

Ep96 - CBL Rewind: Phil Agnew, host of Nudge, on social proof, curiosity gaps, and ethical influence

MichaelAaron Flicker: [00:00:00] Welcome back to Behavioral Science for Brands, a podcast where we bridge the gap between academic research and practical marketing. Every week we sit down and go deep behind the science that powers great marketing today. I'm MichaelAaron Flicker, and I'm wishing you a very happy holiday season. Today, I'm excited to bring you a special holiday throwback as we wrap up the year.

We wanted to reshare one of our audience favorites, episode 26 with Phil Agnew. And if you don't know Phil, he's the creator of Nudge one of the world's most popular marketing science podcast and a master at breaking down the psychology. Behind why people say Yes, why they remember certain brands and why they act the way they do.

It was an episode packed with actionable insights and as we all enjoy some rest and relaxation over the holidays, it felt like a perfect moment to revisit Phil's thinking. [00:01:00] Hoping you all have a wonderful holiday with friends and family and now. Here's our episode with Phil Agnew. Enjoy.

Welcome back to Behavioral Science for Brands, a podcast where Richard and I go deep on behavioral science and really dig into topics that can help American marketers today.

But before we get started, very excited to welcome Phil Agnew today. Senior product marketer at Buffer and creator, founder, and host of the Nudge podcast. Phil, welcome to the show.

Phil Agnew: Oh, thanks so much. I'm very excited to be here. I'm amazed by this studio. I love it. I'm not leaving.

MichaelAaron Flicker: We, we, we, we, we dressed it up for you.

Phil Agnew: Oh, me.

Thank you.

MichaelAaron Flicker: Yeah.

And I thought for our listeners, lemme give a little background to your podcast and how you approach it, if you don't mind me. Showering you with a little Oh yeah. My analysis of your, of your background. The Nudge podcast [00:02:00] dedicated to the intersection of consumer marketing and and psychology aims to explore how businesses can use insights from psychology to better understand and influence consumer behavior.

150 podcasts?

Yeah.

And counting and counting. Every week. Every week. Yeah. When I was researching all of your work, you had this quote recently that creating an emotional connection with audiences is crucial. People don't just buy products, they buy feelings. If you can make someone see it, feel seen and understood, you've won half the battle.

What I say that you said that, that sounds pretty good. You're quoted, I'll take it. It was inspiring to me. So. Welcome to the podcast. We're very excited to go deep with you on behavioral science today, but maybe you could start by giving us a little insight. How did, how did you get into behavioral science?

What was the, what was the thing that happened that brought you to behavioral science?

Phil Agnew: Yeah. Well [00:03:00] that's a funny story because it's, there's this guy sitting next to us. I thought

MichaelAaron Flicker: that might be, yeah.

Phil Agnew: So Richard, you did a bit of work with a company where I worked at back in, around 20 18, 20 20, yep. At Brown Watch, and I'd never heard of the concept of, of behavioral science.

Really prior to this, I'd done consumer psychology in my studies and I'd, I'd, you know, vaguely of stuff like central proof. And then Richard came, did a few talks in the company and then with, with our, with our customers as well. You released your book in that year too? Choice Factory. I remember reading the Choice Factory and, and messaging my boss saying, I think we should buy a copy for everyone in the team.

And he told me to sharp. He was like, whatcha talking about? But I've been obsessed with behavioral science ever since. And yeah, I think back in 2019, thought I would really love to listen to a podcast about this concept. And didn't really find one, so did that classic cliché marketing thing of thinking, oh, I'll just do it myself.

Interviewed you, Richard, plus some other researchers to get the podcast off the ground and yeah, that was four, almost [00:04:00] five years ago. 150 episodes later. Loving it. Really enjoy the field, apply it regularly in my job, apply it to the podcast. I'm trying to grow and spend way too much time reading research and popular science books on the, on the concepts.

But yeah, that's it.

MichaelAaron Flicker: Would you say that the way you look at marketing today has changed because of the deep dive you've done into behavioral science? Definitely.

Phil Agnew: I mean, it's quite funny. I was one of the ones who unfortunately spent 50 grand on my marketing degree, a lot of money. I came out of it and I was asked to do stuff like write an email subject line.

