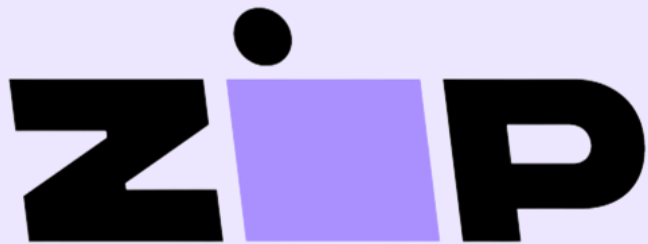# Harnessing Behavioral Science for Your Brand

Priscilla Aurthur

Quirks 2025

zip

6.3M*
Active customers

83.3k*
Merchants

46%*
Average AOV lift

500+
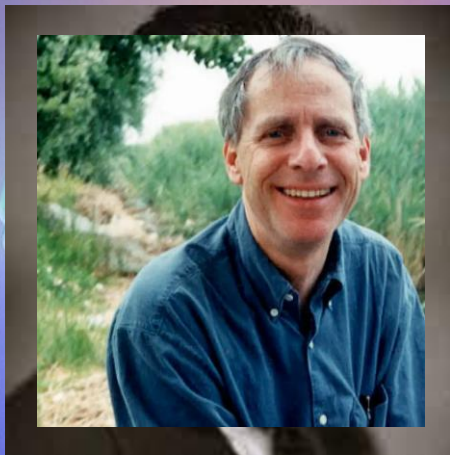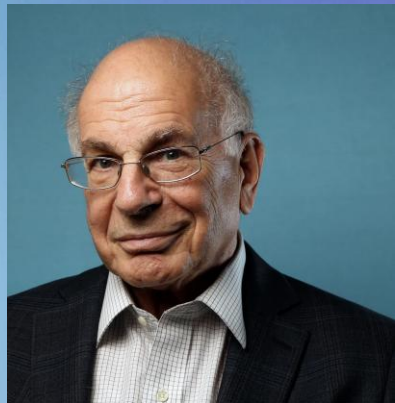MR projects last 5 years

*Global FY25 Q3. Based on Zip's internal data.

Brands supported over the years

What is Behavioral Science ?

- **John B. Watson**, known as the "father of behaviorism" **laid the foundation** for studying human behavior

- Pioneers like **Daniel Kahneman, Amos Tversky, and Richard Thaler**, help build the field of behavioral science.

- BeSci studies **why people do what they do**, beyond logic because **humans aren't always rational.**

- BeSci has **influenced** everything from **public policy to product design**.

- It looks at **how people actually behave, not how they say they will** closing the gap between intentions and actions.

There are over 100 principles of BeSci

Anchoring
Availability heuristic
Representativeness heuristic
Framing effect
Loss aversion
Prospect theory
Endowment effect
Status quo bias
Default effect
Sunk cost fallacy
Hyperbolic discounting
Temporal discounting
Present bias
Mental accounting
Certainty effect
Ambiguity aversion
Risk aversion
Probability neglect
Optimism bias
Overconfidence bias
Planning fallacy
Survivorship bias
Confirmation bias
Hindsight bias
Recency bias
Primacy effect
Priming
Choice overload

Decoy effect
Compromise effect
Base rate neglect
Belief bias
Dunning-Kruger effect
Halo effect
Horn effect
Just-world hypothesis
Fundamental attribution error
Actor-observer bias
False consensus effect
Illusion of control
Neglect of probability
Law of small numbers
Regression to the mean
Peak-end rule
Mere exposure effect
Disposition effect
Cognitive dissonance
Self-serving bias
Zero-risk bias
Social proof
Reciprocity
Authority bias
Scarcity
Commitment and consistency
In-group bias
Out-group homogeneity

