



The ten-minute behavioural guide

A free, downloadable guide to Behavioural Insight & Communication for any type of message (ads, messages, corporate material, emails) in any type of space (paid-for media, owned spaces, personal communications).

Overview

Generally, discussions of marketing initiatives tend to focus on adjusting an established sequence of factors – awareness, interest, and desire. We don't focus on those hierarchy effects because they are too loose to be useful and are easily disproved ([Howard & Barry, 1990](#)). However, social psychology – examining both 'instinct' and 'thinking' – asks us to look at many areas: to the antecedents (commitment, information, goal-setting, etc) and consequences of decisions (feedback, rewards, etc); to accentuating and attenuating actions; to automatic versus deliberate actions; and to group versus individual behaviour.

These are really helpful. And are best characterized as one of three areas of effect ([Ross & Nisbett, 2011](#) are great on this): situational influences (or, context), the quasi-stationary equilibria that can both define and create change (or, norms), and subjective influence (or, construal).

To make a useful change in a few minutes, we're going to focus on only norms, and construal.

1. Norms

We conform to a shared understanding about expectations of behaviour within a group. And we do this *even though we like to think of ourselves as making personal and principled decisions*. Ouch. This is a vital nugget of information. How do we use this knowledge in comms? We focus on are *descriptive* norm (injunctive, social, provincial, prescriptive, proscriptive, global, and others we'll leave alone).

In short: show the behaviour you want to happen.

It's sort-of is as simple as that. You want everyone to use your product? Then show it. You want behaviour more prevalent? Then show it as popular. Social media makes this more possible (although fiddling with quasi-stationary equilibria is tricky, and can run away with you). Many of us (and most of us at The Hunting Dynasty used to) describe what's not wanted to show the 'problem' in order to explain why we're describing a change: Showing litter everywhere in order to dramatise why it's bad ([Iron Eyes Cody and Keep America Beautiful](#)); showing just how many people missed hospital appointments in order to 'shame' people into adhering ([BBC website article](#)). This is bad. What one should do is tell people that the behaviour you're trying to promote is *popular*. And that's our answer about how to behave, right there.

But, you must make sure you *show* it, not simply *say* it. That's the trapdoor. In tests, ads that have information about social approval (or disapproval) make us *think* the ad is persuasive, but it's only by *showing* the behaviour that intentions are influenced directly. ([Cialdini, 2003](#)) Why do we respond like this? Our System 1 'gut' response beats our System 2 rational deliberation, so by the time we get to 'thinking about it' we've already had the answer.

2. Construal

Yucky word. It tells us that *where* we think about something relative to ourselves affects *what* we think about it: The closer events are (proximal) the more we think about 'actions'; the further away events are (distal) the more we think 'in theory'. Blah, blah: what does it mean? Bringing behaviour into a moment, making it more concrete by being clear about what needs to be done, and making it personal, gives you a much greater chance of that behaviour being enacted. A way of getting to the point quickly is to look at channel factors.

In short: explain what action(s) need to take place.

For instance, the U.S. government sold bonds during WWII. When Dorwin Cartwright, in 1949, experimented with the 'Buy War Bonds' message by changing it to 'Buy an *extra* \$100 Bond' and made concrete where and when to do this (at your workplace when the solicitor asks you to sign-up) he doubled bond sales to 50% of the workforce, from a base of 25%. This type of channel effect is popular with telethons and other types of appeal. (More here.)

But surely we wouldn't fall prey to this chicanery when important things are at stake – such as our life?

Tetanus inoculation for young adults is an offer squarely in their individual interest. When presented with information about the risks and value of inoculation they reported changed beliefs and attitudes (Leventhal, Singer, Jones, 1965). Job done? Nah, only 3% got their tetanus shots. When given – in addition – a map with the destination circled and urges to check their upcoming schedule to plan a time (drawing it in to the moment, making the action concrete) nearly 30% acted. A decimal point shift in uptake is not to be sniffed at. This is the benefit of lining up our instincts with the world around us.

We know can get a little messy when applied to beautifully crafted and expensive advertising campaigns, but the trick is to get it working smoothly. And of course, not everything is an expensive advertisement – there are plenty of opportunities to apply these lessons to internal emails, work kitchen signs, product pamphlets, and other communication paraphernalia.



Showing the behaviour you want to happen, and explaining what action(s) need to take place, will improve the success of your communications for sure – however, there's much more research to draw on, and many more implementation techniques available.

For more on this and other insights speak to us via email, phone, or twitter. A short message is all that's needed to info@thehuntingdynasty.com and we'll do the rest, phone **0843 289 2901** and speak or leave a message, and follow/tweet <http://twitter.com/huntingdynasty>