People will open. I had no idea what I was doing genuinely. I was like, okay, I'm gonna use a SWOT analysis here. I think I'm gonna, I'm gonna use some framework and I just didn't know. And then started to learn more about behavioral science and consumer psychology. And you discover, wow, they were actually.

Laws, people follow, maybe not laws heuristics. [00:05:00]

Richard Shotton: Actively. Powerfully influences people. And as an industry, we aren't using it as much as we should be. Yeah.

MichaelAaron Flicker: We were talking as we were preparing to come out and do our podcast, how different behavioral science is applied in the United Kingdom and in the United States, in the uk.

How would you all describe the application of behavioral science in marketing and advertising? This is [00:06:00] something most agencies and brands know about. Some none. Where, where are we in the penetrating. The, the market. I'm leaving that to you,

Phil Agnew: Richard. What do you

MichaelAaron Flicker: reckon?

Richard Shotton: I, I think it has definitely grown.

MichaelAaron Flicker: Yeah.

Richard Shotton: Back in the early two thousands, people would not know what you're talking about if you raised the subject of behavioral science. Now, I think we've got to a situation where most marketers and most agencies have heard of this topic, but I don't think they are applying it as much as they should. So it's grown and it's become a mainstream.

Topic, but there's still, I think there's still headroom.

MichaelAaron Flicker: Yeah. That would match your, your

Phil Agnew: experiences as well. I think people have got, they've got the vocabulary now, if you say social proof, people know vaguely what that means. Yeah. But they don't maybe understand some of the, the lateral ways you can apply that principle.

Yeah. They think it's a quote on a website. Mm-hmm.

MichaelAaron Flicker: Rather

Phil Agnew: than, you know, all the, all the wonderful different ways you could apply that sort of bias. And I think, yeah, maybe that's, that's where we're at. We at a basic level is more to go.

MichaelAaron Flicker: [00:07:00] As the token American in the room. I will tell you that we we're on that road in the United States, we're probably not as developed as the United Kingdom in terms of applying behavioral science in brands and in and in agencies work,

Richard Shotton: which is puzzling, I think, to many people because the heartland of academic study is in America.

Daniel Kahneman, Katie Milkman, Robert Giulini. Were all based in, in America.

MichaelAaron Flicker: Yeah, it's really a it's really an opportunity for marketers and brands to say we have academics that can guide the way we build our brands. We just have to go through it. We just have to learn it and apply it. It's an opportunity.

When you were talking about lateral applications of social proof, that's always so interesting to me. Maybe you could explain to the, to the listeners a little bit what you mean by. You know, not just putting a quote on a website. 'cause I think that's always so helpful to talk about.

Phil Agnew: Yeah, I'll use examples.

So social brief is the idea that we follow the actions [00:08:00] of others evolutionary traits as cavemen. If you see dozens of other cavemen running out a cave, better run. You don't go in and you know, we use it all the time. You go on holiday, you see people queuing outside a restaurant, you're gonna go in that restaurant or you're at least gonna look at the Google reviews to see what the public opinion is.

And there's this, there's this tendency in marketing just to think, oh, okay, if we just have a few quotes from our customers on our website, especially sort of SaaS where you're buying online, direct to consumer stuff, that's enough. And there's so much more you can do. For example, there's been some studies recently in the last two years where if you put the amount of sales a product has next to the product.

Whilst you're actually on the, on the product page, that can increase sales of that product. Say you're selling a coffee machine, it's got 390 sales, just saying that 390 people have bought this coffee machine increased sales by I think 52% in one of the variants. And also if you don't have enough sales, so you are a much smaller organization.

If you just put the views, if you just say 3000 people have viewed this product, [00:09:00] that too has been proven to increase the actual sales by around 50%. And these are, that's a huge increase, massive lift. I can send the report a bit of research so we can include it in the show notes, but two very subtle ways, just a little lateral ways of applying social proof to get people to, to actually make a decision and buy your product.

MichaelAaron Flicker: And it, and the, and the reason it works is because it implies. The popularity, just the way that you, we, we teach social proof in a literal application. Yeah. It's a, it's just a lateral way to show that.

Phil Agnew: Yeah. You might have already talked about this, because I think this is one I've heard you talk about Richard, but the ecos in

MichaelAaron Flicker: the

Phil Agnew: UK with the number plates.

