

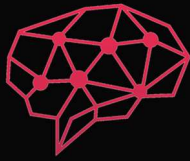


# 'BRAINWASH': THE MODEL

How entrenched thoughts are changed.



[patrickfagan.co.uk](http://patrickfagan.co.uk)



Brainwashing is real.

It happens every day, when long-standing beliefs and habits are changed. It happens when you join a cult or go to a Nazi rally, but it also happens when you switch your laundry brand, go on a date, or start watching a new TV show.

You're particularly vulnerable to be 'brainwashed' when you're transitioning through a turbulent time. In today's topsy-turvy world, it's never been more important to know how it all works.

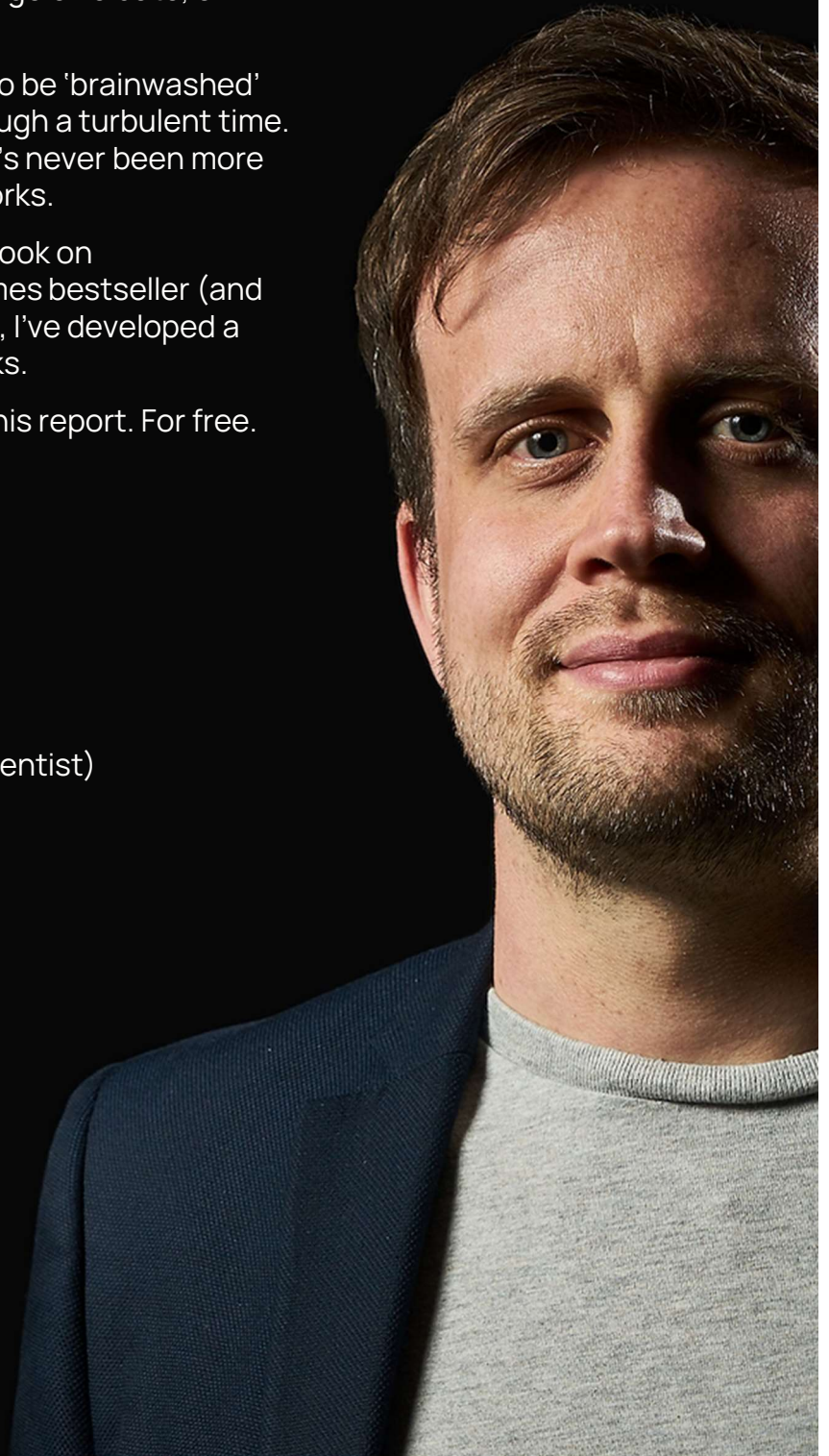
Fortunately, I've co-written a book on brainwashing. It's a Sunday Times bestseller (and yes, that is a nudge). From this, I've developed a model to explain how it all works.

Now I'm sharing it with you in this report. For free.

You're welcome!

