

Ep 125 - Inside Influence Part 1: How Cialdini's Principles of Reciprocity and Likability Drive Consumer Action

MichaelAaron Flicker: [00:00:00] Welcome back to Behavioral Science for Brands, a podcast where we bridge the gap between academics and practical marketing every week. We sit down and go deep behind the science that powers great marketing today. I'm MichaelAaron Flicker.

Richard Shotton: And I'm Richard Shotton.

MichaelAaron Flicker: And today, we're kicking off a very exciting miniseries entitled Inside Influence, all centered on one of the most influential books in marketing and behavioral science, Robert Cialdini's Influence.

Let's get into it. So Richard, there are very few ideas- ... in marketing that have had the kind of impact Cialdini's principles of influence have had. They show up everywhere, in advertising, pricing, product design, and even you could see it in how people interact with one another every day. Getting to do a series with Robert Cialdini, we're a little giddy [00:01:00] over here, aren't we?

Richard Shotton: Yeah. He's genuinely an absolute star in the world of behavioral science. I have my copy of the new edition of Influence, and I think this is probably five years old now. Over 5 million copies sold. That puts it as one of the most popular books ever, let alone within the field of behavioral science.

MichaelAaron Flicker: And what's so interesting is that many people understand the concepts or have heard of the work, even if they don't attribute it to Cialdini and his research studies. It's just widely in modern marketing milieu. Is you just hear people talk about the concepts regularly. Y-

Richard Shotton: yes, and it's a book, and his work, I think, is particularly practical.

Often academics don't do themselves any favors. The psychologists and the marketing academics, they write in a very unnecessary [00:02:00] complex way.

Everything's dressed up in layers of verbosity, and they often research things that are a little bit impractical. Cialdini is completely different. It's written like a novel.

It's wonderfully easy to read, and he is always interested in practical experiments. When he came out of grad school, he went and enrolled on lots of sales people's training. So he he got jobs at car dealerships so he could learn the influence techniques that were used by the professionals, and then he categorized them and tested them.

So everything has a practical sales route. It's a, it's an absolutely brilliant book.

MichaelAaron Flicker: So when we had a yes from Dr. Cialdini, he said, "Yeah, I'd love to come on and join you guys for an episode," we were then faced with an interesting dynamic. On the one hand, lots of marketers may be familiar with the principles, but it was our [00:03:00] estimation few, far fewer have really gone deep to understand what did he write, what were the studies behind it, and how can they help drive behavior in practice today?

So we said, "What if we do something we've never done before? Let's do a week, and we're going to jam-pack three episodes with the most important takeaways we have from his seven key principles. We're gonna produce these three episodes. Everybody can come along for the journey. We're really gonna walk through in detail what we think are some of the most important parts from the book."

And then the cherry on top, in episode four of this miniseries, we're going to sit down with Dr. Cialdini w- now that we've formed our own view, what-- now that we've gotten the basics, and so we can go deeper with him, talk about what we've learned, talk about the practical implications for marketers today, [00:04:00] and really take that chance to sit with him and really apply it so everybody gets the most value out of it.

Richard Shotton: Yeah. Oh, looking forward to it. I think it'll be a brilliant series. One of my favorites. Excellent.

MichaelAaron Flicker: Perfect. So- the seven principles of influence, reciprocity, liking-

Richard Shotton: Yeah ...

MichaelAaron Flicker: social proof, authority, scarcity, consistency, unity. Some people may hear and right away, ding, they've heard something in this podcast, they've read something about some of those, and some other ones may feel a little less familiar.

So we're gonna take our time in these episodes to cover the material and really bring everybody up to speed so that by the time we get to the interview with Dr. Cialdini, we feel ready to go.

Richard Shotton: Yeah. Brilliant. Brilliant.

MichaelAaron Flicker: Our first our first one. Shall we start with the- Yes ... first principle-

Richard Shotton: Yeah

MichaelAaron Flicker: Reciprocity?

Richard Shotton: So yeah. This is a this is the opening chapter of the new book, [00:05:00] and reciprocity is sen- essentially the idea that in culture, there is a strong pressure that people feel to return favors. Now, interestingly- Some of the experiments he talk about are quite Anglo-centric. They've improved in America or they've improved in Britain or improved in Australia.

There, there isn't essentially a global set of datas to support them. But reciprocity is interesting because a number of ethnographers and sociologists suggest that this finding, this pressure to return a favor is there in every single culture. So Alvin Gouldner, sociologist, says Every single human society has this bias of reciprocity."

So it's a truly global insight.

