

Interview: Tara Austin, behavioral strategist at Ogilvy, on how small behavioral cues drive large-scale change

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 sitting with Tara Austin, a behavioral and brand strategist at Ogilvy, and a co-host to one of the largest behavioral science and marketing conferences N Stock.

Let's get into it. Tara, welcome to Behavioral Science for Brands. We're so excited to have you with us.

Tara Austin: Hi guys. Thank you so much for having me. Delighted to be here.

MichaelAaron Flicker: We are super excited about the conversation we're gonna have today. And before we get into our conversation. If you'll indulge me, I'd love to give our listeners a little background on who you are and then we'll get into our conversation.

So, as we said in the intro, you're a behavioral and [00:01:00] brand strategist. You co-host Nudge Doc, and you're also serve as a partner at Ogilvy's Behavioral Science Practice, where you've worked on everything from sustainability to public health, to consumer decision making. You're involved in a lot of campaigns and think a lot about how we can change consumer's mindset and behavior.

And I hope we get to this today. Additionally, outside of your day job, you have taken the reins as campaign director at par, which is a group campaigning for cyclo bin access rights in the United Kingdom. So excited to hear about that. Excited to talk about behavioral science. So welcome to the show.

Tara Austin: Thank you. Thank you.

MichaelAaron Flicker: Our listeners love stories, Tara, and I was thinking maybe like all humans, we'd love to hear a story to start the day. Mm-hmm. How did you get involved in the marketing and advertising industry? What was your first time you learned about behavioral science as a [00:02:00] practice? Can you just tell us a little bit how you got introduced to the field overall?

Tara Austin: Yeah, sure. Well, I, my, my introduction to behavioral science was pretty straightforward because it was really the birth, at the birth of the whole field of applied behavioral science because Rory Sutherland and Jazz Groom were setting up the Ogilvy Behavioral Science practice that was called at the time, Ogilvy Change.

And Ogilvy is one of one of the biggest ad agencies in the world. And at the time, I was a pretty junior, I guess. Brand strategist. I think I was working on sort of Hellmans and comfort, lots of Unilever brand doves making advertising. And and Rory and J set up what was then called Ogilvy Change.

And at the same in that same time I had this idea it was triggered by the London riots in [00:03:00] 2011 was it now. And I was really shocked by the London riots, but I used to get the gross some magazine and people used to sort of jokingly put it on my desk because they were kind of teasing me about it, reading it.

But you know, I was working a lot of fast moving consumer goods and I found it interesting. And the editorial that year, that week after the riots was talking about shop security shutters and how difficult they were for shopkeepers to install. And I really, I had this insight about the town planning process actually.

And yet I was familiar with shop shutters and there was an artist called Ben Ein in Hackney and in Hastings where I'm from who'd been painting these shop shutters really beautifully. And I, I realized that these shutters were a visible signal of the presence of crime in the, in the area. So every one of your listeners will be familiar with broken windows theory.

And I think it's, you know, [00:04:00] something of a contested idea these days perhaps. But it, it seemed, and it rang true to me, that that shop shutters were. Signaling to people that this is a bad place, that you might be a bad person as well and that you won't welcome. They certainly make an area less welcoming, but they also weirdly make an area less light as well.

'cause the light doesn't reflect in the glass. I had all this insight about shop shutters and I sort of thought, but they're big, relatively flat media spaces. Surely we could do something with them. And I remember having a conversation with j where we were thinking about what could we do with shop shutters that might turn them from a sort of symbol of crime.

And something that was part of the, I felt it was part of the problem in terms of how alienated people were from their local communities. And, and in some cases, you know, where the, where the, there was mob rule in the London riots. [00:05:00] People ripped the shutters off their runners. They did it on mass. And it was, it was a very sad time.

It was, it was sort of weird. And, and I thought, well, hang on. There must be something we can do with these shutters. And we decided actually we could paint the faces of local babies onto shop security shutters to see if we could bring down antisocial behavior. And j made me commit to doing this as the sort of first experiment that Ogilvy change would ever run.

And. Not only did we, we do it and we generated very strong kind of interest around the world in this experiment. The results were slight, but there was some reduction in antisocial behavior in the areas, particularly area immediately around the shutters. And we subsequently repeated the experiment at eimg as well.

But I think what was so interesting about that was. It was all at the, it was at the, the birth, you know, nudge [00:06:00] thinking fast and slow to only come out in, in 2010, I think it was. The experiment we did was in 2012 and it, it went all over the world and it, and it won. Can lions for the o for the Ogilvy agency, which if you know anything about advertising is like the highest award.

Gold lions for gorilla advertising. I think it was in, in that category, but really it was a social experiment. See, yeah. Could we use cute baby spaces? There was some science from the University of Pennsylvania and Munster that suggested that the round faces and the big cheeks, big eyes, small features, the Disney kind of proportion faces, anime kind of proportion faces.

That these faces cute. Were the, the baby schema is how they describe it in the literature. And that the baby schema could encourage nurturing behaviors. So we were trying to use this science, apply in the real world, see if we can bring down antisocial [00:07:00] behavior, and it kind of set the world light a little bit.

It's a bit of an old case study now. E even though it was a tiny little experiment at the time, it, it introduced me to the world of behavioral science. And from there on, I sort of, my interest grew my, I started reading and reading and reading. I'm the only one on our team, apart from Rory Sutherland who doesn't have a psychology degree.

But at the time I, you know, it was, yeah, I mean, the behavioral science field didn't even exist when I was at university. I do wish I'd studied psychology, but I've, I've, I hope that I've made up for it by now. And that was the beginning. Ended up running the. Behavioral science practice and then leaving Ogilvy for a bit, doing, working at a couple of other agencies and doing, you know, a lot of, again, behavioral behavior change work.

