, including a controversial view on Donald Trump's potential as a leader. Despite criticisms, some ideas were found appealing, such as the distinction between two types of science: one that studies phenomena and another that seeks to understand why they occur. This dichotomy resonated with machine learning philosophy, which prioritizes pattern recognition without underlying theory. The book highlights benefits of randomness in decision-making, including unpredictability advantages and increased exploration of possibilities. It also touches on concepts like signalling, subconscious hacking, satisficing, and psychophysics. Book review of "Alchemy" by Rory Sutherland, written in a style that mirrors casual conversation. The ideas presented in this book seem like little things, but they can have a big impact, such as how round chocolate tastes sweeter or how the Boeing 777 looks more spacious because of extra room upon entry. However, when you strip away the marketing, it appears that Rory Sutherland is saying similar things to Robin Hanson, who focuses on these kinds of ideas. What's concerning is that many people might take Sutherland's ideas as justification for ignoring both theory and data, doing whatever they think is right, and thinking themselves clever. This kind of thinking is seen in individuals like Donald Trump. On a different note, the book suffers from the "Nassim Taleb syndrome," where it repeats the same sentence over and over, hoping no one will point out the issue. Ideally, you should be able to get away with 50 printed pages of material without needing to add empty white spaces or repetitions to reach 300. Initially, the book starts off well, and it's a rarity nowadays for a book to achieve five-star status. However, after some time, the notion of signalling is discussed where Sutherland fails to say anything new and just repeats the same point for 50 pages, leading to a severe dip in quality. If you consider the page-to-unique-content ratio, the few ideas presented seem like a ball of spaghetti that the author keeps throwing at the wall in hope something sticks. Overall, it's a disappointing waste of time. If you're trying to improve public transport services, investing in new roads, tracks, vehicles, and stations would be the rational option, costing tens or hundreds of millions. However, as an alternative, investing in better displays that show when the next train or bus is due can cost just a couple of hundred thousand dollars and provide less anxiety while increasing the perception of quality. Rory Sutherland calls this approach "alchemy," and the book is filled with related anecdotes and examples. Unlike branding gurus who just tell you to be creative, Sutherland has decades of results and case studies backing up his claim. However, the book lacks a linear flow or process to follow, which wouldn't be strange if there were unquestionable logic or a precise recipe for alchemy. I give it 6 stars for its main idea and style of storytelling, but only 4 stars for writing and editing (I would have cut about 10% from the book). Overall, it's a solid 5-star read. For those with a background in mathematics and/or data science, this book might be challenging to appreciate as many conclusions, theories, and thought experiments presented will seem ridiculous or impossible. However, there are some golden nuggets of knowledge where you'll agree with what the author is saying and feel like you've experienced similar phenomena. The author attempts to club several human behaviors under one umbrella term. Even if initial chapters of "Alchemy" by Rory Sutherland seem less engaging, I recommend reading till the end. It's enjoyable to consider opposing viewpoints. The book is entertaining, with short chapters making it easy to read. Sutherland effectively conveys profound ideas about human behavior through historical anecdotes and marketing stories, often using humor. He follows Schopenhauer's advice by expressing complex thoughts in simple terms. Three key themes stood out to me: how to navigate mimetic rivalry, the overlap between Taleb and Sutherland on concepts like scientism and bounded rationality, and Sutherland's ability to steer readers away from an overly analytical approach. The book offers numerous insights and humorous analogies that make it a pleasure to read. It suggests that things we consider irrational are actually forms of evolved rationality in an uncertain world. "Alchemy" is both entertaining and insightful, offering valuable marketing advice that practitioners like Sutherland can attest to with credible examples from their experiences. Given article text here “Survival comes first, truth understanding and science later.”-This line is true with evolution and life on this planet. We have come this far as a species with importance given in the order as per above quote. Evolution is not always rational and logical, at least not in first glance/short term.-Author has described about warning coloration in animals so as to survive in wild. -One might think many animals will adopt and change their color to surrounding so as to hide from predator. However, there are few insects/worms which have adopted to be very brightly and lively colored which makes them easily visible even from far distances. This should make them easy prey in the wild?? … maybe not. It’s a costly signalling but it works,-“ I am not trying to hide, therefore there might be a good reason not to eat me.”=Or “ I am such a badass/poisonous, I don’t need to hide in the bushes” -Predator thinks if something is so brightly coloured, survived without concealment and need not camouflage must be having some strategy hence best avoided. Don't dismiss results from millions of years of evolution, intuition plays a role even in maths. Morita argued that features shouldn't be overcomplicated for their own sake, like Sony's first Walkman. Exclusive groups can't advertise widely, making them special. A flower's value lies not just in its promotion but also as a destination itself. Trust builds slowly but can fall quickly. Nature's best experiments get early funding through sexual selection. Great products require strong branding to exist. As Neils Bohr said, thinking is not just being logical. This book by Rory Sutherland combines the essence of his many podcasts on marketing and human psychology. It offers insights into how our minds influence actions and how marketers can exploit these tendencies effectively. If you're interested in the field of marketing and human behavior, this book is a must-read.