Patrick Fagan

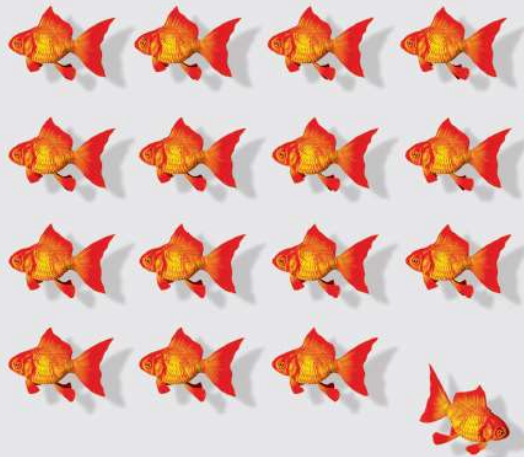
(Your favourite behavioural scientist)



THE *SUNDAY TIMES* BESTSELLER

# FREE YOUR MIND

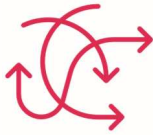
THE NEW WORLD OF MANIPULATION  
AND HOW TO RESIST IT



LAURA DODSWORTH  
& PATRICK FAGAN

## Is your mind free?

You're bombarded with attempts to influence you every hour of the day – from your smartphone's dings to your partner's stings. That's why I co-wrote this book with journalist Laura Dodsworth. It's a Sunday Times bestseller and it was described by the Telegraph as 'an important new book'. We met with experts ranging from monks to magicians; we scoured the latest scientific research; and we infiltrated cults and forums. Out of all this learning, I developed a model to understand how brainwashing works. Funnily enough, I call it B.R.A.I.N.W.A.S.H.



## **BAMBOOZLE**

They wear people down and disrupt old ways of thinking.



## **RATIONALISE**

They give some 'placebic' explanation for new behaviours.



## **ATTACHMENTS**

They offer purpose, community and direction amongst the chaos.



## **INCREMENTS**

They bring people round step-by-step, not all at once.



## **NORMS**

They demonstrate authority and leverage the need for conformity.



## **WISHES**

They appeal to base and repressed instincts and desires.



## **AUTONOMY**

They give the illusion of choice, and they manage the available options.



## **SYMBOLS**

They use visuals, archetypes and semiotics to engage the non-conscious mind.



## **HEAVEN & HELL**

They paint pictures of dystopia and utopia; they punish and reward accordingly.



# Bamboozle

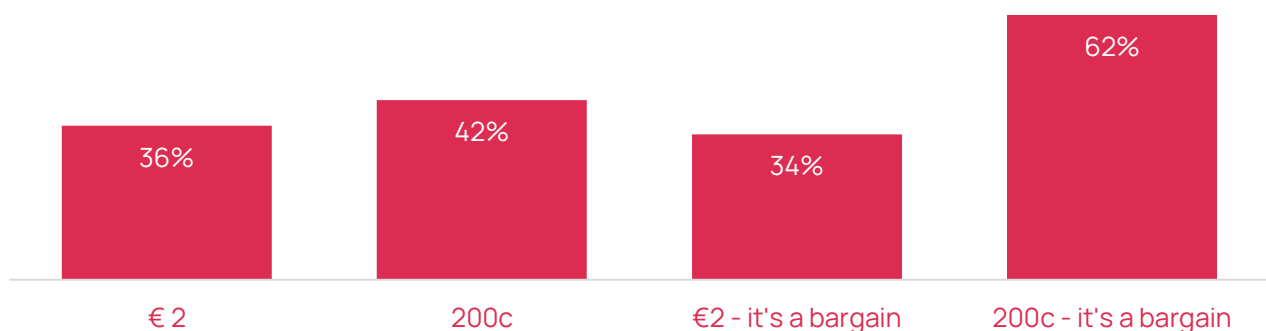
The first step in 'brainwashing' – changing fixed habits and beliefs – is breaking down the old ways of thinking. This is a necessary foundation before something new can be implanted. As George Orwell wrote in 1984, 'Power is in tearing human minds to pieces and putting them together again in new shapes of your own choosing.' During China's Cultural Revolution for example, the Red Guards aimed to destroy the Four Olds: old ideas, old culture, old customs, and old habits. During torture and interrogation, targets are worn down through hunger, fatigue, stress, and of course pain. One particularly cruel prison even played Baby Shark on repeat all night. The point is to disable what one cult expert called 'the conscious watchdogs of the mind'. During the famous MK-Ultra experiments, subjects were worn down via things like sensory deprivation, before new attitudes were implanted through 'psychic driving' (e.g., looped audiotapes). On a smaller scale, you're more vulnerable to influence if you're tired, stressed, hungry, confused, and so on.