But I've, my career has sort of bridged the brand and advertising world into the more applied behavioral [00:08:00] science world, and I've found lately that there's great strength for me in kind of yeah. Bridging that gap a little bit.

Richard Shotton: Yeah. I, I, I love that as an example. Babies of the bar. Babies of the borough.

Yeah.

Tara Austin: Old people. Kidding. I,

Richard Shotton: I had always thought there was a different rationale behind it, so I didn't really know about the, the, the baby sma, the baby schema. I thought you'd been inspired by the Melissa. Bates, I think she was at university in Newcastle. She came up with this idea of the, the watching eyes.

Watching

Tara Austin: eyes. Oh yeah. No, but, but Richard, we knew, we, we never talked about the watching eyes because we were very conscious that, you know, when we painted these babies onto shop shutters and they were local, we wanted them to be local babies, we went through many hoops to recruit local babies and get, can you imagine getting sign off on the.

Pictures of children. I mean, it was really quite difficult. But and we were very much conscious of the science around watching eyes, but we never talked about it because we did not [00:09:00] want this project to be perceived as something coming from Big Brother or, or something in which we were, you know, suggesting surveillance.

But subsequently, when we did the experiment again in 1990 and we worked with Wing Commander Keith Deer, he's now not in the military anymore, and I think he objects to me still calling him Wing Commander, but I can't help it. He's

Advertisement: got but Keith who was working at Oxford at the time was specifically looking at watching Eyes Theory and how surveillance changes behavior.

Tara Austin: And he again, found a small effect around our shutters with the presence of the babies. Because babies have eyes as well.

Richard Shotton: Yes.

Tara Austin: Yeah. Great. Because he

Richard Shotton: did the. Because the, the debates and study that started the whole watching eyes thing, and if people haven't heard this, it, it is quite a simple study. She does it in a university kind of common room for staff where there's an honesty box for milk.

So if you have a cup of tea, you're meant to put five or 10 pence in each time. And she [00:10:00] randomly alternates imagery above the honesty box. So one week it might be flowers, a picture of some flowers. The next week, a picture of eyes. And then she looks at the price paid essentially per liter of milk consumed.

And she sees this very clear pattern A week with eyes get this nice big spike in pavement essentially doubling versus the flowers. Flowers. It drops again, Isaac, it goes back up. And it seems to be that this this reminding people that they might be being watched gets 'em to behave in a socially acceptable way.

So fascinating. Would strongly recommend

Tara Austin: Keith Deere's. 10 minutes. We only give him 10 minutes. I was embarrassed by this, but 10 minutes nudge doc. Talk on exactly this and, and watching eyes and, and surveillance and how that can, that can shift our behavior. Certainly,

Richard Shotton: I love this idea of what you, what what inspires you and what you talk about is very different, and I think that's a lovely thing.

Sorry, Michael.

MichaelAaron Flicker: Oh, not at all. I was [00:11:00] just gonna say for those that may not be familiar with this campaign that Tara and Richard are talking about, we'll put it in the show notes. There's a lovely BBCA 92nd story on this. So in the show notes, you could see in these cute round baby faces, it is hard to it, it, it's less about the eyes and a lot more about the baby's cute anime faces that I think that connected with me when I saw the case study.

Tara Austin: It's interesting. I think the same year someone sent me a experiment in India where people fond of spitting a kind of I think it must be some sort of like red to tobacco type stuff.

Richard Shotton: Oh, they're chew beetle, isn't it? That's the Beatle that's, and

Tara Austin: it's the beetle stuff and, but it, it's, it marks the, the walls, people spit it on the side of walls, and so you get these little red streaks everywhere.

And so what they did was start painting gods onto the walls to prevent people from [00:12:00] spitting. I have long been talking to TFL and various others about whether or not we could do something specifically aimed around public urination, because frankly, people do not want to urinate on faces. We've also, I've, I've long wanted to do an experiment with with puppies.

Piss puppies has been something that I've never managed to get it away, but, you know, to just to paint. Very cute puppy faces into areas where people are otherwise doing their business. I mean, yes, is it gonna be, is it gonna stop them? No. But is it gonna just move them somewhere else? But, you know, that may be all that you want.

And in our case, the parade where we did this in Woolwich and Woolwich had been a, a really sad case during the London riots. A lot of pe, a lot of rioting, and people really destroying their, their own local community. But you know where we did it, there was a taxi rank. It was a sort of 24 hour late night area.

And there was, you know, public urination and all of those kinds of things. And, you [00:13:00] know, the, the, the shopkeepers, it, it matters so much antisocial behavior. The, the statistics might not matter all that much, but whether or not their shop has been urinated on matters to them. And so I think often with some of the things that we suggest.

And these kind of techniques that we are, we talk about and try and popularize they, they matter because even if they don't, even if they're not in the lab, and even if, even if something's not that replicable, if it works for you, God, then go

and do it. You know, if, if you've got a, a friend of mine has a wine and cheese shop, you know, getting him to take the pound, sign off his menu and seeing, okay, does the, do the sales go up because you've reduced the pain of paying and suddenly a seven pound glass of wine looks like it's only a seven.

Oh, I can drink that. You know, if it works for him. Does it really matter if it works for everybody else? Arguably not. So I think there's a lot to be said for just the, the, the work to [00:14:00] share the, this thinking because the context will be different every single time. But it gives people an opportunity to, to try these things.

They should go out there and, you know, try these things for themselves.

Richard Shotton: I mean, the pound sign. Point that you mentioned? Mm. I think the study was by Sybil Yang works with St. Andrew Cafe, New York, and sometimes people sit down and there is a menu with the dollar sign next to everything. Other people sit down at the table and the dollar sign's been removed, and she found that if you had the menu and there was no currency symbol, you spend I think 7% more.

