

2nd Edition

'Insanely useful. Apply the lessons herein and your storytelling, marketing, and design efforts will be forever improved.'

Rand Fishkin, Founder, Moz



WEBS OF INFLUENCE

**THE PSYCHOLOGY OF
ONLINE PERSUASION**

The secret strategies that make us click

NATHALIE NAHAI
THE WEB PSYCHOLOGIST

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'At Unilever, we have worked with Nathalie for the past several years. She has enabled a step-change in our approach to communication through her amazing insight and expertise, which has allowed us to deliver stronger relationships with our consumers as well as secure stronger sales.'

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'A fascinating dive into the psych-tech nexus, *Webs of Influence* combines in-depth research with practical guidance to expose the hidden techniques behind online design, marketing and sales. You may never look at the web in the same way again.'

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'Nathalie offers unique insight and understanding to those of us grappling with the implication of an increasingly virtual existence - how we act in it and how we monetise experiences in it. This is critical reading for all of us making strides with our digital transformation.'

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Sarah DeRocher Moore

VP of Brand and Revenue Marketing, Spreadfast

'A terrific and mind-expanding foray in the drivers of online persuasion.'

Shane Parrish

founder, Farnamstreetblog.com

'My most recommended book on persuasive design by one of my very favourite experts. Nathalie Nahai's book is a gift to our industry. It's comprehensive, accessible and jam-packed with insights.'

Nir Eyal

author, Hooked: How to Build Habit-Forming Products

'Nathalie has a knack for making you look at the website you work on every day with a completely fresh pair of eyes. Her knowledge and enthusiasm seep through the

pages of this book, and have got the whole team “thinking like a customer”. We’ve had some great successes with ideas she suggested, but more importantly, she’s helped us to start thinking in the right way about the experience we offer our customers.’

Susannah Ellis

energy website product owner, uSwitch

‘A great summary of what we know about the psychology of web site design. Nathalie’s latest book hits the mark. It’s a must-read if you are planning or designing a website.’

Susan Weinschenk, Ph.D

*Chief Behavioural Scientist, The Team W, Inc., author,
100 Things Every Designer Needs To Know About People*

‘Nathalie’s insights into the online influence of behaviour and how that should inform a brand’s authenticity, originality, and overall marketing approach are incredible; immensely practical for all companies, from small business to enterprise.’

Toby Daniels

co-founder and CEO, Crowdcentric

‘Nobody has done more to turn psychology research into practical advice for web designers than Nathalie Nahai. Every marketer needs *Webs of Influence!*’

Roger Dooley

author, Brainfluence

‘A very useful guide to applying behavioural research to the way you present your business online, full of fascinating real examples and practical tips.’

Caroline Webb

*CEO, Sevenshift, author, How to Have a Good Day,
Senior Adviser, McKinsey & Company*

‘It is so rare to find a book like Nathalie’s: well-written, thoroughly-researched, never dry, and, most importantly, insanely useful. Apply the lessons herein and your storytelling, marketing and design efforts will be forever improved.’

Rand Fishkin

founder, Moz

‘Nathalie brings the psychology of online behaviour to life with tremendous insight, intellectual rigour and that rare commodity – practical advice. A thought-provoking writer whose charm, energy and enthusiasm for her subject inspires audiences and encourages debate.’

Lindsay Spencer

Head of Communications, The DTG (Digital TV Group)

‘A fabulous book that is a must-read for anyone serious about applying genuine behavioural insights to improve their digital presence.’

Dr Joe Devlin

Head of Experimental Psychology, UCL

‘Simply the best, most straightforward insights into how our psychology drives our behaviour online - and how to harness it. No one does it better!’

Martin Eriksson

co-founder and curator, Mind the Product

'A brilliantly accessible guide to help you navigate the complicated world of how and why people make the decisions they do online. Applying the latest in thinking in psychology, sociology, business, design and more, this book is essential reading for anyone who works on the web.'