Bystander effect
Groupthink
Bandwagon effect
Conformity bias
Social comparison
Pluralistic ignorance
Spotlight effect
False uniqueness effect
Normative influence
Descriptive norms
Injunctive norms
Identity signaling
Habit formation
Cognitive load
Ego depletion
Behavioral inertia
Implementation intentions
Default bias
Sludge
Friction
Effort heuristic
Choice architecture
Nudge theory
Behavioral bottlenecks
Simplification
Chunking
Cue-triggered behavior
Hot-cold empathy gap

Salience
Timing effect
Goal gradient effect
Self-nudging
Anticipated regret
Regret aversion
Affect heuristic
Mood congruence
Self-perception theory
Identity-based motivation
Loss aversion
Intrinsic vs. extrinsic motivation
Temporal construal
Hedonic adaptation
Fear of missing out (FOMO)
Effort justification
Pain of paying
Nostalgia effect
Emotional contagion
Behavioral mapping
EAST framework (Easy, Attractive, Social, Timely)
Behavioral segmentation
Journey-based insights
Behavioral personas
System 1 vs System 2

THE LIST GOES ON...

5 key BeSci Principles

01 Anchoring

02 Framing

03 Priming

04 Friction

05 Cognitive Ease

Anchoring

a cognitive bias where people rely heavily on the first piece of information they see (the "anchor") when making decisions or judgments.

$250k

$750k

$10m+
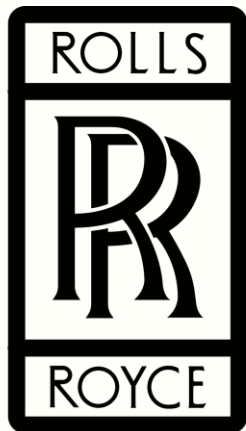
$750k

ROLLS ROYCE

Compared to a high-end Mercedes, a Rolls Royce was hundreds of thousands more

Rolls changed the context, the anchor point

Behavioral challenge:
William Sonoma's new '**bread maker' did not have a price comparison, little sales** when introduced at $275

Once they **introduced a marginally better bread maker for $429 and placed it next to the $275 bread maker** in a print ad, sales for the cheaper bread maker doubled.

*"I don't know much about bread machines, but **if I can buy the $275 model that's almost as good as the $429 model**, then I must be getting a good deal."*
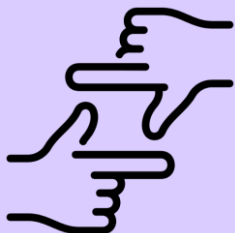
WILLIAMS SONOMA

$275

$429

Framing

a cognitive bias where the way information is presented (whether positive or negative) influences how people perceive and respond to it

75% lean

25% fat

Ground Beef Case Study:

To prove this bias, in a behavioral research study, 2 groups were asked to judge **which meat was better quality?**

● **Group 1: told the meat is 75% lean**
● **Group 2: told the meat was 25% fat**

Result: No surprise Group 1 describes the meat as much 'better quality'

Levin, I. & Gaeth, G. 1988. How Consumers are Affected by the Framing of Attribute Information Before and After Consuming the Product. Journal of Consumer Research, 15, 374-378
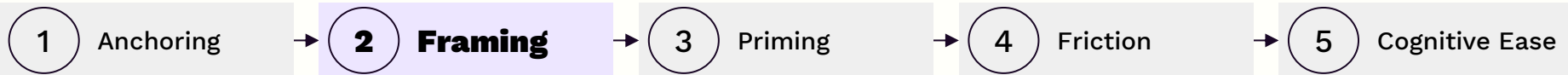
HM Revenue & Customs
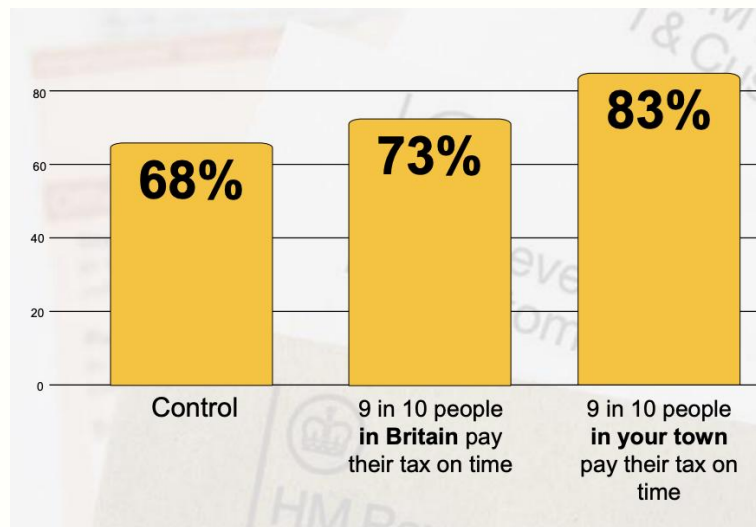
Brits not paying their taxes on time