The argument being. You know, making, spending a little bit more abstract, increases willingness to pay. Now you'll get lots of pendants saying, oh no, but it's not statistically significant.

Advertisement: Mm.

Richard Shotton: And it's a little bit of, well wait a second, it's not statistically significant at 0.95 mm.

Tara Austin: It is

Richard Shotton: statistically significant, a 0.9.

So there's a 90% chance the results were not random. And what you could say is, well, [00:15:00] there is something slightly arbitrary about academia picking 0.95 as this Yes. Absolute benchmark. If I'm a restaurant and it's almost costless to take the dollar or pound signs off

Tara Austin: Yes. And

Richard Shotton: I've got a 90% probability it's gonna work.

Well, that to me sounds like a pretty decent commercial test. It might not sue academics, but there's a difference between academia and commerciality. So yeah, the, the, the dollar signs is a, a, a lovely study, which could be tested far more easily, very cheaply.

Tara Austin: Absolutely. Absolutely. And we, and we, I very much live in the applied world.

You know, we are not p hacking, we are p hacking rather the data because we're, we are not looking for what yeah. Statistically is so significant. As much as we are looking for what the client is happy with, what makes the client happy, what gives them what's gonna make them richer help their business, help them personally look good in front of their [00:16:00] own bosses.

That's our, our job first and foremost is, is to, to do their bidding. And so anything that works and however it works, and actually it's interesting when we're talking about the babies of the borough, I think it's, is it called a lollapalooza effect? The layers of these things, you know, are, are combined and that's what you know, increases its power.

And, and we, we often talk, and if you may have covered this somewhere already if you spoke to Rory already but we often talk about this case study from Australia. My dear friend Sam Tatum, who sadly passed away this year. But he ran a, a campaign for KFC Australia where we tested against a control, various different messages aimed at increasing the perceived value of \$1 chip.

Have you heard this before? Am I boring you?

Richard Shotton: No, no, no, no. Sorry. Noting this down. So I didn't realize Sam was behind this. I knew it was KFC and yeah. Global [00:17:00] Australia. But yes. So yeah, this is a brilliant one to talk about. Yeah, absolutely. Yeah.

Tara Austin: And Sam yeah, so that we, we very much use the scientific method, which I think is interesting for people in the advertising industry.

'cause normally we kind of zone in on one strategy, like this is the right strategy and then we execute it maybe in different ways. But with this experiment, what we did was try and develop as many different ways as possible using the academic literature to guide us using different behavioral science principles to guide us develop in, in total, we had 90 different ways of saying.

Our chips for \$1. And so there were various different messages. Maybe some like a value trade off message where we'd say our chips for \$1, but only on collection. Right? We won't deliver them to you. Like you have to collect them to get them for a dollar or, you said you want chips for free.

We said we'll meet you halfway at \$1 or something like [00:18:00] this. And there's some sort of reciprocity or a social norm. Everybody is you know, going for our chips. Everybody loves these chips. And but the, what was interesting is we, we had 90 different ways of saying this. We whittled this down to, I think maybe about five that went into a, a live test.

We actually used social media to test them, which is unusual for us. Now. We normally do a, a test that might be an implicit association test or a kind of max if quantitative test where we're teasing out which are the best. Optimal ways of saying something and framing something. And then when we had a winning proposition of those five, we then piloted it and tested it in South Australia in a test market.

And the reason I mentioned it's because the, the winning proposition was. Our chips. \$1 maximum. Four per peeps. Maximum four per person. Now, this was a disclaimer for the chips [00:19:00] and we elevated it. And in the case studies and things, when people talk about this, they usually say, and this was our anchoring condition because it anchored the purchase to four.

Everybody's doing it to four. But the reality is it's far too simplistic to say, okay, it's just this behavioral science principle at work. Because clearly there is some social norming going on. Hang on. Is everybody else buying four packets? Is that the norm here? That is being implied and, and, and there's a scarcity piece of, oh, it's maximum four per person.

That's as many as I'm allowed to have. And I have to tell you, we sold a disgusting number of four packet sales. You know, the, when we look at overall chip sales, chip sales, were up 56%, \$1 chips. Just by it, by bringing in this campaign, we help. We held all other factors constant. And then in South Australia we had radio ads and point of sale and they said maximum for per pees, 56% increase [00:20:00] in in chip sales.

But also within that 56%, a horrifying amount of people bought four packets which they otherwise wouldn't have done. And we do also work with Public Health, England, and many, many health bodies. So there was a little bit of conflict, I think around that in terms of the results a bit of we felt a little bit, we felt a bit conflicted about it.

But it does just go to show I think that you can have such a powerful effect even on something like price without changing the product or the price to change the perceived value through a little bit of framing. And I would argue it's, it's not enough to say in the purity of the lab, actually, we just want to, you know, people to think about the four packets.

No, you want them to buy into the scarcity. You want them to buy into the social norm. You want, you want these things to come together. An entourage effect if you like, a lollapalooza effect, if that's the right language for it. Because that's where you get the most [00:21:00] psychological power. And again, because we're not working in the lab, we don't necessarily wanna pull these things apart from one another.

We want to give the, the client the maximum bang for their buck. So we're happy to kind of push these things together.

Richard Shotton: I, I love this as an example. I think it's the theme from all the examples you've said. Is this kind of creativity of application. So watch guys effect or or scarcity. Very well known biases.

But what most people I think would've done is just say, there aren't many chips left, or you've only got till August the 13th to buy them. Slightly vague, slightly nebulous. The audience might be skeptical. A physical, tangible, concrete limit in what people could do. That is a credible signal. I think it's such a, a, a pathway way of applying it.

In fact, Michael and I were so interested in the, the KFC piece that, that Ogilvy did, that we reran it to see if it worked on Americans with in a different category.

So [00:22:00] 282 people randomized into two groups. We said to half of them, Sierra Nevada Pay allow costs 1890 \$9 in your local supermarket.