Jamie Bartlett

author, The Dark Net

'Nathalie Nahai is the most intelligent contemporary writer on technology matters. The first edition of *Webs of Influence* was a game-changer for anyone interested in understanding the interface between psychology, consumer behaviour, and the digital world. This new edition is even better and will turn every reader into an expert: A phenomenal book!'

Dr Tomas Chamorro-Premuzic

*Professor of Business Psychology, UCL and
Columbia University, CEO, Hogan Assessments*

'Nathalie has repeatedly challenged my assumptions about how and why people behave the way they do online. Her arguments are grounded in science and a deep understanding of people. As someone with no background in psychology, I've learned a huge amount from her writing and speaking. You should buy this book if you want to understand the reasons why people's online behaviour is the way it is.'

Will Critchlow

founder and CEO, Distilled

'A contemporary look at the technologies and techniques influencing us on a daily basis, and breaks down the principles at play with remarkable clarity and insight. *Webs of Influence* is an essential read for anyone looking for a deeper understanding of why we behave online the way that we do, and how to apply these psychological insights in practice.'

Phil Nottingham

Video Strategist, Wistia

'Required reading for online marketers. As marketing becomes more personalised, it's essential to understand what motivates your audience and drives their behaviour. *Webs of Influence* makes it easy to leverage psychological studies and process to improve your online marketing – from copy to design, functionality and pricing.'

Stephen Pavlovich

founder, Conversion

'Nathalie is hands-down one of the most articulate and observant members of the digital marketing world. She has such a thorough understanding of how people who use the web, think. Every time I read something she's produced, I learn something new.'

Kelvin Newman

founder and Managing Director, Rough Agenda

'Nathalie has a unique ability to make psychological research approachable to the masses. She is one of the most engaging speakers and writers out there.'

Chris Savage

CEO and co-founder, Wistia

'Nathalie's book is the most detailed and definitive guide to embracing the latest scientific research into clear steps to satisfy your customer's deepest needs before they realise they have them. *Webs of Influence* will help you optimise every single element of your digital communications.'

Rich Millington

founder, Feverbee

'No doubt, Nathalie Nahai is *the* web psychologist and by picking up this book, you are holding the best possible knowledge in your hands. No matter if your job is to make website users happier, to sell more, or even both, this content will catapult you to new dimensions of better UX.'

André Morys

author, Co-Founder, the Global Optimization Group

'I've seen over 100,000 landing pages, but remember very few. If you use Nathalie's approach to persuasion on your website, you'll create marketing experiences your customers will respond to, convert from, and most likely copy.'

Oli Gardner

co-founder, Unbounce

'What Nathalie has to say should change the way you think about marketing, advertising and communications online.'

Mitch Joel

President, Mirum, author, Six Pixels of Separation and CTRL ALT Delete

'The science behind how we think, feel and act in a single book. Get it if you want to be able to connect to your customers, and influence their actions.'

Peep Laja

founder, ConversionXL

'The ecommerce world has never been so competitive, and if you're a retailer or manufacturer who fails to listen to and understand the demands of your customers, then you're soon going to be wondering why your products are gathering dust. Nathalie explains that online persuasion is centred around three key principles: know who you're targeting, communicate persuasively, and sell with integrity.'

Dave Howard

Global Marketing Director, Brandview

'If you are hoping to make any sort of impact online, but aren't practicing what Nathalie is preaching, you'll find yourself coming up short. Practical advice, well-delivered and rooted in research. A book that's rarely far from my desk.'

David Greenwood

Senior Account Director, This is Pegasus

'Design user experiences that produce results with this excellent and practical book. One of the leading voices in applied behavioral sciences, Nathalie Nahai brings scientific insights and rigour to your work. A must-read for designers and marketers!'