Just by putting the green number plate on there makes, because that's salient and, and you see a green number plate more likely than you would a yellow or a white one.

MichaelAaron Flicker: Well step, step back for us, 'cause we don't know this in America. Oh, okay. So please. So ecar is, it sells new and used cars? No, as

Phil Agnew: an electric car.

Electric cars. E cars, electric

MichaelAaron Flicker: car. Got it. Okay. And

Phil Agnew: the UK government is. [00:10:00] Decided they can, they have the choice, don't they, to put a green sticker or, or just a green bar to the left of the number plate. Okay. In the car. And that's quite interesting because it's salient. People see this green number plate, which stands out from, in the uk we just have white and yellow number plates.

We don't vary by state. So interesting. It really stands out. And in doing so, that's a lateral way of applying social proof. Because if you see every one in 20 cars with this green sticker on it. That stands out, sticks in your mind, do you think? Wow, lots of people own electric cars makes people far more likely to buy

Richard Shotton: them.

Very cool. Yeah. Jonah Berger has an amazing phrase in his book, contagious. He says, one of the aims of a marketer should be to make private consumption public. So as, as Phil saying, if you have to stand a number plate and no one knows it's an electric car, once you start badging 'em and identifying in a very distinctive way, it feels like they're much popular.

And that becomes you know, kickstarts a virtual circle. Very cool. [00:11:00]
Yeah. Very cool. Now we've started talking about some practical applications. You've talked about social proof, literally unilaterally. What other brands do you think reply in Pable Science very well? What, what stands out in your mind as a, an exemplar?

Hmm.

Phil Agnew: Can, can I start with a bit of a cliché? One that maybe you've talked about before, at least a lot of people think about, and this is Steve Jobs time at Apple. I spent, spent way too many evenings over a couple of months ago watching all of his keynotes at Apple with a behavioral science hat on, trying to figure out is he applying behavioral science tips when marketing his products?

It's a real direct way of just saying, okay, how is Steve Jobs actually selling? It's fascinating to watch these keynotes with that hat on because you see, he is just using principle after principle to persuade people to buy these products and make these products more effective. So there's one that immediately hit me when I started watching these keynotes.

[00:12:00] Almost every time he would come on stage for a keynote, he wouldn't say, hi, my name's Steve Jobs. I'm CEO of Apple. Today we're doing this. He would say, God, I'm so excited for today. We have spent months, weeks, years, weekends, working to get this to you today. I can't wait to to showcase it. And that of course, is a bit of a labor illusion by showing people the amount of work you've put into something.

You are far more likely to get people to buy it. So there's wonderful studies on this where if you give a prospective house buyer a list of houses and say these have been handpicked for, handpicked for you by a real estate agent who has spent the evening trying to pick these houses, they will value those houses far, far more.

And if you give him the exact same list and say a computer generated these houses for you, and Steve Jobs just is using that same principle there. Right? He's just showcasing the work he's put in.

Richard Shotton: That's fantastic. I didn't know he did that. So we have talked before around James Dyson [00:13:00] using a very similar principle.

MichaelAaron Flicker: Yeah.

Richard Shotton: So the opening line appears biography, his autobiography about how he went through 5,126 prototypes, which failed before the 5,000 hundred 27th prototype. Was the complete success of this new radical bagless vacuum?

MichaelAaron Flicker: Yeah,

Richard Shotton: so again, that's, yeah. Something that one of Britain's most successful, illustrious entrepreneurs has naturally realized can boost appreciation of a product.

Yeah. Excellent. It's a really interesting one

MichaelAaron Flicker: we talked about in Dyson as well. That the design of the Dyson vacuum has so many see-through parts. You actually see it working as it as it sucks up and goes into the bagless component. So it's not only does he do it in the book, his autobiography, he does it in the advertising about the product and in the product itself makes it, makes it more visible.

Richard Shotton: And even new products. They, for the, I think the hair dryers or hair mm-hmm. Curler type things, they talk about the amount of [00:14:00] tests that each one go through. So it is a repeated tactic that Dyson use. Yeah,

Phil Agnew: it's, it's a really good one. And it's not even the only one Steve Jobs used. I mean, you, that's you.