How good value is this? And just under 14% of people thought it was good or great. Remaining people, same brand. 12 pack of Sierra Nevada pay allow for 1899. But we said maximum number of cases you can buy is six. And the proportion who thought it was good or great value went up to 22%, or just under. So you get this 59% improvement in terms of how good a deal people think.

It's, and I think it all comes back to this kind of body language, this credibility. Mm-hmm. And the assumption is if the retailer is not letting me take as much

my wine, if they are restricting it, it must be because it's a loss leader, they're, they're losing money on each sale. So it must be a good deal's.

Yeah. Brilliant, brilliant campaign.

Tara Austin: Mm. Scarcity as well. Right? Which just so powerfully driven by our desire not to [00:23:00] lose out on something. Yeah. For anyone out there who is, you know, in the dating market, just remember that, you know.

MichaelAaron Flicker: Terry you raised did. That is a lesson that goes beyond our brand marketing that is a life, a life thing you could take with you.

It strikes me that your personality as a brand leader, your personality as a marketer makes you more or less susceptible to wanting to use behavioral science. And you mentioned Rory. When we were having our chat with him, he talked about how in all of his travels he's found entrepreneurs are just generally more attracted to his content.

And hi, behavioral science and corporate leaders, just generally speaking, are a little bit more thoughtful maybe is the, is the more correct term. And it [00:24:00] struck me in the way you were going through in describing we don't work in a lab. We are interested in the maximum value for our clients. That really there's a question of.

Does it matter exclusively whether it's provable to 0.9 Richard, as you were saying? Or does it really matter that I could test and learn in my environment? And it's just such a reminder that if you can set up brands, if you could set up commercial experiments where you have the ability to test and learn low stakes environments where you can test, just gives you a lot more chances to be successful.

And I think that's easily lost when there's so much riding on every campaign. There's so much riding on every decision you make. If you can have a lower stakes way to test, you have a lot of opportunity to have something like the KFC Australia example come to life.

Tara Austin: Absolutely. And I mean, Rory is quite fond of saying you have to test the things that your competitors won't test because therein lies competitive [00:25:00] advantage.

You know, and we are seeing now with, dare I say, the AI revolution, but nobody wants to talk about anything else. But we are seeing you know, these are

predictive machines. These large language models, they, and predictive predictivity is the enemy of creativity, you know, all we had Roger I Martin nudge Dock this year sort of the, the, the CEO whisperer, business leader leading thinker.

And he was, you know, talking about how all data comes from the past, right? It all comes from the past. And so if, and so everything that our AI are being trained, trained on is. Something that's already been done. And I think we do need to really, in the, in the business world, we have to be creative.

We have, if we're gonna even get any kind of attention, if people are even gonna [00:26:00] notice in their world what it is that we are trying to suggest to them then we have to break the pattern of their thought. And that means that we have to have salience. We have to stand out. We need to do that. And, and creativity can, can vastly help us with that, but we can't really necessarily get it at the press of a button if that button is relying on what's been done before it.

So I think there's a role more than ever right now for the, the human intelligent, the lateral thinking and the new connections that only we can humanly judge to be good or worthy. But you know, that it's, it's, it's, it's gonna be increasingly important. We're just gonna see so much dribble and garbage out there.

And at the same time, I am happy that some of this thinking will be applied more easily, more generally. We have nudge agents within our Ogilvy AI's system now that anyone [00:27:00] anywhere in the business can, can use and can ask, Hey, I've got this campaign coming up. I might not have. The time or resources to involve the behavioral science team.

But I've got opportunity because Dove's got a new kind of deodorant and there's this special factor to it. And what can the AI tell me might be relevant behavioral science thinking that I could leverage. And, you know, I, I've always believed that this, this field, you know, doesn't just belong to their behavioral science practice.

It's something that is increasingly, it's something that any good brand strategist should certainly be on top of. But also I think that this is part of humanity growing up. I think that this is the kind of stuff that can and should be taught to our children because we don't, we're not given a user manual.

We, we. Our education system does a lot to tell us about the world around us, and yet the world around [00:28:00] us is manifested by what's going on

between our ears our relationships how we learn, how we influence one another, how we get what we want. And and we really have to understand that first.

When I, when I do training for people, I always like to frame it as therapy. I always like to start any BCI training as saying like, this isn't about your consumer or your client or your customer, whatever. It's about you and how you understand yourself first and foremost, and that's what's so exciting.

That's what's, you know, that's why I think the very best behavioral science thinking when you, when it comes and you see it, it's obvious in retrospect because you know it intuitively to be true. But the scientific method can help us all as well. So yeah, the more testing, the more we can learn, the more test environments, why not like, just try.

We, we can't always predict what our audience, how they're gonna respond, and we need to understand that [00:29:00] the context is everything. So just keep trying, keep learning as much as we can.

Richard Shotton: With the campaigns that you've run mm-hmm. Has there been a result that has really surprised you? You mentioned the importance of testing.

We can't always predict perfectly how consumers are gonna behave. Is there either something you've run, colleagues have run, or, or you've, you've, or maybe something completely outside of the agency where it's been a real surprise in what they've, they've discover.

Tara Austin: Surprising what they've discovered. Oh, probably.

Do you know, I've, I've, I, one of the things I've realized about myself in the last few years is that I have a really bad autobiographical memory. I like when people ask me questions about my own life, I really struggle to,

Richard Shotton: or someone else at Ogilvy if it's

Tara Austin: I tell you one do you wanna hear about what Something that really failed?

Oh, yeah,

Richard Shotton: yeah,

yeah.

Tara Austin: I always think that's very instructive. And it's not mine, so I can talk about it. But I, [00:30:00] I will tell you, there was a in the sort of early days of the, of Rivy change, there was a council London council that we were working with. I won't name names, but there was a London council that we were doing a little bit of work for, and they want to increase direct debit payments to the council.