Alex Osterwalder

entrepreneur and author, co-founder, Strategyzer

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CONTENTS

<i>Publisher's acknowledgements</i>	xii
<i>About the author</i>	xiii

PART 1 KNOW WHO YOU'RE TARGETING

1 Introduction	4
2 The psychology of decision-making	6
3 Who are you targeting?	9
4 Cultural quirks	11
5 Individual differences	39

PART 2 COMMUNICATE PERSUASIVELY

6 Basic principles	60
7 Optimising your website	67
8 Selecting the right images	88
9 The psychology of colour	97
10 Social media and customer service	110
11 Designing persuasive videos	120

PART 3 SELL WITH INTEGRITY

12 Influence: An introduction	130
13 Principles of online persuasion	136
14 Increase your sales	162
15 Pricing and value	174
16 The behaviour chain	185
<i>A closing note</i>	192
<i>Notes</i>	193
<i>Index</i>	229

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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Nathalie presents at conferences around the world on the science of online persuasion, and contributes to national publications, TV and radio on the subject. She also sits on the Social Media Week advisory board and Ogilvy Change experts' panel.

You can tweet to her @NathalieNahai and find out more at nathalienahai.com

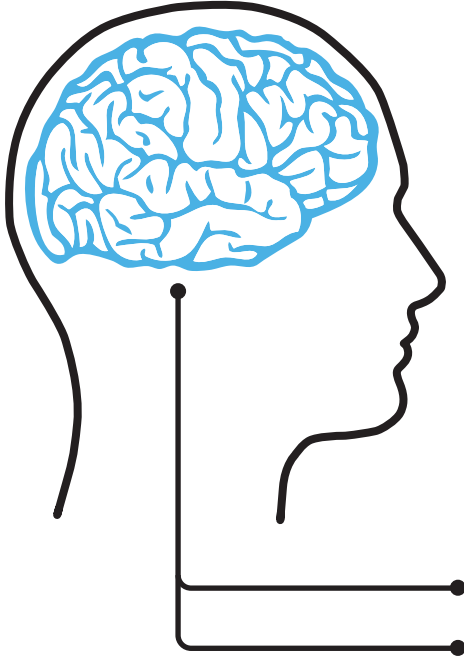


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1 PART

KNOW WHO YOU'RE TARGETING

DECISION-MAKING



Cognition by itself cannot produce action; to influence behavior, the cognitive system must operate via the affective system

Colin Camerer, et al.

Ancient, automatic responses in the brain can
BIAS AND OVERRIDE
 our conscious decision-making processes

1 SYSTEM
 Fast
 Emotional
 Subconscious
 Intuitive
 Automatic
 FFF

2 SYSTEM
 Slow
 Analytical
 Conscious
 Laborious
 Intentional
 Rational

PERSONALITY TRAITS

PLASTICITY

STABILITY

Openness

Extraversion

Conscientiousness

Agreeableness



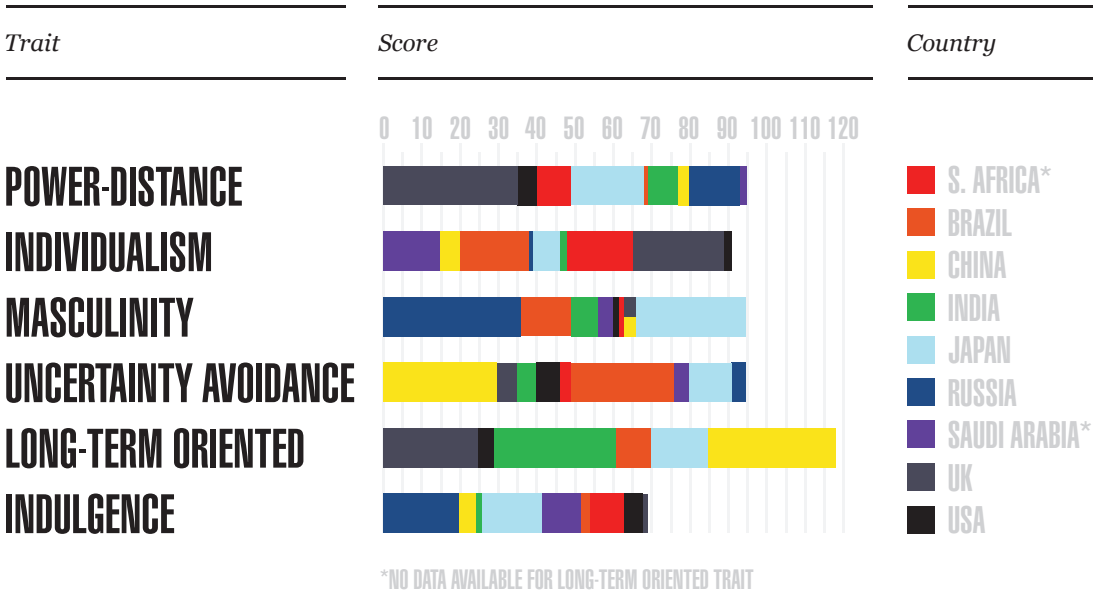
Intellectually curious
 Novelty-seeking
 Creative
 Imaginative
 Adventurous
 Independent
 Open-minded
 Emotionally self-aware