The 10 seconds in you're thinking, wow, okay. He's using a principle already. Yeah. The one he absolutely loves, and this won't surprise either of you, is anchoring. Whenever he's trying to persuade someone, he tries to anchor them and give them a bit of extra information to make that. Offer or deal or promotion that they're selling seem a bit more appealing.

So the classic example is, rather than saying this iPod has 10 gigabytes of storage. He'll use an anchor, which is far more salient and say it's a thousand songs that can't fit in your pocket. An example that I really loved was when he introduced the, the iPad. This was a fascinating keynote because prior to the iPad launching.

There was loads of news articles about how this piece of kit will be worthless. You might remember this, right? Yes. We all thought, we've got laptops, we've got iPhones. [00:15:00] Why therefore we need an iPad. It just does. It's just a bigger iPhone. Exactly. And then people were, were commenting online at all of

the journalists were saying, this is also gonna be really expensive because it's, it's.

Three times the size of an iPod and they were saying, you know, there's no way he's gonna be able to justify this price for \$600 or \$500. It's just too much. One of them said it could even cost up to \$999, and as soon as Steve Jobs read that, he thought, brilliant, I've got my anchor. So he goes, he starts to introduce the price of the iPad in this keynote, and he says, some of you in this work room, because he's talking to the room of journalists.

Some of you have said this points behind him, this will be the price and nine, nine, \$9. Yeah. At a charm price on nine, nine, \$9 appears in big writing. Behind him, he says, you know, and, and that would make sense, that price. He says, you know, there's so much tech in here. There's so much wonderful innovations.

It should be that price. Yeah. And then he says, but it's not gonna be that price. And I'm not kidding, the 9, 9, 9 smashes into a million pieces and 4 [00:16:00] 9, 9 appears. And he says, this is the price we've got it down to. And the audience, which bear in mind is a bunch of people who said this should, this will cost 600 quid, and it's too much erupts into a floor because they think,

MichaelAaron Flicker: oh wow,

Phil Agnew: I can't believe he's, he's managed to do that.

What an amazing price. And it's just because he set that anchor, he says, this will cost 4, 9 9, and that's a really good deal. No, people would have exactly the same issues that they had before. They'll question that, but by setting an anchor, he made that price more appealing.

Richard Shotton: So he's using multiple different biases and insights and behavioral science.

Yep. Was this something that you think he was interested in? Was he getting these findings from academic studies or do you think he was just really attuned to to, to human nature?

Phil Agnew: I think he was attuned to it because from a young age. He would apply these principles.

MichaelAaron Flicker: Yeah.

Phil Agnew: As a great example, he, he created this product with, with, with Wozniak when he was at in university.

Yes. And it was called the Blue Box. And it essentially allowed you to make calls internationally without paying. Yeah, [00:17:00] totally illegal. Totally illegal. Shouldn't have been able to sell it. And he sold it at university dorms. And the way he sold it was he was leveraging some behavioral science. He would go into different dorm rooms.

Where you've got a group of people sitting around and rather than say, Hey folks, I'm Steve Jobs, I'd like to sell you this product, here are all the benefits. He would say, Hey, is Michael here? And they would say, no. What? And he would say, oh, Michael's looking to buy this blue box. I, I wanted to talk to him about buying the blue box and they would say, oh no, he's not here.

But, but what is that? What that, what's that blue box thing you're talking about? And then he would go into his sale pitch. Yeah. Michael never existed. He made him up just so he had an in and to inspire a little bit of social proof to suggest, oh, somebody else. Is interested in this product, a bit of scarcity.

Maybe somebody else wants to buy it. Maybe I won't get the chance to. He's able to go in and sell it. And that was him at, I think 16. So he sort of, he was going for these radical, weird approaches that as a 16-year-old, I would've [00:18:00] never have thought of doing that. I would've just said, here were the product benefits.

He was using them from the outset, and I think that's prior to reading any research.

Richard Shotton: Yeah.

Phil Agnew: Well, I think that that

Richard Shotton: flow often happens. Kahneman's research partner, Amos Ky said, you know, all this stuff I've learned, used car sales when an advertiser's got their first, now who's being slightly self-deprecating.

But there's definitely a anyone who's interested in human nature, if they run a small business or they're attuned to what people do, I think they pick up on a lot of these, these principles. Yeah,

MichaelAaron Flicker: and I think a lot of the a lot of the hope for the podcast that we're making is it's not just. CMOs of big companies that can use these principles.