## Science Bit

A persuasion principle called 'disrupt-then-reframe' bamboozles people (such as an unusual pricing format) before sneaking a persuasive message (like 'it's a bargain').

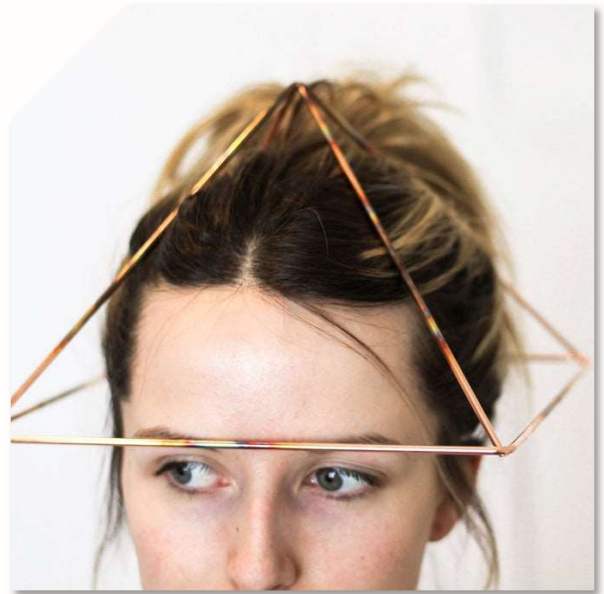
Proportion Buying Cards for Charity





# Rationalise

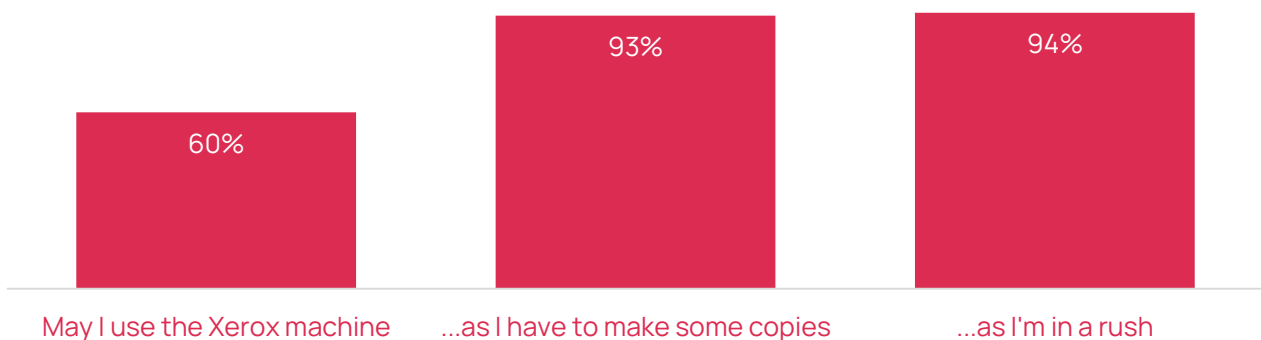
Laypeople tend to believe that our thoughts drive our actions: if we think something is good, then we will do it. In fact, a whole swathe of psychological experiments suggest the opposite: if we do something, then we think it must be good. Our habits and beliefs are often the result of emotions or circumstance, but the rational mind rationalises reasons for it, which are often inaccurate. Psychologists call this 'motivated reasoning'. There is, for example, a group of people who believe that wearing a headgear pyramid brings benefits in concentration and wellbeing. They rationalise the behaviour, with language like 'strong output of negative ions'. When a drastic change in habits is required, people typically need to be given some 'placebic information' to calm their cognitive dissonance. Famously, psychologist Leon Festinger infiltrated a doomsday cult and found that, when the prophesised date came and went, most members rationalised a reason for it and became even more steadfast in their beliefs, now focused on a new date.



## Science Bit

People were more likely to let someone cut in line if they were given a reason for it, even if the reason was completely useless ('I have to make some copies').