Enjoys company
 Energetic
 Gregarious
 Optimistic
 Warm
 Assertive
 Ambitious
 Excitement-seeking

Self-disciplined
 Organised
 Dependable
 Tenacious
 Consistent
 Cautious
 Methodical
 Good impulse control

Compassionate
 Cooperative
 Likeable
 Considerate
 Empathetic
 Affectionate
 Humble
 Emotionally responsive

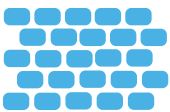
HOFSTEDE'S 6 DIMENSIONS



GENDER DIFFERENCES

BEHAVIOURS

Emotional Stability



Even-tempered
Not easily phased
Self-confident
Resilient
Calm
Relaxed
Unemotional
Copes with setbacks

Women are more likely to:

Provide inaccurate personal information
Read a site's privacy policies and change their personal settings accordingly



Blog anonymously
Post modest photos
Seek out health information
Participate more actively on social media platforms

Men are more likely to:

Go online for gaming, betting, and entertainment
Spend more time and money shopping online (UK, USA)
Research products



Share their phone number and address with companies and on social platforms
Download and listen to more music and videos

1 INTRODUCTION

“ For many, Internet access is no longer a luxury, but a necessity; it has become an obligatory component for economic, political, cultural, and individual representation and empowerment.

E. B. WEISER, PSYCHOLOGIST¹

Since so many of our daily activities take place online, it is now harder than ever for businesses to grab, hold and convert their customers' increasingly fragmented attention. Those that do succeed are the brands that understand their customers' needs and can deliver the solutions to their problems in a frictionless way. Whatever your business, whomever you're targeting, to succeed online there are three fundamental principles you must be able to fulfil:

1 KNOW WHO YOU'RE TARGETING

Understand the universal, cultural and individual factors that influence your audience's decision-making processes.

2 COMMUNICATE PERSUASIVELY

Know how to use language, non-verbal cues and visual design to communicate effectively with your target audience.

3 SELL WITH INTEGRITY

Use psychological persuasion principles to facilitate (rather than coerce) your customers towards a mutually beneficial outcome.

With this in mind, the book is divided into three parts. Within each you'll find cutting-edge insights and research from which the principles are drawn, real-world examples of how they can be applied, and how-to sections to help you implement them in your business.

2

THE PSYCHOLOGY OF DECISION-MAKING

“ Cognition by itself cannot produce action; to influence behavior, the cognitive system must operate via the affective system.

COLIN CAMERER ET AL., *BEHAVIOURAL ECONOMISTS*¹

Although it's comforting to believe that we make decisions from a rational place, in recent years mounting evidence to the contrary has disabused many of us of this notion. A considerable number of studies and theories suggest that our decision-making can in fact be significantly influenced and biased by our emotional processes.