It's not just the largest brands, but everybody can find insight in these principles. And I think if you're using them at a car wash, if you're using them, you know in, in a smaller business it gives you that confidence to know this is the types of things that I should repeat and that will yield me more [00:19:00] results in the future.

Richard Shotton: And interesting. Use the example of a car wash because. It doesn't have to be multimillion pound budgets that can access these ideas. You've mentioned the illusion of effort fill and anchoring.

MichaelAaron Flicker: Mm-hmm.

Richard Shotton: Anyone can use those. There's no cost to applying them, so you might as least test them as as concepts.

Absolutely.

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Richard Shotton: So you talked about leisure effort and anchoring and the brilliant use by Steve Jobs. Yeah. Any other [00:20:00] brands that you think have harnessed behavioral science quite powerfully?

Phil Agnew: Yeah, there's, there's one I I wanted to talk about today 'cause they have harnessed behavioral science, but they've done it for the wrong reason. Okay. So I think it's an interesting one to talk about. And this is Theranos, which was Elizabeth Holmes' company. Now Theranos was this company which. It was extremely successful at the time, so it made Elizabeth Holmes into the youngest self-made billionaire of all time.

She was in the Forbes list, you know, included everywhere. She became an icon basically because of this company she had created this company was, was worth well over a billion dollars itself. And the idea was that with just a pinprick of blood, a drop of blood, you could test your blood for all sorts of diseases, all sorts of illnesses.

You don't have to go and get all of your blood taken, which is really stressful for people. You can use it on the military and on the on the field in military action, and there was all wonderful applications you could use as product. The only issue is the product didn't work. It never [00:21:00] worked. That they basically made it all up quite a big issue, quite a big issue, and this all eventually came out.

The question I had when I was analyzing her history is, why did people believe her for so long? Yeah. Why do people believe this? This bogus product, and a lot of it comes down to many different behavioral science principles she was using to make people trust her. So one is the halo effect. So she gained an awful lot of trust of engagement simply because she surrounded herself and she compared herself to.

People who were extremely successful. So she very early on got Henry Kissinger on the board, which obviously influenced people. She came from a family who was quite wealthy and well known and used that to her advantage. She would always start her pictures by saying, talking about her granddad's success, for example, classic halo effect.

But the most classic example is she completely styled herself, which is funny, thinking about what we just talked about on Steve Jobs. She wore the black [00:22:00] turtleneck, she lowered the sound of her voice to even sound like him, and that all of that was to essentially make people think that she is similar to this other person who's, who's extremely, you know, successful.

And the halo effect is, is fascinating. It works in such subtle ways. I read this one paper which suggested that if you are a designer store of some sort, that's basically completely unknown if you just put your store next to Gucci and Prada. Your sales go up via just the association with them that's, you know, a little bit of halo effect and I thought, I wonder if I could use this for my podcast.

Mm. So I created two different images of my show. One which just showed the logo Yeah. Of my podcast and one which showed the logo of my podcast, but very faintly behind it was all the other top shows in the uk. So Diary of a Sea, desert Island Discs whatever else it was at the time. And I showed it to about

200 people via a Google survey and just said, would you listen to this podcast, [00:23:00] yes or no?

And some of them saw the one with the just my logo. Some of 'em saw my logo and very faintly in the background. They still knew they were being asked about Nudge, very faintly in the background. The other logos, and they were twice as likely, went from 7% to 15%, twice as likely to want to listen to my show when it was associated with these.

With these other famous shades, and it's a great nudge to use. It. Obviously worked for Elizabeth Holmes by associating herself with these great people, but it can work for you as well. You know, there is no shame in associating your brand or your podcast or whatever it might be with the other greats in the field.

Just look back. If we go back to Steve Jobs, look at his think different campaign, which was just full of Einstein, Gandhi, all these great thinkers and just associated them with Apple and it was, it was classic halo effect.

MichaelAaron Flicker: Yeah. So it brings up an interesting thing that Richard and I have spent a lot of time talking about, which.

If you're going to be using behavioral science, there is some ethics that has to get applied there. [00:24:00] There's, when you're talking about changing people's belief, trying to change their behavior, you can, like Holmes did, you can use it. To a negative effect. Yeah, it's a tool. It's neither Behavioral science is neither good nor evil.