MichaelAaron Flicker: And it's something that you may just naturally connect with as someone who's once received a gift when you weren't expecting [00:06:00] it. Somebody comes to a dinner party, or you give a gift and you see the reaction that people have. But thinking about how that can be applied commercially is really where Influence takes it to a whole new level.

It says, "This is a reality amongst all cultures, and th- this is how it can be used commercially to make a big impact."

Richard Shotton: Yeah. A- absolutely. This isn't just a discussion of kind of gift-giving culture that might be relevant at Christmastime. This is very much relevant to commercial approaches. So in, in Cialdini's book, I think the best experiment he talks about is not one of his own.

There's lots of his studies peppered across the book, but it's actually a more recent experiment done by the behavioral insights team in the UK. So this was done in 2013, and the behavioral insights team partnered with Deutsche Bank on a fundraising campaign, [00:07:00] and the CEO sent out an email one morning asking employees to donate one day's worth of salary, and this would either go to a children's charity or a meningitis charity.

Now, the experiment was that some... I think it was done by floors. Some floors or some departments came in and they just received the email. Other groups, when they arrived at work, there was a small I wanna emphasize the word small, we will put a picture of this in the show notes. A small pot of sweets, so probably, I don't know, 20 pence maybe trade cost, maybe 50 pence retail value.

A small pot of sweets was on people's chair, and it said "There is an easy way to donate to One a Day." So it was emphasizing that these sweets had come from the charity. Now, people who didn't receive the sweets, who just got the [00:08:00] email, 5% of them donated a day's salary. People who'd got the sweets, they...

11% of them- Amazing ... donated. Amazing. Y- absolutely. It's amazing because it's a more than doubling of- Yeah ... proportion of people donating, but also- Those sweets cost about 50 pence. The average amount donated was £840. Wow. The people who were donating were bankers. These are serious salaries. I worked it out, as I think it's over £200,000 a year.

We don't work as many days in Britain as you guys do in America, so- ... slightly lower than Americans might expect. But it's about £200,000 a year. So that was the average salary, £840 a day. That's what they're donating, and all based on what? This trivial gift. So it has an outsized impact. I think that's the interesting bit.

It's not just that you give someone a present and they will return that favor. In this kind of charity setting, you give someone a very small present and you [00:09:00] get it back 50-fold. It's a phenomenal change in behavior.

MichaelAaron Flicker: It's a brilliant experiment because when you hear the concept of reciprocity at its face, it al- almost the natural human reaction as a marketer is to say, " of course."

Obviously if there's a sense of a desire if you do something, somebody's gonna want to reciprocate. To me, the brilliance of this experiment is it immediately puts a quantitative lens on how impactful the reciprocity bias is, and as you rightly called out, there's a dollar value. So when you're trying to think about how important is it to find a way to use reciprocity, this gives you some really hefty quantitative data to say doubling of the people's participation on serious amount, £840, a [00:10:00] big decision, and it gets a doubling.

To me, it's got that really nice feature of having quantitative data with it.

Richard Shotton: Yeah I think you're right. I think an awful lot of organizations might say, "Okay, of course if you give people gift, it will get a warm glow." But what this study shows is it's not just a warm glow, it's people are prepared to put their hand in their pocket and give much more money, a disproportionate amount of money.

And I think that is a very valuable study. If we stick in the charity world, an awful lot of charities would feel nervous about doing this if they didn't know the study, because it feels like we have to look after our budgets, this is largesse that we just can't justify. If you've got a peer-reviewed study done in realistic settings with serious amounts of money, it gives you the justification internally to then spend a little bit of seed money on the sweets to recoup it at a later date.

MichaelAaron Flicker: I was thinking about earlier in the episode when you said that this was true across all [00:11:00] cultures. Or n- all may be too strong of a statement. Many cultures, they have seen this reliably come back. And we talked in a previous episode of sometimes these... many times these biases come from an evolutionary explanation.

There's something about the way we've developed over centuries that have created this this cause. This feels like it comes from that type of- Oh ... Evolutionary d- development.

Richard Shotton: C- completely agree. If you think for most of human history, people haven't lived in cities with salaried jobs. Most of the time we were on the plains of Africa.

We were in small hunter-gatherer groups. Now, one of the facts of nature, one of the key things in that situation is variability.

You could have a lucky day, shoot a deer, and be overflowing with meat. Another [00:12:00] week you could have a bit of bad luck and not catch any food. Now, if you have an excess of food, there is a phenomenal advantage if you can, in some way, turn that excess of food into a future benefit. And essentially, if the society develops this strong element of reciprocity I've captured the deer, I've got too much meat, I give you some meat.

That is a very sensible thing for me to do because now I know you have a massive obligation when you get some meat, and maybe I haven't been so lucky, you have to share with me. So it is a phenomenal way of surviving a variable environment. And maybe this is why all cultures do it, because those who didn't develop reciprocity essentially didn't survive as well.