And so what they were doing was they were sending out leaflets and we said, okay, well we will, you know, behaviorally optimize your leaflet. And they gave us a tiny little bit of money. And we, and we did you know, we did a test where we had maybe three or four different conditions and using different behavioral science principles, your standard stuff, the stuff that, the behavioral insights team, the nudge unit, they, they all do.

We all do. And we do a huge amount now on email, for example. But it was, it was a leaflet. And so we tested it and we tested against the control. And when the results came back. There was no difference. There was no difference, which of course is, you know, very embarrassing for us on one level. But on [00:31:00] another level, it meant that we could say to the client.

There is no point producing this leaflet. Sorry, because the control was no leaflet at all. I should have made that really clear. The control was no leaflet at all. And so there was no difference in the signup between the people who received the leaflets and the people who received no leaflet whatsoever.

And so our recommendation was don't send the leaflet. There are other things that we can do within the process in the online portal and sign up and blah, blah, blah. But we, we saved them that little bit of money on printing and posting even if, you know, our, our leaflet hadn't had the psychological power that we might have wanted it to.

So I think there's always something to be learned when you test and when you test appropriately and when you do, make sure that you've got the right controls. And I think just recently we did a a project. We did quite a bit of psychological profiling of audiences. [00:32:00] We did a project for a client whose name, there's so many projects I would love to talk to you about that I absolutely cannot, unfortunately.

But we did a project in which we had intended to talk about the different flavor profiles of a certain product and how the different flavor profiles related to

different personality profiles. We, we had this hypothesis that, you know, people who liked. Let's say, I'm gonna make this up, but mint, were higher on conscientiousness.

'cause we have seen that in other categories. Actually. I have seen that in other categories. And people who liked, I don't know, vanilla were more agreeable. And so we, we did this project to to profile different flavors audiences for different flavors of this brand. And what came back was, again, was not statistically significant, but the very clever team running this had had the insight to make sure that [00:33:00] they'd inserted a open question into the personality profiling.

So what they, what they were able to do was ask people what they, they thought about themselves, their, their personality, how they des and how they would describe the personality of these different flavor drinkers, mint or whatever, vanilla, and what they could then do was do a whole piece of really interesting analysis on that language.

And we have a wonderful tool called Relative Insight that allows us to compare language data sets and and see the relative differences in the dataset. I, I love this tool because it's just another way of digging away at something that's very human and very qualitative, the words that we use.

And you can tease out the, you know, how different audiences might use different words, different grammar, just talk about different things. And it can tell you things in very large data sets that you would otherwise never be able to see with the human eye. But [00:34:00] it was also a really good case of just making sure that in our proposal and in our testing we had we'd prepared for the worst.

And I think that is something that you know, it has to set us apart in the applied world from the kind of academic conditions we take the academic work. We apply it and bastardize it for our own uses. But one of the things we have to be very careful for is that we never get it wrong. We always build in a backdoor.

We always build into our proposals and the work that we do that if, if this doesn't work, we're gonna find another way to make this work. And I think that is a different kind of it's a different kind of standard that we have to apply for ourselves. I wish I could tell you which client, but I can't.

I'm sorry. I'm sorry. That's okay. It's got lots of

MichaelAaron Flicker: value even without even without that.

Richard Shotton: You've covered lots of great campaigns that you and your colleagues have done. [00:35:00] One other that I think you've been involved in, which I've. I love is this campaign about one binnies rubbish? Oh yeah. Can you tell us a bit about, about that?

What you maybe what the campaign was that people haven't heard of it? Yeah. And then what some of the behavioral insights powered

Tara Austin: Yeah. Yeah. This was a, this was a bit of a favorite of mine actually. So my very first client that I ever worked on in my career was wrap the, was and recycling action program for the government.

I have subsequently worked on wrap at least another two or three times. I've won the wrap pitch in two different agencies. I won it in Ogilvy and then I won it off Ogilvy in my last agency before Ogilvy, and now we have it back again in Ogilvy. So I've worked on it many, many times, the on waste and recycling, and it's a, it's something that's very close to my heart.

And recycle For London came to us as part of the wrap kind of roster. And they said we've got a problem with like 18 to 34 year olds in London. We need to increase the [00:36:00] recycling rate. They're just not recycling anywhere near as much as they should. And London is a really, if you, if you've done any work in waste and recycling, you'll know that it's a really complex field because we just do not have our act together in this country.

And so, ev there's something like 14 different levels of service that you could have in any, in any property in London. And I could be in a terrace house and be recycling everything and in, in the building next door because it's actually a block of flats. They can't recycle half of the things that I next door can recycle.

So it's a really complex field because how do you create, as they'd come to us and said, how do you, you know, what advertising can we make? We wanna make some bus sides, we wanna make some out of home. You know, we've got all this, we've got this footprint in London, we've got assets, we've got bin lorries, we've got you know, TFL transport for London.

We've got poster sites, we've got things we can use, [00:37:00] but we don't know what to say. And we've got this problem because a bus driving from Peckham to Tottenham is gonna go through various different boroughs with

various different levels of recycling. How are you gonna say to all of them, Hey, you should be recycling your paper.

You should be recycling your plastics like this. Or and there were lots and lots of questions. We'd already done some interesting implicit association testing around things like pizza boxes. Most people think you can recycle a pizza box if there's any kind of food on it, you can't recycle it.

And that causes contamination. And so one of the things was, should we be telling people that they can't recycle pizza boxes? Should we be telling them that they can recycle aluminum? And they don't realize they can do that? What should we be telling them? And it was just, it was very complicated and there were loads of stakeholders and it was all a bit of a beggars model.

