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MichaelAaron Flicker: [00:00:00] Welcome back to Behavioral Science For Brands, a podcast where we bridge the gap between academics and marketing. Every other week we sit down and go deep behind some of America's most successful brands. I'm Michael Aaron Flicker.

Richard Shotton: And I'm Richard Shotton.

MichaelAaron Flicker: And today we're sitting with Patrick Fagan, behavioral scientist and bestselling author of *Hooked: Why Cute Sells and Other Marketing Magic that We just Can't Resist*.

Let's get into it. So Patrick, welcome to Behavioral Science for Brands. Richard and I have made it our little mission to be on the hunt for how we can connect behavioral science and marketing. And we'd so excited to have you on the show today and to sit and talk. If you will indulge me, I thought I might introduce you to our audience and give everyone a little bit of a backgrounder on who you are.

And then we can get into a conversation. I.

Patrick Fagan: Yeah, sounds good. If it's, if it's [00:01:00] good, I'll put it on my LinkedIn.

MichaelAaron Flicker: That sounds like a, a good barter. That sounds good. So Patrick you're a renowned behavioral scientist and self-described data psychologist. And from all your writing I have seen, you thrive at this intersection of academia and commercial industry.

At the one hand you are a lecturer. Top universities like University College, London and have had your insights featured on The Guardian, the Economist, and others. And on the other hand you have your website, Patrick Fagan dot co.co k. Cut. I can do this Patrick fagan.co.uk where you are regularly writing and consulting and working with major brands to help them influence consumer behavior through cutting edge psychology.

And you're the author of not just the Book in the Introduction Hooked but a second book *free Your Mind* a [00:02:00] Sunday Times Bestselling Expose on the New World of Manipulation and how to resist it. And a

resume bullet. How could we miss you were formerly the lead psychologist at Cambridge Analytica on the co commercial side, not on the political team.

We're thrilled to welcome you.

Patrick Fagan: Thank you. I didn't see any Facebook data while I was there, or any, my crap. Yep. That was a great intro. Thank you for having me. I'm really happy to be here.

MichaelAaron Flicker: Yeah, we're, we're so excited to have you and you know, our listeners love stories. Before we get into the meat of today's discussion, maybe you could start.

By sharing us a little, how did you get into this industry? What brought you to behavioral science, consumer psychology? Where, where, where did this all begin for you?

Patrick Fagan: I've always been interested in advertising, actually, particularly, I used to love there was this book by Judith Williamson, *decoding advertisements* where she looks at the symbols and the semiotics [00:03:00] in advertising.

I just thought that was fascinating. This idea that there can be below the surface, another message that can be influencing people in ways they might not be aware of. Found that very interesting. And so I did psychology at UCL. Once I had that degree, I wanted to figure out how to make money from it.

So then I also did marketing at Kings as a master's. Then I tried to become famous in a band. It didn't work out, but you know, gave it a shot. And then from there I joined behavioral science consultancy. Came basically out of university into helping a supermarket sell more cat food. Pictures of cats did it surprisingly, but they, they're salient, they stood out, their emotional attention grabbing and relevant.

So they work quite, quite well. And then I've just been doing it since then, really researching and more importantly. Actually using it, practically using the insights to, to change behavior. I call it tending minds into money. So taking the insight but actually practically [00:04:00] using it.

MichaelAaron Flicker: Yeah. And that, that tension between academic insight and research and that field and actually commercializing it is a very fertile place to play. Richard and I spent a lot of time talking about it. How has that been as you've taken these academic research and brought it into commercial practice? A lot of our listeners are very interested in how they can bring.

What they hear on the show, what they read into the market. How is that, what's your experience been taking academics and bringing it into the market? Well

Patrick Fagan: One thing of course is that these things always need testing in the market, which sounds obvious, but there's no kind of silver bullets.

When I consult for clients, I'm very clear that I'm not giving them the answer. I'm giving them things to test. If, for example, I had a client recently who is a supplements brand, [00:05:00] and one of the things we recommended they do is remove the currency side from the pricing because there's fair few studies showing that, for example, in restaurants, if you do that, sales will go up 'cause it feels less like money.