MichaelAaron Flicker: I think that's... It's so helpful to think through that lens. Today, you would refrigerate the meat. Yeah. Today there's other options other than [00:13:00] relying on... Oh, being so close to feeling that good luck or bad luck has a terminal outcome, surviving or not surviving a winter, surviving or not surviving.

And so to think about it in that evolutionary way really makes you feel like, man, this is long-rooted in human development. And if you think about language- Yeah ... that has come from long ago a British phrase I might say much obliged-

Richard Shotton: Yeah

MichaelAaron Flicker: reveals this. It means I'm grateful for it.

It means thank you, for our American listeners who might not have heard it, but that-

Richard Shotton: Or our British listeners under 30. Yeah,

MichaelAaron Flicker: yeah. There you go. There you go. But I- I'm obliged because of your generosity much obliged. It's a fascinating phrase that you don't hear used today, but it has that sense [00:14:00] of reciprocity built into it.

Richard Shotton: Yeah. A- absolutely. And I'm sure there are some skeptics listening thinking, "Oh, it's just one word. What does that mean?" And if it was just English or old-fashioned English that showed this, maybe you could ignore it, but in Portuguese you have obrigado, which is, I think the literal translation is I'm indebted.

I don't know how to pronounce the Japanese word, but it's something like sumimasen which I think has similar etymol- etymological roots. So we see it occurring again and again. Our very language reveals this reciprocal bond that you get from a gift.

MichaelAaron Flicker: Lovely. So we're talking about reciprocity.

Are there any nuances specifically when we're thinking about how to take this insight of human nature and apply it commercially that would be helpful?

Richard Shotton: Yes. So great if people listen to that behavioral insights team study and think, "Okay I'm definitely gonna start trying to give more gifts out to prospects or [00:15:00] customers."

But absolutely, it's not just you should offer gifts. There are some lovely studies that reveal what type of gift. So one of the most interesting ones that Cialdini covers in Influence is a 2011 study by Hershy Friedman, who's at City University of New York, and he runs this study over four weeks, and he stands outside a small restaurant, and as people are walking in, he gives them one of three things.

So I'm using that word thing very loosely because one of the things is nothing. A third of the people - ... he just nods and says hello, and they go in. The second third of people get a free keyring. The final third get a free little tub of yogurt. And he then investigates what do those groups spend?

And the first thing he finds is any gift increases expenditure. [00:16:00] So no gift group, they spend \$8.39 on average, and then it is for the keychain group, \$9.39 on average spend. That's a 12% uplift. But for the yogurt group, it's an average spend of \$10.41, so a 24% improvement versus the control. A

MichaelAaron Flicker: doubling of versus the- Y-

the keychain group.

Richard Shotton: Yeah. Yes, yeah, 12% jump and then a 24% jump. Yeah. So the argument here is any gift boosts expenditure in store because people feel indebted. But Friedman makes the argument that relevant gifts, that things that look as if you've made a little bit of effort to understand where I'm coming from, they are the most effective.

Because of course, if you are going to a restaurant, almost by definition you're a little bit hungry, and a yogurt relates to that. A keyring's all very nice, but it has nothing really to do with the particular context you're in. So Friedman's argument is try and think about [00:17:00] what mindset your customer's gonna be in, and then whatever gift you give them should reflect that I'm thinking about a trip I just made to Spain, and I was in Madrid and walking down the block, and bakeries had people standing outside and handing out little bites of whatever baked good they had inside.

MichaelAaron Flicker: And in America, very rare. I- it's much less common to see that, except for one of the most commercially successful places- Yeah ... Costco. Yeah. Yes. Where they have free samples throughout the store, and those samples are little bites right next to where you can buy them. It's interesting that other big market, big box chains have not latched onto that in the way that Costco has.

They have they have not decided to do so much sampling in store. But that sampling which [00:18:00] brands pay to have space to then run a sampling is actually to the benefit of total sales because it creates an indebtedness amongst the people that try it.

Richard Shotton: Yeah. Yeah, absolutely. And I think we did a episode, gosh, about a year ago where we talk about reciprocity in the Costco context.

And if people are interested in this bias, we talk about a completely different set of studies. So there's a really nice study we talk about, again, with charities showing how powerful reciprocity can be. But you're right Costco is a phenomenally effective retailer, but maybe other people are a bit too narrow-minded.

They are very clear on the ledger about the costs of giving away- Yeah ... free sample, but because they haven't been able to quantify the benefit, they think it's a nice-to-have rather than an absolutely crucial bit of your strategy.