Proportion Letting Someone Jump in Line





# Attachments

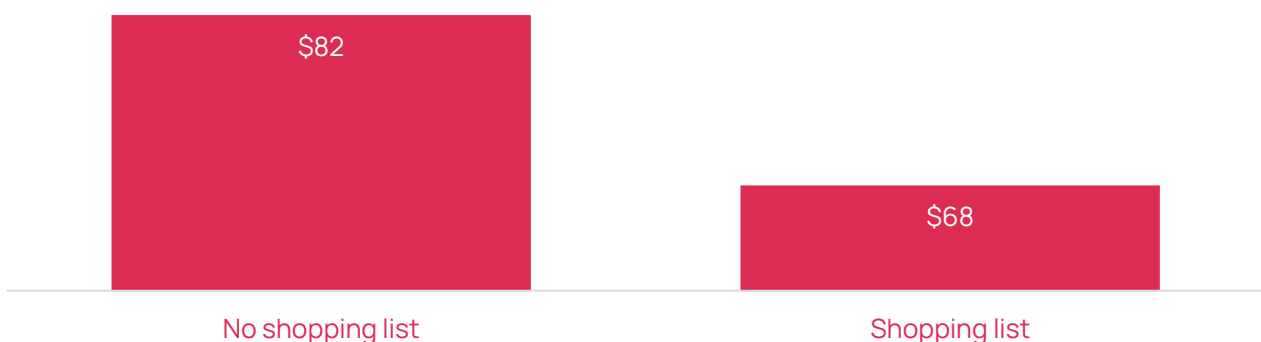
The world is a chaotic and frightening place. Ultimately, nothing lasts for ever and ruination could come upon us at any time – we could get lose our job, lose our partner, or lose our life at any moment. Everything is simply dust in the wind. While the universe is infinite chaos, our minds are infinitesimal by comparison. We don't have the time, energy or brainpower to think through every decision carefully. Thus, we have to attach ourselves to some kind of guiding principles, like community, philosophy or religion - or else get swept away by manipulators. As the famous saying goes, if you don't stand for something you'll fall for anything. For example, a psychoanalyst observed that Jehovah's Witnesses better withstood Korean POW camps because they had something sure to cling to; and cults often target those lacking purpose. A study of adult fans of My Little Pony ('bronies') found they scored lower on the Meaning of Life Questionnaire. On a smaller scale, people are more likely to get manipulated if they go into the situation without a plan.



## Science Bit

If you don't have a shopping list planned in advance, you're more likely to get swept away by impulsive buys in the store.

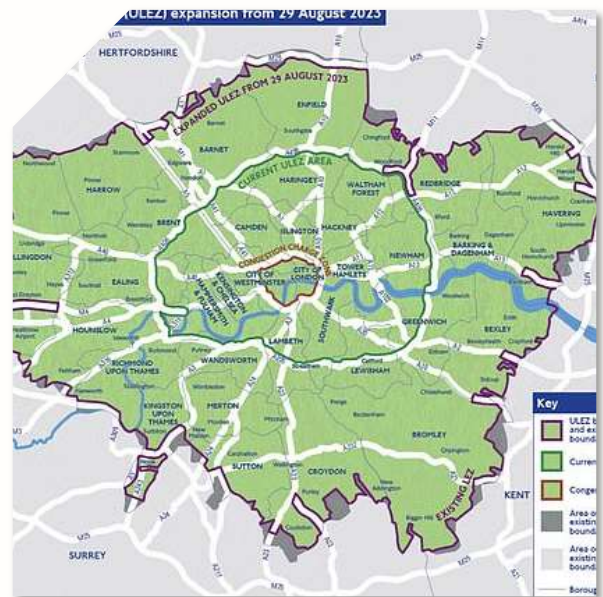
Amount Spent on a Shopping Trip





# Increments

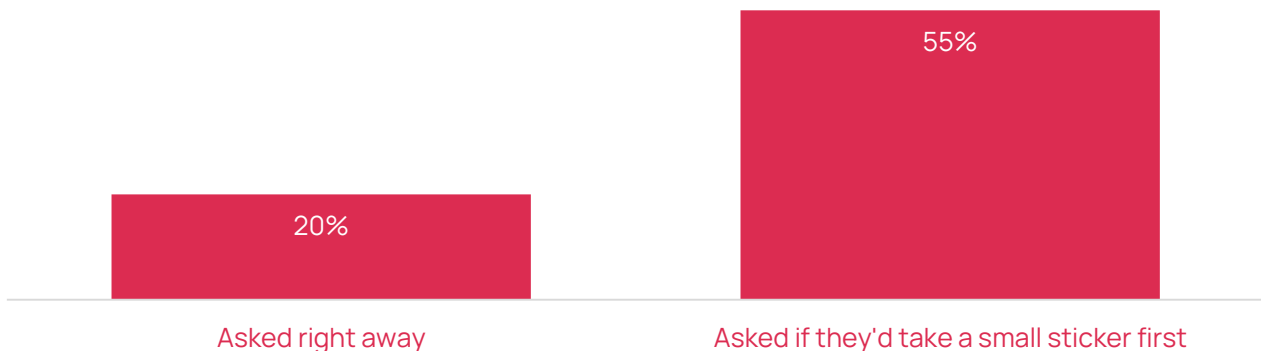
Manipulation rarely happens all at once – rather, it goes in small increments that may be barely noticeable.. In essence, a thousand nudges make a shove. Multilevel marketing schemes don't ask you to invest all of your life savings on day one; you start with a small financial investment, a small commitment to the job, just one day at a seminar, and it ramps up from there. They might, for example, have recruits walk around in public with shades of the brand's lipstick on their hand as a conversation starter – a 'foot in the door', as psychologists call it. You are more likely to agree to a larger request if you have agreed to a smaller one beforehand. This can happen on a small scale, like reserving a hotel room but not having to pay until you arrive. It can also happen on a larger scale. London's Congestion Charge evolved into 'low emission zones' (LEZ) and then 'ultra-low emission zones' (ULEZ), which then spread into outer London, and later into other cities across the UK along with 20mph speed limits, 15-minute cities and 'low traffic neighbourhoods' (LTNS).