So they did it and sales went down significantly. And that's because. Supplements is a category where trust is important. So if you start kind of visibly manipulating and being funny about pricing and things, it might just put people off. It also could have been people coming from other countries to buy the product and they confused.

So the point is we had what seemed like a fairly quick win sore thing, but actually it, it didn't work as we needed to be tested.

MichaelAaron Flicker: And, and in that example to connect the dots for folks, they rolled out something a little bit more broad than running a smaller test or the, or We learned that in a smaller test.

Patrick Fagan: Yeah, they did a small test first, kind of a split test to see if it [00:06:00] works which it didn't. But that's probably one of the main things is of course testing the, and, and knowing your audience and your context. So not every Nigel intervention is gonna work for everyone the same. So social proof might be great if you're selling baked beans, but

not if you're selling a luxury handbag because people don't want the one that everyone else has.

Vice versa, no one's gonna buy limited edition baked beans. Really, I think clients did do that once, but never again, which probably tells you everything. So it is really important to do that research and get to know the context and everything fast because otherwise outside of the lab. It might not work.

Richard Shotton: Do think it's the biases, like you mentioned, the scarce and social proof there. Do you think it's that the bias isn't relevant in particular category or it has to be used in a, a very specific way? So there's a, just thinking there's a tin soup example, mean it's a bit different from beans, but I think it's of the same [00:07:00] milk by Hosh Kent and Wantin where they I think it was a Sioux City.

They sometimes sold them, you know, 79 cents was 89 cents and they got a few sales. Other times they said was 89 cents now 79 cents and some number you can buy is four hands. I think the sales were 3.1 or something to 3.5. So they were using scarcity there. They weren't trying to say it was a limited edition, but I trying to create a sense of that promotion was, you know, I had such a good deal that it was hurting the supermarket or.

Such a good deal that it's gonna sell out. Might, might annoy people. They use scarcity, but it was a very specific type of scarcity. Do you think any bias can be used? Any category, it's just how you use it? Or do you actually think there are no go areas with certain, certain categories?

Patrick Fagan: Yeah, that's a great point.

I remember with COVID, when the supermarkets would say maximum three, it's like, what do you do? You're gonna have the [00:08:00] opposite effect here. Or maybe, you know, maybe they did it deliberately, but. That would cause people to buy instead of one, they might buy three, which of course might be an anchoring effect as well.

But yeah, people definitely for toilet roll, they felt that scarcity when you probably wouldn't normally. So I think yes, it's about framing a presentation of context

Michael Aaron Flicker: and a lot of your points that I've heard you speak about on other shows and in some of your writing is really about insight into the consumer, really understanding the consumer's biases and the consumer's preferences.

How do you guide clients to discover that? Is that through research? Is that through is that through observation? How, if someone wants to make sure their biases are, the, the, so the behavioral science they're using is Right applied, testing it is a, is a good safety measure. But to think about that, how do you, what type of research do you got?

Do you recommend

Patrick Fagan: Patrick? So normally we do some desk [00:09:00] research and that could be doing a rewind of research they've done in the past, but they're probably not looking at it as behavioral scientists. So they could have a, a list of motivations they've found, but they wouldn't know how to translate that into behavioral interventions.

And also a literature review, which is can do quite easily now. Chat gpt deep researchers. It's not as good as a human yet obviously, but it's still very good to get a flavor of cognitive biases and motivations and personality traits that might be relevant. And that gives you kind of a foundation.

But then to get the best interventions, in my experience, there has to be some out of primary research. And that's involves going and just talking to the customers. Obviously it's a bit more involved than that, but I'll give you an example. It was an investment app. They wanted to improve their referral scheme.

And so if you refer the app to someone, you get 50 pounds. That's what it was previously. [00:10:00] But through interviews and just talking to their customers, we found that the reason they were referring people was not for the 50 pounds, was because they wanted to share this amazing investment app where they were making great returns.

They wanted friends with family too as well. So we just changed the framing, the, the essence of the message to being about sharing the wealth. And then when they did that, it ended up being their best performing campaign. They got 4,000 new customers from it. But we wouldn't have known that if we hadn't have done that primary research.