One of the most widely cited of these is the *semantic marker hypothesis*, a mechanism proposed by neuroscientist Antonio Damasio which provides evidence that certain sub-cortical regions in the brain contribute emotional weight to the decisions we make.^{2,3} Given that people with lesions (damage) to these brain structures can be impaired when making certain types of decisions,⁴ many have taken these findings to mean that emotion is at the route of all decision-making – the reality is, however, much more complex.

ONE BRAIN, TWO SYSTEMS

In his book entitled *Thinking Fast and Slow*,⁵ Daniel Kahneman (a Nobel Prize-winning psychologist) proposed that our brains rely on a dual-core system to process information and make choices. He describes the first system as automatic (emotional) and the second as controlled (cognitive).⁶ These two processes can be roughly distinguished by where they occur in the brain,⁷ and together they form the backbone of our decision-making. If we understand how each system works, we can use this knowledge to make better decisions and influence those of the people around us.

According to Kahneman, System 1 (thinking fast) is intuitive, automatic and generally operates below the level of our conscious awareness.⁸ It is in this sub-conscious setting that we undergo different affective (emotional) states, many of which motivate impulse reactions and feelings such as hunger, fear, sexual desire and pain. These states can even have a bearing on the way we perceive and remember things and can affect everything from our ability to learn to the goals we choose to pursue.⁹

Psychologist Zajonc¹⁰ explains that these are the same processes that motivate us to approach or avoid something – decisions on which we depend to survive. It's this system that 'knows' when our partner is in a bad mood, or instinctively swerves the car when a child walks out on to the road. It's our hunch, our intuition, and it informs almost everything we do.

System 2 (thinking slow) is altogether more analytical, deliberate and rational; it is the mode that we employ to reason about the world. It's the system we use to consciously work out a maths sum or fill out a tax return and it's usually rather labour intensive. We like to think that System 2 runs the show, but it is, by its very nature, a 'lazy' system that has to cherry pick what it will and won't attend to – we can't consciously analyse everything all the time. In fact, it's this slow, controlled system that tends to kick in when our automatic processes get interrupted. This can happen when experiencing a strong visceral state (someone steals your wallet and you're furious), when we encounter an unexpected event (your mother-in-law drops by unannounced and you have to put on a smile) or when we come up against an explicit challenge (solving a cryptic crossword in the Sunday paper).

When it comes to decision-making, System 1 will continually generate feelings, intuitions and intentions, which, if endorsed by System 2, will turn into beliefs and actions. This interplay works well until we're asked to respond to something that violates our normal understanding of the world (a flying pig) or requires greater cognitive attention (the end-of-year report). At this point, it's System 2 that steps in, helping us to weigh up the facts (pigs can't fly, it must be an illusion) and respond appropriately (laugh it off).

Although we'd like to think we're rational, in reality, it's our fast, automatic system that's in charge. System 1 relies on heuristics (cognitive rules of thumb) to reduce the complexity of incoming information and speed up our decision-making which, most of the time, works just fine. For instance, employing the principle 'You get what you pay for' tends to be useful when having to make decisions in general, but in the absence of System 2's more rational approach, our automatic processes can sometimes fall prey to biases.

Take the Rational Choice Theory of economics.¹¹ This states that people are rational agents that make logical decisions, by meticulously weighing up all the information, risks and probabilities inherent in a given situation. In real life, this would mean that strategies like decoy pricing should have zero effect on the financial decisions we make, since numbers are absolute. Yet research shows that the context or framing of a situation not only influences our perception of the facts, it also significantly impacts the decisions we go on to make.

For instance, imagine that your friend asks you to go out and buy her some minced beef to make spaghetti bolognese. You go to the butcher's and you see two options: '75 per cent lean' versus '25 per cent fat'. The astute among you will have noticed that mathematically both choices are identical. However, research shows that we're significantly more likely to buy the '75 per cent lean' option, simply because of our positive association with 'leanness'.¹² So what's happening?