Richard Shotton: It's just a neutral tool. I think people understand that when they talk about things like rhetoric. You can use rhetorical techniques to encourage people to love each other. You can use rhetorical techniques to engage, to hate each other. It's not rhetoric to the problem, it's the ends that you use it to.

Behavioral science is just the same, and as you say, Phil, unfortunately it can be used to manipulate and mislead as much as to encourage people to do things they probably should do.

MichaelAaron Flicker: Yeah. And it creates it creates a tension. For all of us to not just teach the behavioral science, but to teach the ethics that ought to go along with it.

You know, when you're going to use these techniques, how can we make sure we use them for good or use them for [00:25:00] positive? And I don't know that we should be policing one another, but it's helpful to call out if she was using these techniques. It would be interesting in the moment, say. Look at these techniques she's using to gain momentum for good or for bad.

Be helpful to know that they're being used.

Richard Shotton: There's a great bit in Nudge by Thaler and Stein where they talk about the ethics of applying behavioral science, and they draw on the work of an American philosopher called John Rawls. Yeah. And I think they call it the publicity principle. And they say, if you're thinking about applying one of these biases, think to yourself.

Would I be embarrassed if my customer knew that I was applying it? And if the answer is yes, that should set off alarm bells.

Michael Aaron Flicker: Yeah, it's a great, it's a great rule of thumb

Richard Shotton: to follow. So we've had Steve Jobs and Apple. Mm-hmm. Elizabeth Holmes and Theranos. Theranos. Theranos. Theranos Theranos. I love that as a name.

It sounds like a Marvel villain. Well, it's even well Head of God death or something. It is a [00:26:00] Greek God. I is. It is.

Phil Agnew: And it's, and it's, it's the combination of two Greek gods. Anyway, they're using that exact principle there as well. Okay,

Richard Shotton: fantastic. Okay. What about

Phil Agnew: one final example? So the final example is.

It is a brand, so it's YouTube, but it's more about what the YouTube algorithm and as such, TikTok and other algorithms like it, but especially YouTube, how they have influenced the creation of media, produce their algorithm, and I think encouraged almost everybody on the platform to use a very, very, very, very effective behavioral science principle.

And that principle is the the curiosity gap. Now this, this curiosity gap is very well known in literature, very well proven. If you give somebody all of the information about something, say, let's say they're walking into a movie and you

say, here's all the things that happened in this movie. They'll be far less engaged to watch that movie.

Makes sense. Whereas if you hold something back. They'll be way more likely to stay engaged. You might think this is clickbait and this is BuzzFeed, and it's [00:27:00] brand new. It's not all of the most, most of the most successful writers in the world have used this. So Shakespeare's success actually came from a lot of the curiosity gap.

His initial works were often recreations of works that already existed. However, back then in the Hamlet play, for example, they would give all the information up front. They would say Hamlet is mad, or he isn't mad, and, and, and they wouldn't leave anything to be. Discovered Shakespeare's genius was hiding things from the audience, leaving them guessing, and inspiring that curiosity gap.

Charles Dickens did the same with a lot of his well, a lot of his writing, he would write, he would publish them in daily or weekly news papers and leave the, the final thing as a bit of a cliffhanger, as a classic example. And anyway, people have known this for an awful long time, but they are starting to really understand this with YouTube.

If you watch any YouTube video that is. In any way successful. It starts with a bit of a curiosity gap, and I dunno how you two will start this podcast, but I would encourage you to maybe look at, say [00:28:00] Steven Bartlett with Diary of the CEO, which is probably the number one podcast in the, in the uk. And he purposely starts that podcast by pop inspiring in the curiosity gap.

He will cut the first 30 seconds to some of the most interesting, controversial things that the guest or host says, leave them unanswered. It just inspires people to listen to an hour and a half episode and that, you know, that's enough. And just one final thing, I thought one of the things I love to do is to test these principles myself.

And I thought, I'm gonna test this on TikTok. I wanted to become TikTok famous. I'm not, but I did test it and I had two grand of ad budget to spend. And what I did is I split it in half and I created 20 different TikTok videos. All about behavioral science. So go to the Nudge Podcast on TikTok if you wanna watch 'em.