MichaelAaron Flicker: And this is an example as a brand [00:19:00] marketer where you ask, "Where can I run a field study?"

Where can I set up a low-cost experiment to replicate to replicate Hershey Friedman's study? I have a storefront, can I try for four weeks varying this and seeing if the gift I can, at almost no cost or at very low cost offer, yields me an uplift in spending?" That to me feels something very practical folks can take away and think about how they can enhance their sales.

Richard Shotton: I I love that as a as a takeout. And I love it because if you adopt this experimental mindset, everything is stacked in your favor as a brand. If ... And there's a very good reason to believe it will work. We've got, we've gone through a couple of experiments already, so the probability is it works.

It's already stacked in your favor. But more than that, if you ran it, and let's say for 10% of people it doesn't work for some [00:20:00] reason, some quirk of their business you do it for four weeks, you turn it off. Very small downside. If it works, and the odds are that it will then you run it forever.

So y- Yes ... you have this kind of imbalanced equation. You've got this sense that the upside is almost limitless, the downside is absolutely trivial. The question really should be why aren't you having a series of experiments from behavioral science that you're using in your every single week thinking what can I test, what can I test, what can I test?

MichaelAaron Flicker: Yeah, and the nice part in this one is if something doesn't work, you try a keychain and it doesn't work, a yogurt might work. You try something that doesn't work- Wow ... okay, if you're a bakery and this baked good is not yielding great success, maybe something else will. It's not only about validating or invalidating the study, it's about how can you can have that tweaking- Yeah

mindset to continue to innovate what you're trying in your storefront, at your

Richard Shotton: Yeah. I think I think you're right there, and that's a far more nuanced take [00:21:00] than me. I think you're absolutely right. It's not does this bias work or not bias, w- not work or not. If you're the 10% where the experiment fails why not think, " what's the little tweak we could do?"

And actually, if you're the 90% where it does work, you should still take that experimental mindset- Keep going. Yeah ... because it's unlikely that the first gift that you stumble upon is gonna be the most powerful gift out of all, the inf- almost infinite number that you could have tested. So absolutely, whether you succeed or don't stop there.

Think about, " what little tweak could I make to try and get it to work or to get it working even harder?"

MichaelAaron Flicker: Yeah. And I've spent a lot of time in e-commerce businesses, and you think about, like, how do you have a premium experience? How do you have a an experience where giving something away for free doesn't feel l- like you're giving out too much?

But when you have a retail experience where somebody's walking in with the intent to buy, same thing on a website, [00:22:00] you have somebody who's already clicked on your ad, they're on the website actively engaged in shopping, these small signals can have can really have a positive effect.

Richard Shotton: Yes, and I think this often, whether or not people continue to run with these ideas is often down to how well they measure them.

If your sole measure is conversion rate, it might not look that good. If someone is intending to buy and they buy anyway, it looks like it didn't have an effect. What Freedman studied was, and what the Deutsche Bank BIT study does, is look at the average basket. It looks at not just do you spend, it's how much you spend.

So you want to be making sure that- Revenue per customer ... yeah- Yeah ... that you're covering both conversion rate and ARPU.

MichaelAaron Flicker: Yeah. Yeah, that's right. And of course in an e-com business you would also look at, let's say, lifetime value. How- Yeah. Oh, yeah ... How long did it take for them- Yeah ... to come back and buy again?

So lots of [00:23:00] data that you can look at there. Okay. So we've talked about this idea of reciprocity and how it could be instilled in creating a test and learn environment at i- in a commercial setting. But are there any more lateral ways- Yeah ... of harnessing reciprocity?

Richard Shotton: So this one you've got to bear with me.

You can't shout me down halfway and say, "What the hell has this got to do with reciprocity?" You've got, you got... This one, I promise you it will do. So this is one of Cialdini's own studies and I must admit at first glance I didn't quite see the link with reciprocity, but I think Cialdini's absolutely right.

So this is an idea that's, that he named the door in the face technique, and his original study was all the way back in 1975. So he goes up to people on campus, and he asks them to volunteer at the county juvenile detention center. Now, sometimes he goes up to them and immediately says, "Will you volunteer [00:24:00] for two hours at the detention center?"

And 17% of people agree. Big ask. Which is fri- Yeah, it's a big ask . And also you're 18, you're 19, you want to go out drinking and playing pool or whatever, not many people want to volunteer at that age. But that's just half the experiment. The other half of the people he approaches, he does it slightly differently.

He begins by saying, "Do you want to volunteer at the county juvenile detention center for two hours a week for a minimum of two years?" Now-

MichaelAaron Flicker: Yikes.