Behavioral challenge:
For years, Brits were sent letters to the late tax payers, **using traditional threats of interest charges, late fees, and legal action to try to get people to mail in their payment.** Some did but many didn't.

They **changed the letters** to say "9 in 10 people in your town pay their tax on time"

Results:
increased compliance by up to **15%**, helped HMRC collect **£200 million in additional tax revenue** in just one year, and over £3.32 billion over the years that followed
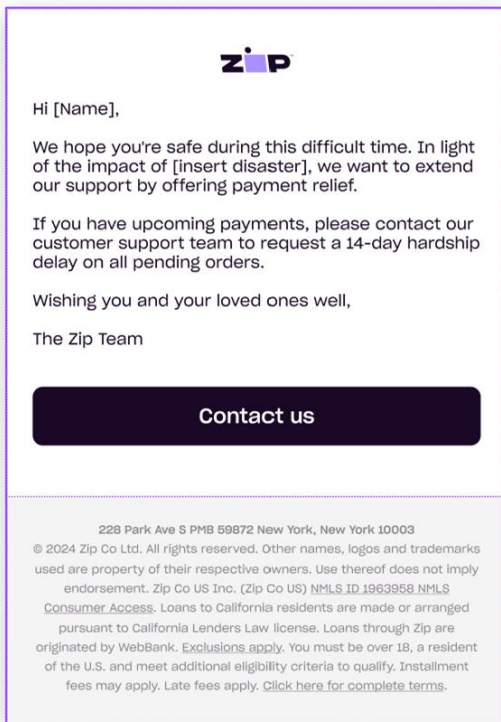
THE BEHAVIOURAL ARCHITECTS

Optimizing Zip's 'Disaster Relief Program' comms to increase take-up of our 'pause repayment' feature

Version 1

Subject: [Insert Disaster] Relief
Header: We're here to help.

Hi [Name],

We hope you're safe during this difficult time. In light of the impact of [insert disaster], we want to extend our support by offering payment relief.

If you have upcoming payments, please contact our customer support team to request a 14-day hardship delay on all pending orders.

Wishing you and your loved ones well,

The Zip Team

Contact us

Version 2

1 **Subject:** You can press pause on upcoming payments

Header: We're here to help

Hi [Name],

2 We hope you're staying safe during this difficult time. In light of [insert disaster], we want to offer more time to make your repayments.

3 We want to help make things easier for you, so if you'd like to pause on all upcoming payments for a full 2 weeks, please request a call from us by [insert date].

We are wishing you and your loved ones well,

[insert name of someone from the Zip team]