But half of the videos started with a curiosity gap opener, and half of them didn't. So half of them started with a question like, Steve Jobs used these three

incredible things to sell this products, and half of them just went into the topic and I compared the two, [00:29:00] and I can't remember the exact numbers, but the impact of the curiosity gap videos.

It something like tripled the effectiveness in terms of the amount of views, in terms of the amount of engagement like, but also 'cause I had a link in my profile which measured how many people went and listen to the podcast. Actually drove thousands more listeners to the show. Ultimately ended up allowing me to get about 11,000 followers, half a million views, and it all came down to using this Curiosity Gap intro, which is a behavioral science principle, which is obviously proven in the field, but it's known way back by the likes of Shakespeare, but still is fundamentally extremely important today.

I,

Richard Shotton: I, I just love the fact that you've run experiments to test it in a, in a different area, and I think that's something that. Marketers should do far more of. We started by talking about Steve Jobs and the illusion of effort and the morales study on, on estate agents and, and how they're the opinion of those [00:30:00] routers, sorry, we say change, automatic effort that people thought they'd put in.

Now most brands are in a very different. Category than estate agents. So I always think they have a bit of dilemma of, well, what should we do with this experiment if it isn't in exactly the same category or the same geographical areas we're using? And I think your spirit of, well, rather than reject the study, think of a approach that tests the underlying idea in our.

Closer area is, is absolutely spot on. I think more people should do that to understand which biases work for them and which biases may be better for a different context.

Phil Agnew: Yeah. And I think, you know, there is no literally no harm. What, what are you doing with marketing? You're gonna be putting a message out there.

MichaelAaron Flicker: Absolutely.

Phil Agnew: Why would you not test it? Why would you not try something? Why would you not apply one of these principles? There is you, you are going to be messaging people anyway. It makes sense to be applying this stuff and learning [00:31:00] from it and seeing what works. And you know what? The

TikTok stuff. It was brilliant. It did clearly show me that the curiosity gap videos were more powerful, but ultimately it also showed me that I wasn't very good at creating these videos.

Even that it increased my engagement, it didn't lead to. Millions of people listening to my podcast and I thought, well, I'll try something else. So YouTube's been my recent one. But regardless, it still allows me to learn something that I can apply to other fields. And we are marked as, it doesn't have to be a peer reviewed study.

We don't have to, it doesn't have to be, you know, completely foolproof. We just have to prove to ourselves. It works, and I think that's where it's really exciting because you don't have all of the red tape that you'd have to go through if you were in academia. You just try it yourself on a few hundred people and it's, it's cheap and it's effective.

MichaelAaron Flicker: I think it's a big takeaway for our listeners because so often we hear, we don't have the budgets to do testing or we, or we don't have, you don't. The creative costs and the media costs are too great. But it just, it's about getting something into market just to see what the signals you get [00:32:00] back. It's not a, as you say, a peer reviewed academic article that needs to be published later.

If we can learn from the signals of what we put into market, even small changes, it gives us a, a better base to work from as we make the next rounds and the next, and the next campaigns. And, and if a brand has an e-commerce site.

Richard Shotton: You've got essentially a laboratory, you can randomize visitors to that site into one of two cells, and then test a bias versus no use of a bias.

And then very, very quickly, if you're a large enough brand, you'll know what works or not. That doesn't have to have

MichaelAaron Flicker: any

Richard Shotton: media

MichaelAaron Flicker: cost attention. That's right. And I, and even if you are not tracking sales, which is sometimes the argument, well, I can't tell what led to more sales. We hear that from brands all the time.

You can still see what got longer dwell time, what got more clicks, what drove more retention on the website after they clicked. There's lots of, there's lots of what we would call [00:33:00] lagging indicators of what, of, of the work, even if it's not. A direct, a direct AB test. Yeah.

Phil Agnew: And it is, it is just so easy.

I mean, you mentioned an e-commerce site. I'd say if you send any emails mm-hmm. You've probably got access to a pool of people that most researchers would dream of.

MichaelAaron Flicker: Mm.

Phil Agnew: I interviewed Danny Zane, who's a, a researcher in the States, and he's done studies on special days. And he's found that on something like Star Wars Day or National Hotdog Day or International Picnic Day, people are more likely to buy.