## Science Bit

People are more likely to agree to an unreasonable request (like a yard sign) if they previously agreed to a small one (like taking a bumper sticker).

### Agreeing to Put a Large 'Drive Safe' Sign in Their Yard







## Norms

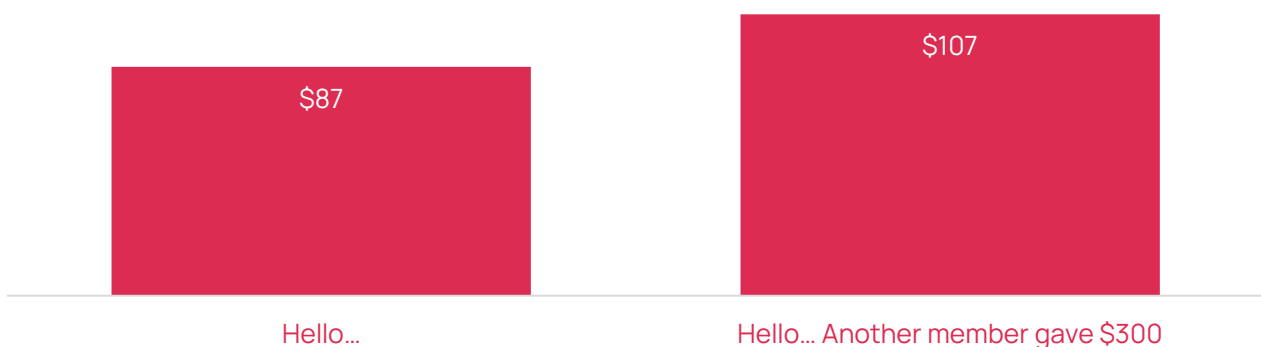
We are all so-called 'cognitive misers' with limited attention spans. We cannot consciously think about all the information and choice in the world, so we must rely on automatic rules-of-thumb. One of these is norms – if other people are doing something, particularly if they are authoritative, we assume it must be the right thing to do. We also, as social creatures, are afraid of upsetting the group or the authorities and being ostracised. Cults and other manipulators harness these principles by establishing strong behavioural norms and group ties, as well as a powerful and charismatic leader. An 'us versus them' dynamic is established and people who stray from the norms of 'us' are brandished heretics, conspiracy theorists, or in the case of one famous organisation, 'suppressive persons'. A trap illustrates the principle quite well. In a Larsen trap, birds can enter the cage but cannot leave. Usually they are suspicious of it, but the trap cunningly has a bird that lives in the separate compartment, watered and fed. The other birds assume it must be safe, and enter.



### Science Bit

People are nudged by social proof – for example, giving big donations if they hear that other people are, too.

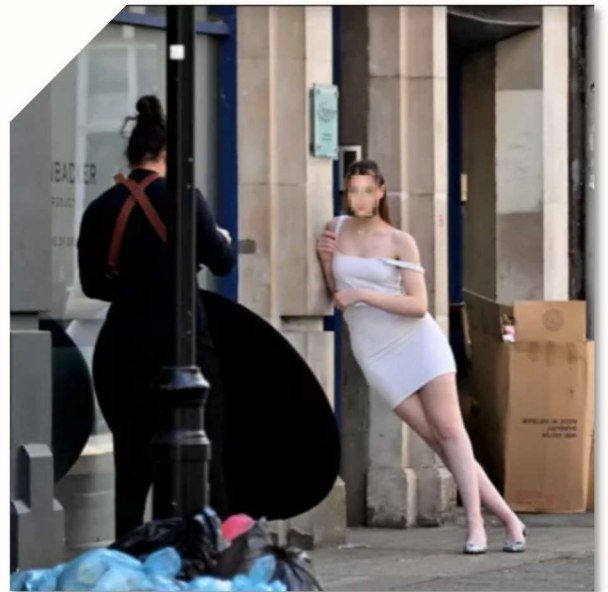
Average Donation Size to Call-In Donation Drive