Well, information is never free from the context in which it is delivered or received, and along with our associations, there are many ways in which this context can skew our decisions. For example, we tend to pay more attention to information which comes easily to mind (the availability heuristic), and we often give greater weight to memories that are personally relevant, or emotionally vivid – which is why stories can be so powerful. We also tend to seek out information that enhances our self-esteem (self-serving bias) and reinforces our existing world view (confirmation bias), all of which can heavily influence both the marketing messages we respond to, and the subsequent purchase decisions we make.

Whether we like it or not, the reality is that our decisions are influenced by a whole host of factors, many of which lay beyond our conscious awareness and control. This means of course, that if we can understand how and why these principles work, we can also use them online to help shape the behaviours of others.

3 WHO ARE YOU TARGETING?

“ *Your personal core values define who you are, and a company's core values ultimately define the company's character and brand.*

TONY HSIEH, FOUNDER OF ZAPPOS¹

Before you can successfully ascertain your target audience, you first need to have a clear understanding as to the values, purpose and identity of your business. If you have never developed a marketing strategy or if it has been a while since you updated an existing one, you may find it useful to complete the exercises below.

Take a few moments to carefully consider each of the following questions. The answers you provide (in particular to those regarding your target market) will directly determine how you'll implement the principles in this book to influence and successfully engage with your online audience.

WHO ARE YOU AS A BUSINESS?

- 1 What are your core values as an individual?
- 2 What compelled you to start/join your business?
- 3 What are your company's core values?
- 4 What specific needs do you solve, and how do you solve them?
- 5 What is your primary goal for your business?
- 6 Who are your competitors?
- 7 How do you differ from your competitors?
- 8 What is unique about your service/product?
- 9 What would happen if you did not provide this service/product?
- 10 What would you like to gain from the insights within this book?
(For example, make more money, grow your market share, become a key influencer within your field.)

WHO IS YOUR TARGET MARKET?

- 1 What is motivating your customers to engage with you?
- 2 What is the age range of people who would want your service/product?
- 3 Which gender(s) would be most interested in this service/product?
- 4 What is the income bracket of your potential customers?
- 5 Is this a service/product they need or is it a luxury item?
- 6 How will they use this service/product?
- 7 What do your customers value most?
(Easy availability? Low price? Personalised attention? Special features?)
- 8 Is this an impulse buy or something they are saving for?
- 9 Where do they get most of their decision-making information?
(Through word of mouth, review sites, targeted adverts, trusted experts, celebrities?)
- 10 Where are your clients located?
(Locally? Globally?)

Having identified the key elements of your identity as a business and the potential profile of your target audience, let's take a look at how this sits within the wider context of cultural and individual differences.

4 CULTURAL QUIRKS

“ *Those designers who better understand the preferences for their target online audience are more likely to achieve success in highly competitive online markets.*

DIANNE CYR ET AL., PSYCHOLOGISTS¹

Whether you're aware of it or not, your culture forms the foundation of your behaviours, your thoughts, and even your feelings.² It informs and influences the language(s) you speak, the art you enjoy and the music you listen to. Culture shapes the social norms you adhere to, the attitudes you express and the beliefs that you hold. In short, it operates as 'a shared set of values that influence societal perceptions, attitudes, preferences, and responses'.³

Travel to any community in the world, and you will find people sharing and teaching their culture's social map to one another, shaping the values and behaviours of generations to come. It is this vital process of cultural transmission that distinguishes one society from the next,⁴ and your insight into these cultural sensibilities will determine how much influence you may wield in any given marketplace.

GLOCALISATION AND ADAPTATION

“ *To put it very simply, diversity sells.*

PROFESSOR ROLAND ROBERTSON, SOCIOLOGIST⁵

With nearly half of the earth's population now online,⁶ the widespread adoption of services such as global ecommerce sites, online banking and live translating apps⁷ exemplify our progress towards a world in which geographic and linguistic differences no longer serve as the barriers they once did. Although many have decried the rise of globalisation as a death knell for cultural diversity, this reality