Why your brain was built for Facebook

A new study finds that human brains are wired to share ideas.

Social media finally make sense. A new study shows that a particular region of the brain is tied to sharing ideas with larger groups.

Facebook, Twitter, Pinterest, Instagram, Google+ and a host of other social media sites are compelling for good reason, a recently published study has found.

It turns out, humans have a specific region of the brain, the temporoparietal junction (TPJ), that lights up like a Christmas tree when a person experiences an idea that is particularly share-worthy, according to the Association for Psychological Science.

University of California, Los Angeles, doctoral student Emily Falk, along with colleagues Sylvia Morelli, Locke Welbourn and Karl Dambacher, used functional magnetic resonance imaging (fMRI) scans to study the brains of 19 students as they reviewed visual and auditory pitches for 24 television pilots.

Then the students played the role of film-industry interns, giving recommendations via videotaped assessments of each show to “producers.” The videos were presented to the “producers” (79 undergrads), who then also rated the shows.

Falk and her associates found certain subjects had more of a flare for convincing others
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“We wanted to explore what differentiates ideas that bomb from ideas that go viral,” said Falk in her report. “We found that increased activity in the TPJ was associated with an increased ability to convince others to get on board with their favorite ideas.”

The discovery is particularly profound in showing the “social nature of our minds,” said Matthew Lieberman, UCLA professor and senior author on the study.

And, as with many scientific discoveries, this one could be used in either a beneficial or dastardly fashion.

Falk enthused about how social media communications could be used in spreading positive public health campaigns — essentially utilizing scientific knowledge to determine what campaigns, such as promoting healthy lifestyles and combating high-risk behaviors, will have the largest impact and become viral.

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The downside, of course, is that the science could be co-opted by advertisers to more effectively sway people’s opinions and purchasing choices.

It’s novel research with great possibility — that’s worth tweeting about.

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