And the reason I love this project was 'cause we came along and said, no, no, no, you guys, we are gonna clear the [00:38:00] decks here. And we used the comm B behavioral model developed by Susan Mickey and a team at UCL, which, we are very, I'm very, very fond of it's really mostly, I'd say it is particularly useful in public health.

And kind of these behavior change campaigns like this one where you've got an altruistic drive and it's at the heart of the government's behavior change wheel which they were developing at the time to see how they could nudge people without incentives and carrots and sticks. But we, comm B is a really fantastic model 'cause it has these three elements.

Yeah, it's comm, CCOM, but in the model it looks more like CMO for, for boring reasons. But capability, motivation, and opportunity are the three elements of the model, and they break down into six further elements. And all of this is widely available online and, and in your show notes, I'm sure. But a fantastic, very simple model that was allowed us to say [00:39:00] that c, c for capability, can I do the behavior m am I motivated to do the behavior and o do I have the opportunity, the facilitating factors that kind of help nudge the behavior.

And everything up to that point, if we're focusing on capability and motivation do people have the knowledge? Can they do it? Do they actually know what they can recycle? And and do they want to do so? And with this very simple model, we basically said, look. Yes, you could focus there, but you've got lots of challenges.

The lowest hanging fruit is what in the model is called opportunity. And it's the environmental opportunity aspect of this, which is they didn't have a recycling bin in their house. So actually when we looked to this younger audience, these transitory people coming through London, staying in groups and different kinds of housing, the renting.

Yes, they they recycled [00:40:00] in the office and they recycled on the street, but they weren't necessarily recycled at home because they had a bin that maybe belonged to their landlord and they didn't necessarily have a recycling bin. Our PR team came up with this lovely phrase, bin digestion, but what we meant by that was the piles of crap that sat around the bottom of people's bins or in a plastic bag somewhere near the bin, maybe that had some cans and some bottles and some paper.

Because the reality is that, yes, I could tell you about Pete's books. I could tell you about all this stuff, but people, these young people, they knew that you should recycle paper. They knew that you could recycle cans and bottles and things like that. We didn't have to tell them about those things, and yet they weren't doing it.

Why? Because in the, in the last mile, at the moment of truth, they didn't have a recycling bin. And at very best, they might put something next to the bin, and then when it was full, someone had just pop it into the bin and take it out and, and throw it away. So what we said to them is. We've got a different behavioral brief here.

We don't need to tell people to [00:41:00] recycle. We need to tell people to get a recycling bin, and we need to tell people that that is the new social norm. And so again, with our lovely creative hats on the line for this campaign was one bin is rubbish. One bin is rubbish, which to any of your American listeners, rubbish means both trash.

And very bad. Naughty. Not a good idea. It's a stupid thing to do. So one bin was a stupid thing to do. And actually two bins and the other, the, the kind of line was sort out another one for your recycling. And the beautiful thing about this campaign was it could run all over London on every bus, on every bin lre.

We could have one consistent message that was normalizing the idea that everybody ought to have more than one bin. And in the three years that we were running this, and you still, I still see it on, on bin bin LRE deliveries around the capital to this [00:42:00] day. But in the three years where we were looking at this and measuring it, we doubled the number of bins in London, in homes.

It went from 1.1 to 2.1. And so I think we, you know, took a lot of heart from that, and I certainly did. It was a, it was a lovely, what was so beautiful about it was that the simplicity of the strategy cut through. And the model using combi, using a behavioral model to say, look, you've got this big, messy challenge.

We can actually just go for the lowest hanging fruit from a behavioral point of view and zone in on. This is a new, it's a different brief entirely getting to get a recycling bin. And we did all kinds of things for that. But it was, it was a kind of very simple strategy. And, and the simplicity, the elegance of that is is something I'm quite proud of,

Richard Shotton: of itself.

It's an amazing campaign, fantastic results. And I think hearing about it from, you know, the, the, the Met beginning through to the simplicity of result is just [00:43:00] super interesting as a, as a case study. I think people can also apply these learnings far more widely. The fact that you ended up on not motivation.

Not trying to change people's levels of motivation, but making the task easier. That is something that I think a lot of brands could focus on. Hmm.

Tara Austin: Interestingly, and actually that, you know what, that brings me right back to when I said we call it combi, but actually the model looks like CMO when you see it written out because, and the reason for that is within the model C and O, capability and opportunity, can I do it and am I nudged to do it?

M sits in the middle, motivation sits in the middle because those two things on either side of it actually drive motivation, which is to say that if something is really, if you can do it and it's psychologically very easy, you know how to do it. You have the energy, the stamina, whatever, everything that you need in place to do it, it's easy for you to do.[00:44:00]

And if your environment nudges you to do it as this would do, there is a recycling bin there. The interesting thing about that is it builds your motivation to do something because your motivation is not just reflective, but also automatic. I'm just going with the flow. The thing that is the easiest thing for me to do here that feels the most right and correct.

And, and and without even thinking about it you are doing it. And not only are you doing it, but once you've done it, once that again. Doing something builds your motivation to do it again. It becomes psychologically unrisky. So I've, I've recycled in the past, therefore I'm gonna do it again. So within the model, you

know, capability and opportunity do build motivation, and that's why, that's why it kind of looks awkwardly like CMO rather than comm.

But I think that is also something that we, in the brand world, everyone wants reflective [00:45:00] motivation. They want you to know why my product is the best one and, and to, and to believe that and have all these, things in your mind. And yet, if as Harvard suggests, if you know, 95% of our decision making is done in our system, one subconscious mind, it doesn't really matter.

You know why you're doing something as long as you're doing it. As far as the kind of the business results are concerned I think it was, is it chelini someone who used to, it was, I think it's when Cialdini's talking about commitment and he, and he says you know, if you, at some point you go into a Starbucks because you need to go to the toilet or, or because it's raining or something.