And we did this into, I was fascinated listening to her and I thought. I'm just gonna try this today. I looked up when International Podcast Day was, it was last week, 1st of September. So I sent my email sent my audience one of two emails. One said 50% discount to my course, sign up today. The other said, celebrating International Podcast Day, celebrating here's 50% off.

It worked. The click through rate on the international podcast day one was two x. Yeah. And the open rate was, I think 9% higher as well. And it was just like, that [00:34:00] took me five minutes after learning about this insight to apply it, and I got a bunch of sales off the back of it. That's fascinating.

Richard Shotton: And I think if you look at it from the audience perspective, if someone says they're selling a product for 50%.

We often associate low cost with low quality, so it sets off alarm bells. But if you attribute the reduction in price to the

MichaelAaron Flicker: say operation,

Richard Shotton: yeah, suddenly I think you might make, maybe you avoid that quality price trade offs. That's a lovely thing that people can go out and apply very quickly.

Phil Agnew: It's a really good one.

'cause we all hate. Even as marketers, we hate getting cold calls. We hate seeing ads. We hate getting interrupted. We hate getting junk mail. But if you attach it to a special day, it feels like there is justification for that communication. Suddenly it goes from being, why am I getting this unsolicited LinkedIn DM to being, oh, it's International Star Wars Day.

Maybe I will watch shows tonight or, or you know, oh yeah, maybe I will get Disney Plus and watch the latest TV show at them on, because there is justification for it. So we've covered a lot of [00:35:00] nudges today, but one more just to chuck in. Brilliant. The special days. Brilliant. Who was the academic today?

Zane. Daniel. Zane. Daniel.

Richard Shotton: Zane. Daniel. Zane.

Michael Aaron Flicker: So we've covered a lot of ground today and we always like to wrap it up if we can. Who wants to take a swing at, at at the big takeaways that we covered today?

Richard Shotton: So, okay, we've covered three different topics. We had, what was it, Steve Jobs to begin with?

Mm-hmm. Yes. How he was a person deeply attuned to human nature and used biases like the illusion of effort. Mm-hmm. So this idea that if you tell people how much effort you've gone to, it makes the product feel higher quality. You've mentioned his use of anchoring. So we don't just appreciate the value of a product by looking at its inherent qualities.

You throw out a. A random irrelevant number and that will affect people's valuation. So he's classic use. You mentioned anything was suggesting it might cost 9, 9, 9. As an iPad. Yeah. And then revealing it was \$500 cheaper, so that was fantastic. We had Steve Jobs. [00:36:00] Then we talked about Elizabeth home, who worked for what brand?

The Theranos lot Theranos Theranos and what some people call sludge, the negative, unethical. Use of of behavioral biases. I think that's a fascinating area. Behavioral science doesn't give you the right to manipulate. People gotta be very careful about applying these biases in a positive manner. And then the final example was I think, you know, a brilliant one around YouTube and the idea that.

Often something called the gon effect. If you leave a cliffhanger, if you leave a little bit of uncertainty that creates an itch that the listener has to scratch. So I think three really interesting, big principles that can be applied by lots of different brands.

MichaelAaron Flicker: We always like to end with a question.

Something you're reading today that is exciting, something you're reading today that's really interesting. What's give our listeners [00:37:00] something to add to their reading list.

Phil Agnew: I'm reading Mary Beard's book on the Raymond M Empire and I'm really struggling with at the moment you could recommend that I read recently.

I mean, I read your book recently, Richard, and it's incredible. If anybody listening is not, has not read Richard's latest book, then pick that up. I also read, we mentioned Jonah Berger earlier in his book Contagion. He's written a new book called Magic Words.

MichaelAaron Flicker: Mm-hmm.

Phil Agnew: And it is about the subtle changes in words, even sometimes just a letter difference, like changing the word vote.

To voter when asking people to vote and how that can have an incredible impact on the amount of people voting. Spoiler alert, 10% swing in terms of the amount of people voting. It changed Obama's election campaign in 2008 just from this one study by a research called Christopher Bryant. So very, very interesting book.

I would recommend picking that up if you create any sort of messaging and want to change people's decisions.

MichaelAaron Flicker: Amazing. Well, thanks so much for being here today and for everybody [00:38:00] listening and watching at home feel free to write in questions rate the show. And until next time, thanks so much for being with us.

Phil Agnew: Thanks very much for having me. Cheers, chips.

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