Richard Shotton: Ex- yeah. That, that, that sums it up. Yikes. Exactly. No one says yes to that. But then once they've said no, he says, "Okay. Would you be interested in volunteering for two hours?"

So that was remember that should be familiar. It's what he asked the people in the first thing. Now, the proportion of people who say yes jumps. It goes up almost threefold. It goes up to 50% of [00:25:00] people agreeing to doing the volunteering Now, his argument, and this is why it relates to reciprocity, he says what you're doing in this second technique is asking for something extravagant, something really large.

People say no, and then as the requester, you adjust your negotiating ask. You adjust your position. And he says this is where reciprocity comes in. Because the requester has adjusted their requirements, there's an obligation on the listener to feel like they should reciprocate that generosity and return that favor.

The asker has done something nice. They've backed down slightly. There's a bit of a pressure on the listener to reciprocate and accept. Now, not everyone accepts. You've still got 50 p- percent of people saying no, but it is a lot better than the initial straight out ask of two hours a week

MichaelAaron Flicker: And a lot of [00:26:00] what's happening here is you're creating context that makes the original ask feel a lot more reasonable than when it wasn't with the context.

What do we call that in pricing when we do that in pricing you create-

Richard Shotton: Yeah ... What

MichaelAaron Flicker: do, what do we call

Richard Shotton: that? So anchoring. Anchoring, yeah. So you throw out a very large number. You're not expecting people to pay that amount, but your follow-up request is smaller. And often we've talked about anchoring, it's a very useful technique.

But what I think is so interesting about influence is Cialdini comes at a slightly different reason why this might work. He's not trying to deny the whole role of anchoring of people take that number as a starting place. They adjust, but they don't adjust enough. He's not trying to say that it's all reciprocity, but he says this door in the face technique, part of that success is reciprocity.

And that technique is definitely something, especially people who work in sales [00:27:00] especially when you're doing negotiations with new clients into your marketing agency, that is something that you can use. Don't jump straight to what you actually want. Make sure you start with so- with what you'd be very happy with, and then be prepared to backtrack, and you should end up at a better place.

MichaelAaron Flicker: It's a unique name he chooses, door in the face.

Richard Shotton: Yeah. Yeah. He's picked it because there is a famous study which is called the foot-in-the-door technique, so this is a lovely mirror image. The foot-in-the-door technique is you ask someone to make a tiny little commitment a small step, and once they've done that, you use the principle of consistency to remind them of their original behavior, and then you ask y- you know, y- the genuine request.

So I love it in that it's one of these wonderful examples where you can take two very different tactics, although almost polar opposite [00:28:00] tactics, but both of them can be very powerful persuasion techniques.

MichaelAaron Flicker: So three big commercial implications of reciprocity. If you wanna boost conversion, consider giving people a small gift, and the plus-up is a small gift that's naturally connected or that shows a mirror good of the thing they're buying And s- second, a more lateral approach to reciprocity, not a small foot in the door, but a-

door in the face technique- Yeah ... where a big request followed up by a smaller one may activate reciprocity in this unique way and get... And what he shows is a 2.9x uplift, almost- Yeah ... three times more likely people will accept the same offer if you start with something much bigger [00:29:00] in front of it.

Richard Shotton: And it sums up Cialdini as well.

What a brilliant name, the door in the face technique. God it's so much better than just saying social proof or anchoring. He's got a real gift for language. So if people like that style, they'll love his book.

MichaelAaron Flicker: Yeah. Yeah, as you say, it reads more like a novel than it does like a s- a series of ba- Yeah

of studies.

Richard Shotton: If you've got Thinking Fast and Slow by Kahneman at one end, which, you know- ... very influential book, great stuff in there, but it... no one would say it's an easy read. Cialdini's at the very other end of the spectrum.

MichaelAaron Flicker: Lovely. Lovely. Let's move on to the liking principle. Let's first start by defining what it is, and then we can go from there.

Richard Shotton: So very simply, Cialdini's argument is, he says, one of the other big principles about persuasion is we are deeply influenced by whether or not we like the communicator. So if we like someone, if we [00:30:00] feel warm to them, if we enjoy talking with them, we will often exceed their demands far more regularly than maybe we should.

We've talked about this one study before, but it's an absolute classic, and it's known as the halo effect. So if you like someone, what tends to happen is even on, even other unrelated metrics tend to i- improve. So what I mean by that is if someone comes across as likable, you'll assume they are better looking, more intelligent, more trustworthy.

Now, what people should do when they are evaluating the character of someone is they should rate each individual metric looks, trustworthiness, likability. They should rate them independently. But the argument from the halo effect, which was first experimented on back in [00:31:00] 1920, I think, by Thorndike, the argument for the halo effect is people don't do that.