## Wishes

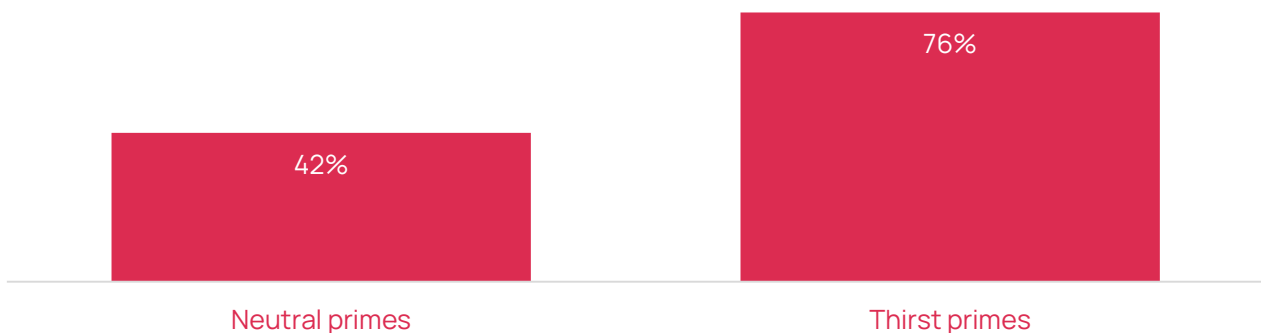
In his landmark book *Propaganda: The formation of men's attitudes*, Jacques Ellul highlighted how propaganda cannot implant new wants within people – rather, it acts as a lightning rod to direct existing (often repressed) desires, insecurities and prejudices into behaviour. Propaganda is as much your own emotions as it is the message which amplifies and conducts them. In the same way that a mouse trap must have a tasty bit of cheese to play on a mouse's greed - or an angler fish must have an enticing illuminated lure to play on the curiosity of its prey – you cannot be manipulated without something that appeals to your motivations. Cults, for example, exploit people's need for social connection or power, while totalitarian regimes stir up repressed fear and hatred. The so-called 'needs and greeds' principle of scams is in play when young women are approached in the street and offered a modelling contract, but only after a £200 photo shoot first. Ultimately, emotion is the motivational steam in the engine that drives behaviour.



### Science Bit

People are more likely to choose a thirst-quenching drink brand if they have been made to feel thirsty first.

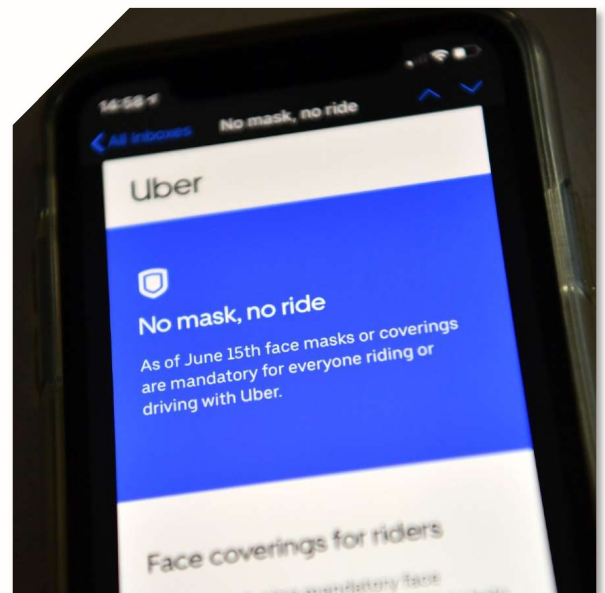
#### Choosing Coupons for 'Super-Quencher' Drink over 'PowerPro'





# Autonomy

A simple rule for persuasion is that you can't push a donkey from behind. Likewise, if people feel they are being forced to do something against their will, they will show what psychologists call 'reactance' and rebel. Harshly admonishing teenagers for smoking often has the opposite effect to what was intended (and indeed studies have demonstrated that manipulative anti-smoking campaigns can increase smoking for this reason). Similarly, a paper found that Uber's 'No Mask, No Ride' campaign made people less likely to wear a face mask. This is why manipulators maintain an illusion of choice and say, 'it's up to you'. A meta-analysis found this kind of statement made people twice as likely to comply. Cults tell their adherents they are free to leave at any time, and brainwashers insist confessions must be made of your own free will, even if you have been tortured. Manipulators also maintain this illusion by designing a choices set that benefits them, like the waiter who asks if you want still or sparkling water, so you end up paying money either way.



## Science Bit

People are more likely to donate if they feel like it's their choice. The 'but you are free' technique roughly doubles compliance, according to a meta-analysis.