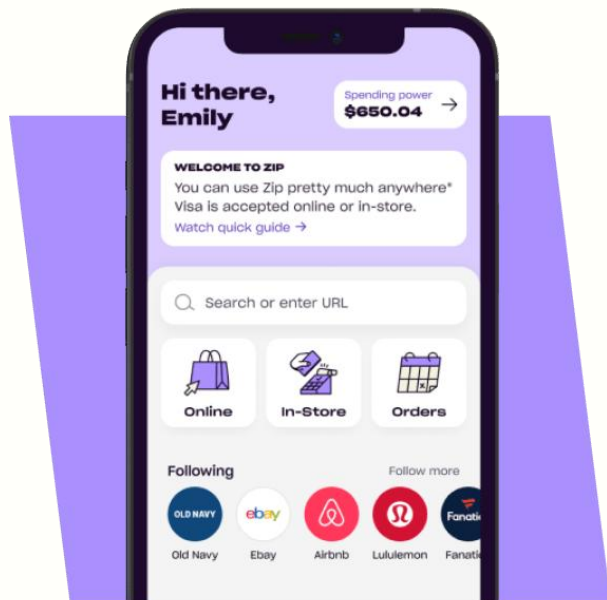[Insert their role]

Request a call, we'll handle the rest
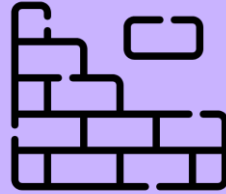
Priming

the unconscious influence that prior exposure to certain cues or stimuli has on a person's thoughts, feelings, or behaviors

Westin Hotels & the "White Tea" Scent

- Westin Hotels **introduced a signature "White Tea" scent** in lobbies, hallways, and even on their bath products.

- Evoking **freshness, calm, luxury, and cleanliness, aligning perfectly with their brand identity** and association

- This form of priming **leaves people with a better experience** when they check in and check out

- Opened **new revenue streams beyond hospitality**. Guests began purchasing branded products like candles, room sprays, and bedding featuring the signature scent.

WESTIN®

HOTELS & RESORTS

WESTIN®
HOTELS & RESORTS

WHITE TEA FRAGRANCE
EXCLUSIVELY AT WESTIN HOTELS

Intention Use Case

Goal:
Identifying what different shoppers need from Zip to **gain more loyalty and boost usage in shopping journey**

To reduce bias, we **began with behavior based questions to ground participants** in real actions before asking about attitudes.

With a 4-day digital diary (where **Day 1 focused on priming** participants) **we asked participants to walk us through their purchase journeys** and share screen recordings

We already knew their preferred payment methods from Day 1 priming so if they used Zip (or didn't), **we saw the real behavior not responses shaped to please us**.

Hi there, Emily

Spending power
$650.04 →

WELCOME TO ZIP
You can use Zip pretty much anywhere* Visa is accepted online or in-store.
Watch quick guide →

Search or enter URL

Online   In-Store   Orders

Following   Follow more

Old Navy   Ebay   Airbnb   Lululemon   Fanatics

Friction

refers to any obstacle (big or small) that makes a task harder to complete, often reducing the likelihood of action
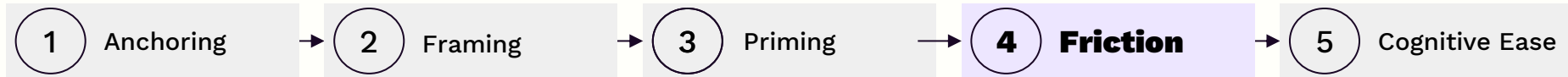
Amazon's 1-Click Purchase

Behavioral challenge: Cart abandonment due to multi-step checkout.