They latch onto one standout characteristic, and then they use that as a guide to all other characteristics. So the classic experiment in this area comes from Timothy Wilson and Richard Nisbett back in 1977. They get one of their colleagues so they do this in an American university. The colleague is Belgian.

He's got a strong accent. They get this guy to record a lecture, and they ask him to do two versions, one where he behaves in a friendly manner, one where he's a little bit standoffish. They take one of these videos, and they play it to a group of people, and they ask that group to rate the lecturer on all sorts of different measures.

And then they take the other video behaving unfriendly this time, and they play it to a separate group of listeners. [00:32:00] And what they find is that not only does the likability of the lecturer vary between the two groups, as you'd expect if he behaves in a cold manner, people dislike him.

If he behaves in a warm manner, people like him. N- It's not just that happens. When the listeners are asked to rate the lecturer on his knowledge, how irritating his accent is, how good-looking he is, all of these metrics vary in line with whether he came across as likable or dislikable.

So the likable lecturer is seen about twice as good-looking, twice as intelligent, twice as likely that his accent isn't found to be irritating. So the argument here, if you have one standout metric such as likability, it affects the audience's judgment even in completely unrelated areas.

Michael Aaron Flicker: And while this study was about the likability of a professor, you and [00:33:00] I have used this to talk about how it can have a big impact on brands and marketing.

Because commercially, it can sometimes be very hard to communicate, is this a good deal? Like value for money, or the company is trustworthy. Those are not easy things to communicate through sight, sound, and motion, through websites, but humor is, as an example. Or and so if people find you to be funny, it can help lift all other attributes.

The, And conveying humor is a lot easier to do than value for money. So you have this opportunity to say, "We know this insight about the halo effect. We see how it applies to people, and how can it apply to brands in the way that we as cognitive misers, those that don't wanna think too hard about everything, will solve an [00:34:00] easier question.

The brand's funny, and that makes everything else ameliorate."

Richard Shotton: Yeah. That's a lovely way of putting it. I think the argument here is when people are making decisions, and this is across all sorts of areas, what happens first is people have a snap reaction. "I like or dislike the salesperson in front of me.

I feel warm or cold towards the brand." you have this immediate- Sense of liking or disliking. That comes first, and then once people have made that, you could say, emotional decision, it's only then that logic comes into play. If you dislike a salesperson, you then use all your powers of logic and rationality to say why the argument he's making is rubbish.

If you like them, you then use all those powers of rationality you have to try and justify why he's saying the correct thing. So it's this immediate snap decision about liking that comes first, and then later on logic gets involved. So [00:35:00] what you really wanna do as a marketer, you've gotta be focusing on that immediate, quick emotional reaction.

That's the thing that you should influence. The rational reasons afterwards are secondary to that snap reaction

MichaelAaron Flicker: It's interesting when this is applied well, you can feel your emotion to the brand before you can even fully think about all its products and its services. When it's done poorly, you have a reaction to an ad, and you don't even remember what the brand is.

You don't even remember. I remember it made me laugh, but I don't remember the brand. So to me, there's this th- it's this balancing act of delivering the halo effect centrally around your brand in a way that it focuses on the brand. The GEICO gecko, you remember the gecko as the fluent device, as the character, the protagonist in the ads, while it delivers humor.

[00:36:00] While it does what it needs to in the ads. Yeah. So to me it's a balancing act for marketers to not just understand that if you believe one thing, it can ameliorate everything. You also have to remember your brand has to be central to the story as you do that.

Richard Shotton: Yeah. A- absolutely.

Absolutely. As you were saying that, I was trying to think of like personal examples that might make this feel clearer in people's minds, and I was thinking

about interviews. I wonder-- a lot of people I think would've been in a situation where maybe they've interviewed 10 candidates, and they've got their little scorecard, and they're rating them by I don't know, job experience out of 10, mathematical ability, eloquence.

But often what happens is you have a gut feeling about a person, and then you look at your scores, and you're like, "Oh, wait a minute. The person I really liked and thought would be brilliant, they haven't come out top on the scores. Maybe I was a little bit harsh on mathematical ability. I'll just edge them up one.

Maybe I was a little bit harsh on their eloquence. They did have a [00:37:00] few good points. I'll edge them up another one." I think if you, if we are honest to ourselves, and we go back to settings like that or pitches, you often find it's that liking that comes first, and then we use logic afterwards.

So I think people would note it in themselves, this bias of likability.

MichaelAaron Flicker: And with that, you can really make some big impacts. So I think it's super helpful for you to say that. Yeah. True. It can make a big impact.

Richard Shotton: True.

MichaelAaron Flicker: So knowing about the importance of liking-

Richard Shotton: Yeah ...