# Symbols

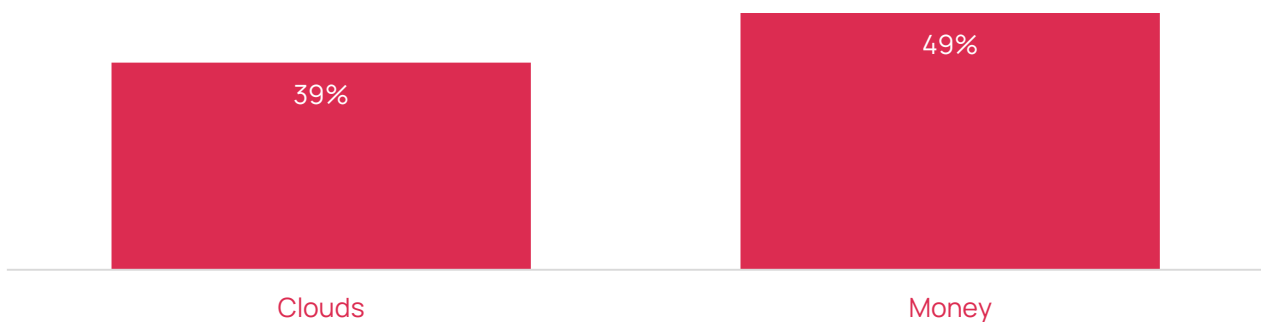
Symbols can unlock hardwired behavioural responses from deep within the subconscious. Evolutionary psychologists have demonstrated this through concepts like 'innate releasers'. A gosling that has never seen a predator in its life will still cheep and scramble when a simple cardboard cut-out of a hawk is glided above its head. A different shape, or moving the cut-out backwards, does not elicit the same effect. Depth psychologists like Carl Jung argued that humans are much the same, responding to symbols (or 'archetypes') that are buried deep within the collective unconscious. Symbols also bypass words, acting as a lightning rod for shared experiences, emotion, and understanding. Religions and organisations like the Freemasons have rites that are packed with meaning only for the initiated. Totalitarian regimes use symbols like the swastika or the hammer and sickle to galvanise a common group around shared meaning, goals, and urges. On a smaller scale, brands build cultural capital and prime purchase behaviours using symbols.



## Science Bit

Purchases are influenced by the subtle symbols around us – like images of money nudging people into buying cheaper products.

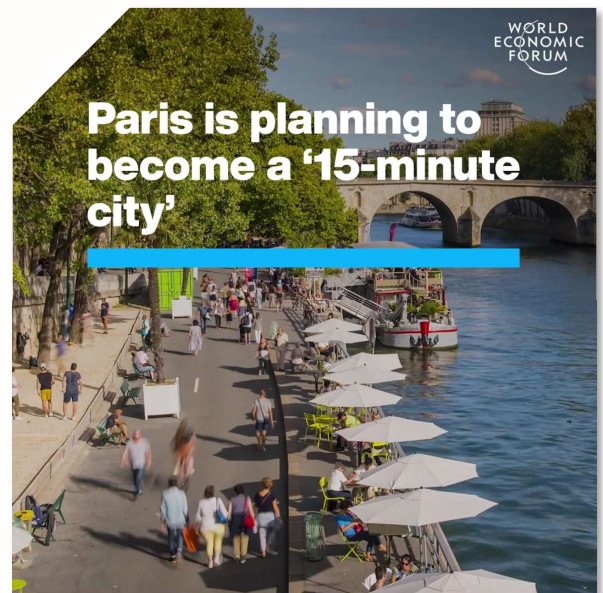
Buying the Cheaper Sofa When the Website Used Images of...





# Heaven & Hell

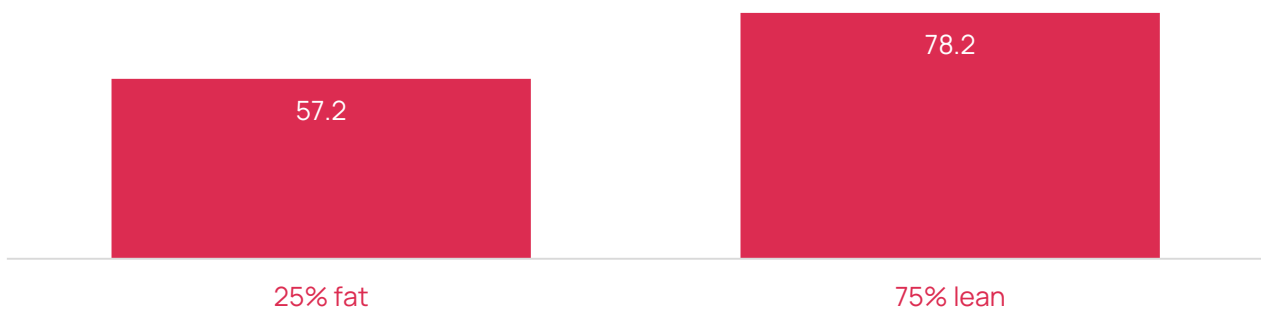
Brainwashers and manipulators use 'push/pull' tactics to gain your compliance – a bit like 'good cop, bad cop' in police interrogations. Prisoners of war, for example, will be tortured and told their old country doesn't care about them, while their interrogator extols the virtues of their captor country and its way of life, and how good things could be for them if they'd just pledge allegiance. Religions promise Hell for nonbelievers and Heaven for believers. Totalitarian regimes paint pictures of dystopia if they're not successful, and utopia if they are. Today, NGOs paint a picture of climate change hell if people don't comply, and a utopia of 15-minute cities if they do. Their opponents meanwhile paint the NGOs' utopia as an authoritarian dystopia. Both groups are using push/pull tactics. On a smaller scale, brands exist to sell consumers fantasies (like a new cologne will make them attractive), nudgers use reframing (turning negatives into positives and vice versa), and websites use 'confirmshaming' to get you click on one button and not the other..

