The brain region that makes ideas go viral

08 August 2013 Amantha Imber

Ever wondered what makes some ideas spread, and others fall flat? Some researchers at UCLA recently made a big breakthrough in understanding why some ideas spread like wildfire, and why others, well...don’t.

Matthew Lieberman, a professor of psychology, set up an experiment that exposed a group of people to several ideas, while they were hooked up to fMRI (functional magnetic resonance imaging) brain scanning. Lieberman found that the ideas that people wanted to spread activated a very specific region of the brain, called the temporoparietal junction – or TPJ for short.

Now, while this might be fascinating for the neuro geeks, here is the really interesting thing: The TPJ is involved in thinking about what other people think and feel. So, basically, when people are thinking about whether or not they will spread an idea, they are thinking "Who can I tell this to?" And if they can’t answer this question, they probably won’t spread the idea.

This study shows that it is no longer enough to have an idea that appeals solely to the end user. Having someone like your product will not guarantee that the product idea will spread. Instead, if you want your idea to go viral, the end user needs to see it as appealing to their mates too.

So when creating ideas, ask yourself: Will my end user want to tell other people about it?
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