MichaelAaron Flicker: is useful, but how do you achieve it?

Richard Shotton: Yeah. Yeah, so that, that's a very good point. And that's what I love about Influence as a book and Cialdini's work in general.

He doesn't just make some kind of abstract argument. It is all very practical. He sets up why coming across as likable is so important for salespeople and brands, and then he talks about lots of different ways that you can boost the likability. Now, genuinely, he talks about lots and lots of reasons, but [00:38:00] one that we've never covered really before, we certainly haven't covered the experiment, is about the power of similarity.

So we like people who are similar to ourselves. So the study in question is a slightly strange one. It's a 1989 study from Cialdini himself and John Finch. So

they're both at Arizona State University. And they give the participants a description of Rasputin what he did during his life, a little bit of a biography.

And the twist in the experiment is one of the prominent bits of information, it's on the kind of cover sheet, is Rasputin's date of birth. But for some people, the date of birth of Rasputin is changed so it matches their own. They- Love it ... The psychologists had surveyed people earlier, so they knew what the participant's birthday was.

So some people had this biography of Rasputin amended so Rasputin and the participant [00:39:00] shared their birthday. Other people just had Rasputin's normal birthday. Everyone was then asked to rate Rasputin on four traits. So you had this nine-point scale, higher numbers are bad, low numbers are good. And Rasputin was rated on his morality, his pleasantness, his effectiveness, and his strength Cialdini and Finch then look at the scores, and if the participant thought they had a different birthday to Rasputin average score was seven point one across those four.

If people thought they shared the same birthday, those scores go to five point eight. Remember, lower is better. So that is an eighteen percent improvement. This was Cialdini

and Finch's experiment to try and show one of the big drivers of liking is do I feel that I've got a link with this person? Are we similar [00:40:00] in some way? So yeah they absolutely do talk about how you generate liking, not just that liking is an important thing to create

MichaelAaron Flicker: The first reaction to this study is even extremely superficial similarity can make a big difference.

Knowing that you and a historical figure share a same birthday is notable, but it doesn't really imply any of those things. You talk about morality, strength, pleasantness. To me, those are so varied and different than a birthday, it shows that even that light connection can make an impact.

Richard Shotton: Yeah. And I actually think sometimes when you see an experiment where they've gone for a trivial bit of similarity and they still show an impact, that is super interesting 'cause it suggests if you are a salesperson, there's so much greater [00:41:00] opportunity. And Cialdini, to be fair to him, he's always emphasizing this should be done ethically.

What he says repeatedly is, "Look, this is not a license to go and just make up stories and pretend you're similar to people. But what you should do is ask lots of questions, find out genuinely about people's backgrounds, where they came from, what their hobbies are." And if you find out enough about people, there's generally an overlap, and what you wanna do is make sure the overlaps, the genuine, truthful overlaps, that's what you're emphasizing.

Now, maybe you share a love of I don't know, Jamaican poetry or NFL or golf. It doesn't really matter what the overlap is, but you want to identify a genuine one and then bring the conversation around to that.

Michael Aaron Flicker: Becau- and you see really effective salespeople do this. They find areas that they can have authentic overlap, true interest overlap, and this study shows everything will go [00:42:00] up.

But it's not only in the realm of face-to-face negotiations or face-to-face salespeople. Anywhere a brand can show an overlap that has some even a superficial connection with their buyers, it feels like that can make a difference to the way people perceive the brand. Y-

Richard Shotton: Yes. Yeah, absolutely. So this is front of mind because I was looking at some of his ads earlier today, and there is a comedian in Britain called Stewart Lee, and he's on the left of the political spectrum.

So what he does when he has a tour He puts his posters up, and there's a picture of him in the middle, and then on one side there'll be a a comment or a nice bit of praise from a left-wing paper like The Observer or The Guardian, and it'll say Stuart Lee's a genius." And then on the other side of his face on the poster, he will put a [00:43:00] horrendous review from the other political side.

So the one that sticks in my mind was from the Daily Mail, which is quite a right-wing paper in Britain. And it was Jan Moore, Muir, I think is the name, and she said Stuart Lee is a slime pit of bitterness. Now, what he's-- And it's a bit-- This, sorry, this is a bit different, but there's definitely a link here, which is Stuart Lee is very powerfully signaling to half of his audience.

He doesn't care about the other half. He knows he can make a very good business selling out stadium by just appealing to half. But he's saying, "I'm genuinely like you, Mr. Liberal, Mr. Left-wing Person, because I'm prepared to put off every single conservative." Now, this isn't meant to be a political point.