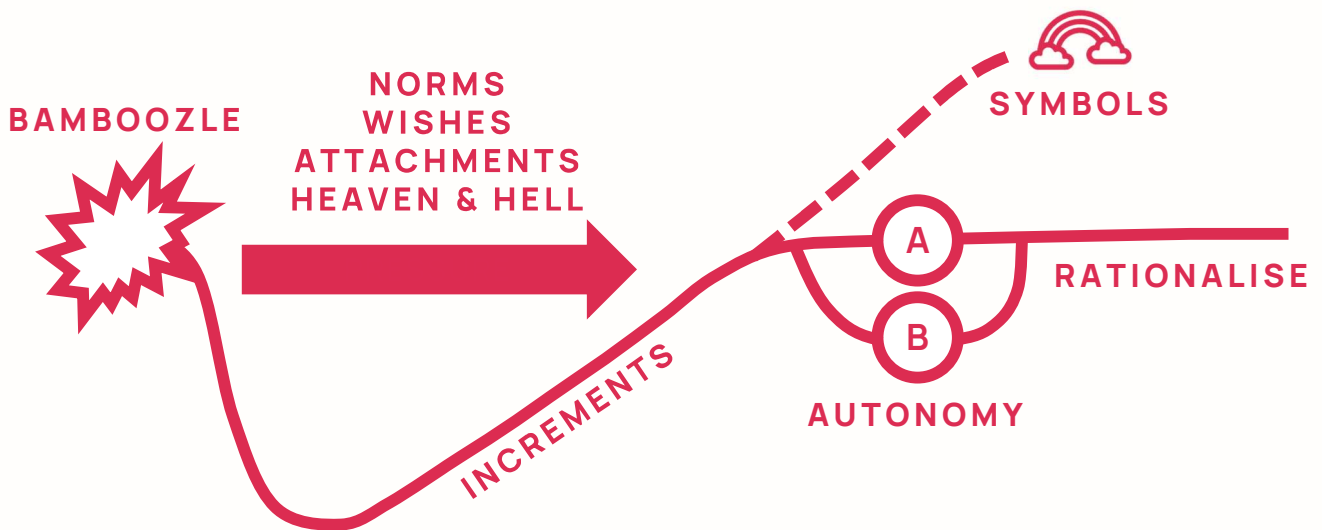


## Science Bit

When a product is reframed (so negatives are presented as positives), people are more likely to buy it. Losses push people away, but gains pull them in.

Rating of Meat Taste (Normalised to 0-100)





1

## Disrupt

Old thoughts and habits are broken down; the conscious defences are overwhelmed.

2

## Reframe

In the 'vacuum' of broken-down thoughts, people are pushed towards new habits via emotions and social pressures. It is framed as their own choice, and it goes in small, manageable steps.

3

## Maintain

'Placebic' rational information allows people to feel comfortable with their new habits and beliefs.



## What to do?

Well, what if you don't want to be brainwashed – what can you do about it? Here are five tips based on the book I co-wrote, *Free Your Mind: The new world of manipulation and how to resist it*.



### **INOCULATE YOURSELF**

Once you know how the magic trick works, it stops working. Once you see it, you can't unsee it. Learning about these techniques gives you a (small) measure of immunity.



### **CALM DOWN**

You're more vulnerable to influence when tired, hungry or stressed, or going through a chaotic time in life. Move yourself from a 'hot state' into a cold one. Take a breath.



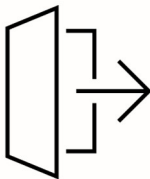
### **LISTEN TO YOUR GUT**

Rational thought is great, but it can sometimes lead us astray and let us justify irrational beliefs and behaviours. On the other hand, mindfulness helps us notice when we are being manipulated.



### **QUESTION EVERYTHING**

Although it's important to cooperate, it's also important to laugh at the emperor with no clothes. Don't be afraid to speak up and puncture the illusions of authority or conformity, even if it's scary.



### **STEP AWAY**

The only dogs Pavlov couldn't condition were those who sullenly ignored the bell in the first place. If you don't want to get tricked by the magician, just don't go to the show. Use less TV, social media, etc.

Have you **freed**  
your **mind**?



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