I, I think he gives this example. I could be getting completely wrong person here, but you go into Starbucks because, because you need to use the toilet and because you go in there, you buy a Starbucks and the next time you walk past Starbucks. You are somebody who uses Starbucks, you've been into Starbucks before, and like, you're not [00:46:00] reflecting on the fact that you know, you, you don't need the toilet this time, or it's, it's not raining.

Your identity has been changed by your behavior and your reference point is different. And so just getting people to actually do things can end up driving that conscious motivation. And then when I ask you is, is Starbucks a good brand? You'll have loads of reasons why Starbucks is a really great brand because, because you've accidentally ended up going in there and that, that is where I'm sure we probably have to end this podcast.

But my final piece of advice for your listeners would be if you start a new job or you have a new, you know, house or new, you know route to work. Don't go into the Greg's, not even once, don't go in there. Don't, or the McDonald's or whatever it is that's on that pathway. Avoid it like the plague, because remember that once you've been in there, once you are then someone that will go in there again.

Because it's become psychologically so much easier for you [00:47:00] to do so. So, resist, resist, resist.

Richard Shotton: Well, that, that's a kibosh on our hoped for McDonald's deal. But

MichaelAaron Flicker: Tara we are coming to an end here and that was a lovely way to wrap it. I'm dying to ask you. Mm-hmm. You walked us through the, the, the campaign from Messy Beginning to Clear, a simplistic ending.

So many of our listeners are excited to use behavioral science in their brands or businesses trying to apply what we're talking about. Can you talk a little bit about, did you know you were gonna use the Combi behavioral model? Before you started the project, did you, were you in the project saying, well, this is a little bit of a, a mess.

Like I, how am I going to sort out what to say to different audiences? Can you just reveal a little bit your process to get to that simplicity in, in your own way?

Tara Austin: Yeah, sure. I mean, I am [00:48:00] I believe that the strongest thinkers are kind of model agnostic and that you have. You want people to think about your problem at the beginning through many different lenses and many different models until you find the one that is the most useful.

Because I have seen in my career that if you try and impose the wrong model because it's the one that your agency says is the model or whatever it is, then you end up getting, tying yourself in, in knots. And so invariably, you know, when I come to a problem, I will be looking combi is one that we use a lot.

It's just, it's very robust, it's very thorough, and it's, and it's simple enough, again, to be useful to a lot of clients. The BJ fog model is a model I often will reference, or sometimes east from VA insights teams. Sometimes mindspace might be useful. All of these models that I might [00:49:00] come to a problem and go, actually, I think this could help us.

But I would say. And, and I've, I've made models. You, you know, you, you create a model yourself because I think the, the challenge is that the human mind is the most complex object in the known universe. The human brain is the most complex object in the known universe, and we are more complicated than anything that we know of.

So is it George Box? I think he said the statistician said All models are wrong, but some are useful. And the reality is that we cannot model the mind and we cannot model all of the complexity of human behavior and the context in which we operate. So we are just approximating and some models are better than others at that approximation.

And I'm lucky in that because I've come from the brand world, I've also got a lot of kind of brand [00:50:00] models that are up my sleeve that I might come to a challenge with as well and say. You know what really what we do want here is we do want I think I was talking about fame, feeling, and fluency. I think that's the system one.

Mm-hmm.

Michael Aaron Flicker: System one.

Tara Austin: Yeah. I won the Budweiser Bud Light pitch for the Euros in 2019 by going in and going, look, this is all about fame, feeling, and fluency, and this is how we're gonna deliver that because. That was the right model for them. It was, they didn't need a combi behavioral breakdown of what was going on.

They needed to be the most famous brand out there that was on the top of everybody's minds where, you know, bud Light was fluent and the assets were recognizable. And they needed to feel something when they saw our, our comms. And, and that's, that's what was required. And so I think the more models that you can bring to a challenge, the better.

[00:51:00] And you might even need to build your own to, to be the most useful for how you as a team and your client understand what the, the challenge is. You're kind of always trying to break down what is the real problem and make that again fluent. You know, the model is just to make it fluent and for your audience so that they can kind of comprehend it as easily as possible.

And that first audience is your client and your team around you. So yeah, I, I think, i, I don't think I would've said from the outset that it's combi, but it is a real good one. I mean, I, I use it a hell of a lot. I used it that same year we were pitching for Public Health England for their teen condom usage campaign.

And I, I think it was actually, I think it was the first time that Public Health England had actually encountered the Combe model at that point was when we pitched it, pitched to them using the model, and they were very impressed because it was, again, it sort of cut through the challenge in a really [00:52:00] simple way, favorite pitch of my life.

I got to talk about anal sex in all manner of kind of crazy things in a, in a, in a, in a professional environment. It was it was great fun and at one point, because I was working on the campaign for against female genital mutilation at the same

time I came into the office and we'd been working really hard on the pitch and I brought in my friends you know, human.

Sized, what's the word? Life size. It was more than life-sized. It was humanized, like a full body vagina costume. And I remember I came into the office, I suck it on and sort of danced around in this vagina costume just to cheer up the team. And the woman who was running the new business team at the time, she came, she saw me, she said, God, you are not gonna wear that to the pitch.

I said, no, I I'm not gonna wear it to the pitch. Don't worry. I'm just trying to, just trying to cheer everyone up.

Richard Shotton: I would've been distinctive.

Tara Austin: It was a great, great, it was a great pitch. And it was one of those ones where, again, the power [00:53:00] of lateral thinking and human creativity was really at the, for i I, I forced everyone to do a.

Lateral thinking, Deb Bono lateral thinking exercise. And we did a random word exercise where you give everybody just literally a random word that's got nothing to do with anything and you give them the brief. And in the it, it was, it was after, it was the end of the first at the end of the briefing I said, I just want us to get generat.