You could-- I'm sure you could find right-wing comedians who do the same thing but tell people that left-wingers hate them. But there's something very powerful about there, about a costly signal about what group, what tribe you are. And I think that is, to me, one of the funniest [00:44:00] applications. And we'll, we can put the image of that particular poster- Oh, yeah.

It'll be fun ... it's a bit pixelated, in the post-- in the show notes.

MichaelAaron Flicker: And you know what it's such a nice example of a lateral application of this. So it's one thing to say to someone, "You and I are the same. We both like golf." It's another thing for you to have like just a, you're both wearing a PGA shirt or you both have a baseball cap.

It just feels more believable. So you can show how the left-wing newspapers love you, but somehow the right-wing newspaper with zero of five stars- Yeah ... definitely do not recommend, feels more authentic.

Richard Shotton: I think so because you would only show the zero out of five review from the right-wing press if you knew that your content was never gonna amuse those people, if it was really genuinely aimed at the left-wingers.

So if you didn't [00:45:00] fundamentally believe that, you would never sacrifice half your audience. Because it's a signal that costs to communicate something, they've alienated half their audience, you only do it if you genuinely mean it, and people are very well attuned to that. There's an amazing study, I think it's from Wallach, that looks at coffee.

So it's not just comedians. And sometimes he says, "This is a coffee for people who love really dark, intense roasts." Other times the message says "This is not a coffee for people who don't like dark, intense roasts." So he's trying to say, "Look- th- this is a coffee for dark roast lovers. Other times it's not a coffee for light roast lovers, and he finds he sells far more if, or gets certainly more purchase intent if they emphasize who it's not for.

It's a really underused tactic, but as you say, it's authentic and credible

MichaelAaron Flicker: And you can get pretty creative with it. You and I have used in [00:46:00] presentations a subway ad, I think it was for a Bible app, that said, "Zero of five stars." Yes. "Definitely would not recommend the devil or Satan." yes. It's like- I love that.

Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. So i- there could be a connection that you make, an authentic connection- Yeah ... you make, even- Yeah ... if it's not, even if you are not Satan himself. Yes, yeah. So creatively, you can create this identity and this in-group by y- by having an insight- Yeah ... and an understanding that overlap can be very powerful.

Richard Shotton: Yeah. And wow, what a brief that would be to get as a creative let's let's really go to town on who we're not for. You could come up with some wonderfully distinctive advertising with that approach.

MichaelAaron Flicker: Lovely. So as we come to a wrap on our first mi- of our miniseries on Robert Cialdini's Influence book, [00:47:00] what are the big takeaways from today's conversation?

Richard Shotton: So two big principles we talked about. We talked about reciprocity. So that is the first principle Cialdini discusses in his book, and it's the idea that supposedly in every culture across the world, if someone receives a gift, they ha- they feel a strong cultural pressure to return the favor. We then looked at the behavioral insights team experiment that showed that if you gave people a gift, little gift, sweets, before thinking about donating some money to that charity, people were much more generous than if they hadn't received a gift.

We then moved into how can this be applied, and we talked about the power of a relevant gift to the context someone finds themselves in. So as you're entering a restaurant, a little sample of yogurt tapped into reciprocity better than a slightly irrelevant key ring, even though they had the same financial value.

We then talked about some lateral applications of this principle, and the brilliantly named door in the face [00:48:00] technique. Which is essentially rather than jump straight to your actual request, if you preface it with a much, much bigger request, when someone says no, and when you respond by minimizing and subduing your request, you have essentially shown willing, you've shown that you're prepared to move, and that creates this sense of indebtedness, and people are more likely then to agree to your follow-up request.

So that was the principle of reciprocity. We then talked about likability, how if as a salesperson or as a brand you can come across as likable, people assume, because of the halo effect, that you will also score much better on unrelated metrics like trustworthiness or quality or value for money. So we talked about the classic study into the halo effect Nisbett and Wilson.

But then the really good one was not just talking about why liking's important, we finished [00:49:00] with the study by Finch and Cialdini showing one of the best ways to generate likability is to try and find things genuine things in common with your audience. And maybe the point to double down on there, this isn't about an unethical invention of fake interests.

What it should be steering people to, certainly on the one-to-one basis, is have your ears open. Be genuinely interested in people, and you will find out what you've got in common, and that's something that you want to spend a lot of time talking about.

MichaelAaron Flicker: And with that, we say thank you to everyone for listening to today's episode.

Thank you for b- taking part in Inside Influence, our miniseries leading up to our interview with Robert Cialdini. If you liked today's episode, please do share it and comment, and follow our pages so that we can help reach more people just like you. And until next time, I'm MichaelAaron [00:50:00] Flicker.

Richard Shotton: And I'm Richard Shotton.

MichaelAaron Flicker: Thanks for listening

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