

The Psychology of Engagement

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Behavioral science is the field that deals with human behavior and how emotions, the environment, and social factors influence that behavior. The applications and implications of this field are many, but one of them is marketing and promotion. At this year's ACI conference in Arlington, Virginia, Sarah Marshall of the Yes& Agency gave a talk on, "Ten Easy Ways You Can Use Consumer Behavior Triggers in Your Marketing." The term "Yes, and" comes from studies about ways people can work together more collaboratively and "Yes, and" as a response to someone's suggestion is proven to be more effective than "No" or "Yes, but." We practiced this with an exercise at the session "An Improv Lens: Connection & Collaboration" at the conference with improv comedian James Wasilewski of HAHA to AHA. One of Yes& Agency's cofounders was ironically also into improv.

Marshall started off by citing a well-known book in the field of marketing, *Confessions of an Advertising Man* by David Ogilvy. The autobiographical nature of the book is actually a vehicle to deliver lessons on leadership, communication, client management, advertising, and more. Marshall noted, "We are terrible at figuring out why we do what we do. People do not know. And human behavior is hardly ever rational." She also quoted Ogilvy who said, "People don't think what they feel, don't say what they think, and don't do what they say."

Marshall went on to present the ten ways and explained them in detail and how to use them in our work as wildlife and conservation communicators. Below is a list of the principles, an explanation of each, real world examples, and a strategy on how to use each one.

#1 Bias or The Endowment Effect

- People value what they own over what they don't own.
- When engaging people in citizen science, such as working on a hiking trail, they will be more invested if it is an "adopt a trail" program rather than just a clean-up day.
- Instill a sense of ownership.

#2 Availability Heuristic

- People will judge the likelihood of something happening by how much it is covered in the news and how common they think it is.
- Getting attacked by a shark is scary because people believe it is likely to happen, but in reality it is extremely uncommon.
- Make your message sticky, and share it widely.

#3 Choice Architecture or The Default Effect

- People are more likely to choose the default choice because our brains are lazy.
- Use an opt-out for license buyers to be contacted with more information rather than opt-in.
- Make your desired action the default choice.

#4 Choice Architecture: Framing

- People react to a choice based on how it is presented to them. Use a positive frame rather than a negative one.
- A \$2,500 discount sounds better than 5% off.
- Choose language that helps people to see things your way.

#5 Social Proof

- People make decisions based on the actions and opinions of others.
- Four out of five dentists surveyed choose Crest for their patients.
- Find ways to highlight what everyone else is doing.

#6 Herd Behavior

- People tend to follow and mimic the actions of a larger group.
- Nike's "Just Do It" campaign speaks to a community of fitness enthusiasts.
- Create a community for your brand.

#7 The Psychology of Surprise

- People pay more attention to things that are novel and unexpected.
- Expectation is that government social media sites will be boring, so surprise them with comedy.
- Find a way to make your message and/or visuals surprising.

#8 Confirmation Bias

- People seek out and favor information that confirms their existing beliefs.
- Patagonia uses confirmation bias to create an affinity with customers by telling a story that confirms the worldview their target audience has of themselves.
- Know your audience, and align with their values.

#9 Loss Aversion Bias

- People feel the pain of loss more intensely than the pleasure of an equivalent gain.
- Coke's limited edition bottles is an example because people will buy them for fear of missing out.
- Emphasize potential losses associated with inaction.

#10 Narrative Bias

- People tend to make sense of the world through stories and patterns.
- A person explaining their first successful bear hunt will draw more people in than a social media post saying buy your hunting license for bear season.
- Give people a compelling story to tell.

In summary, using known information about how people behave can assist us with our messaging and outreach to our audiences. Marshall suggested some additional resources for people interested in learning more about this topic, including the books *Nudge* by Richard H. Thaler and Cass R. Sunstein, *Thinking Fast and Slow* by Daniel Kahneman, *The Choice Factor* by Richard Shotton, *Using Behavioral Science in Marketing* by Nancy Harhut, and *Predictably Irrational* by Dan Ariely.