Generating 'cause we need to get to the right solutions first. So we need to force out all the crap solutions, the, all the obvious stuff that's been done. Let's talk about that and then let's start generating and, and start pushing out into some new spaces and we'll get, we'll get going. And I, I remember there was actually, it was actually the idea that we pitched with came I believe from someone having the word hieroglyphic and that led them to think about emojis.

And we had the, the campaign we ended up pitching with, which never ran but it did win us. The [00:54:00] pitch was using the emojis that people talk about for you know, for, for having sex. So they use, they'll use bergin and like apl and we were talking about the fact that there was no good language for using a condom.

If I say, I'm gonna use a condom, you are gonna use a condom. It's kind of like, ugh. It's just, it's just kind of, it's acra, it's difficult behavior. It feels, there's lots of challenges with it if it felt no good. And so what we wanted to do was create this new kind of cultural practice language around using a condom where.

Actually, we were using the sparkle. So instead of the sploosh, it was the and then the sparkle emoji for like Come clean. We were like, oh, what you need to do is come clean. And yeah, I, and like I said, we, we ended up making a campaign that used emojis in a very different way because that was much further down the line after we'd won the pitch.

But that pitch process [00:55:00] itself was such a joy, I remember. And it was using combi again to kind of try and dictate the model, although it was actually using combi to do almost the whole media planning as well, because we had different parts of the campaign that were building capability, that were building motivation, that we're building opportunity.

So we, we really did max out on that model. And it is a, a old favorite of mine. But yeah, you've just you've just reminded me of the old come clean and how the o but how the sparkle was. Stimulated by a lateral thinking, Deb bono exercise that AI could never replicate. Right. And it might not have been the thing that is, was was done in the end.

It wasn't the campaign that was ever run, but it won us the pitch. And there so was something to be said for that at least.

MichaelAaron Flicker: This has been a lovely conversation. I don't think that Richard and I thought we would be talking about ObGyn quite that way today. So [00:56:00] this is a, a great way. Before we come to an end, Tara is there anything else that you have passion for that you would like to share with everybody listening?

Yeah.

Tara Austin: Yes, certainly. So I spend all of my day job talking about system one and two and, and the, the conscious and the subconscious mind. But my great passion in life is that most people don't really realize that if you are suffering from a particular mental health challenge in, in particular, so depression, anxiety, PTSD, alcoholism, anorexia, even now we're seeing in the re in the, in the data, if you are suffering, there is a safe and effective medicine in psilocybin, which is the psychoactive compound in, in so-called magic mushrooms.

Now the. This medicine must be administered in absolutely the right way with licensed [00:57:00] people in a regulated way. But in that context, it's a very, very powerful tool for healing. And the evidence shows this. If anything, I think

people associate magic mushrooms as being kind of hallucinatory because they open up system one.

That's, that's where they go. These, these mushrooms, these medicines, they, they allow access to system one and people have hallucinatory experiences in, in that state. Because system one is a lot weirder than we think it is, it is associative. And in, in the case of people who are really struggling with a lot of mental health challenges, typically system one has got, has become maladaptive.

Something is in there and you may not even be conscious of it yourself. That is ailing you. And these medicines will allow you to access that and potentially treat it and heal it. But they have to be used. They're [00:58:00] very, very powerful. They're very potent and they can in fact traumatize people.

So our campaign for psilocybin access rights which I co-founded in 2022, is asking the UK government to just recognize the medical potential of these medicines which is happening in the rest of the world. In Australia, the Czech Republic has just rescheduled. Germany has just granted compassionate access for treatment resistant depression because they would rather you tried this than killed yourself.

Now in our country. We seem to be happy with the suicide statistics, which are that 125 people will kill themselves on average every week. And I think it's my great life's work to try and help the normalization of psilocybin and the other psychedelics to get people to realize that they have great power, great potential.

And to try and get our ministers to push through the right legislation that will make this safely accessible for people [00:59:00] so that they don't have to go to an unregulated psychedelic underground that is currently burgeoning because it looks like America is going to reschedule and make these more available.

And when that happens, the science can't go back in the box. If you know many, many people, more than 10% of. Population are probably on antidepressants in, in the data. And they may not be working for them for a third of people. They don't work at all. And that leads to a lot of desperation. But I think it's gonna lead to a lot of people doing unsafe things with these medicines.

So we, the campaign are pushing our government to recognize this, to put in place what needs to be in place for a safe regulated, a for safe regulated access. And I've just delivered this week, 975 letters to Parliament asking mps to sign our letter to the home office. And I would really encourage any of your UK

listeners if there's also something very [01:00:00] big going on in, in Europe, which you can look at our web on our website, but if you go to Par Global, PAR Global, someone did point out to me that he, he said, you're just doing this in the uk.

And I said, yeah, but it. It's global psilocybin access rights is something that everyone deserves to have. And we, we partner with lots of other people, but in terms of our push our little team of volunteers you know, get involved, come to some of our events, sign up to our newsletter. And more than anything, just be aware that this exists.

Don't let anyone in your life die without hope. Because that's how the majority of people who commit suicide, that's what they die from, is a lack of hope. And this medicine absolutely represents hope for all of those people, and they should be able to access it legally and safely. And that's what we're asking our government to make possible.

And we would welcome anybody who can join us.

MichaelAaron Flicker: Tara Austin, you have opened our eyes and our minds to a lot of [01:01:00] topics today not the least of which is Pardoc Global. So thanks for sharing your time and your knowledge with us. And we will put all of the topics that we talked about today in the show notes.

We will encourage folks that are listening at home to share with those that might find the messages from today impactful and meaningful. And until next time, I'm MichaelAaron Flicker.

And I'm Richard Shotton.

Thanks so much for being with us today, Tara.

Tara Austin: Thank you.

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