Extra clicks = more chance of drop-off. By reducing steps, **Amazon removed friction** resulting in,
● Boosted buying
● Increased conversion
● Greater customer lifetime value
● Faster checkout time
● Lower cart abandonment
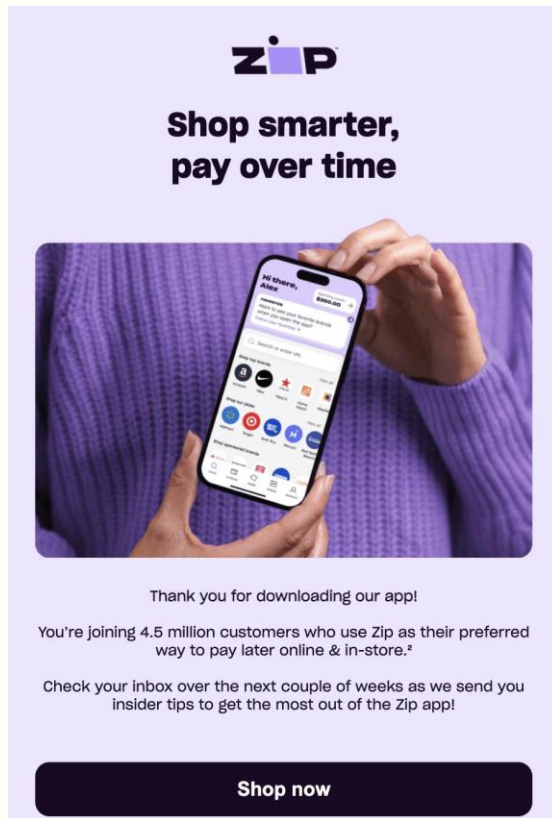● Better customer experience

ZIP x THE *BEHAVIOURAL* ARCHITECTS
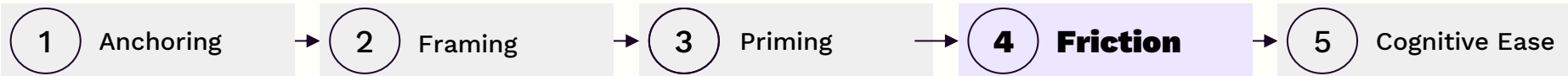
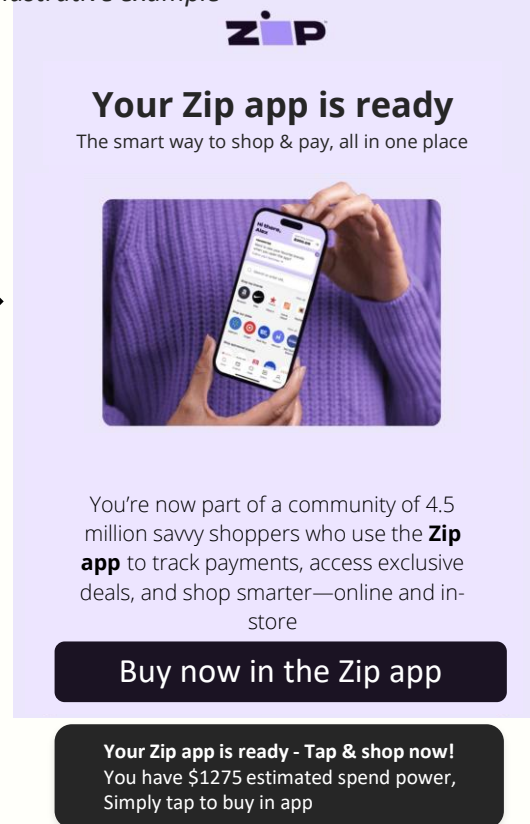**Understand & Improve customer drop-offs and improve Zip's in-app customer onboarding**

Goal: Guiding new customers to their first in-app purchase with Zip. (After downloading the app, customers get a series of comms over 14 days)

Friction: 'Shop Now' didn't clearly signal 'engage with the app'

We reviewed and updated the full Day 0–14 onboarding flow to reduce friction

---

ZIP

Shop smarter, pay over time

Thank you for downloading our app!

You're joining 4.5 million customers who use Zip as their preferred way to pay later online & in-store.²

Check your inbox over the next couple of weeks as we send you insider tips to get the most out of the Zip app!

Shop now

Illustrative example

ZIP

Your Zip app is ready

The smart way to shop & pay, all in one place

You're now part of a community of 4.5 million savvy shoppers who use the **Zip app** to track payments, access exclusive deals, and shop smarter—online and in-store

Buy now in the Zip app

Your Zip app is ready - Tap & shop now!
You have $1275 estimated spend power, Simply tap to buy in app

Cognitive Ease

the feeling of effortlessness when processing information, which makes things seem more familiar, likable, and true
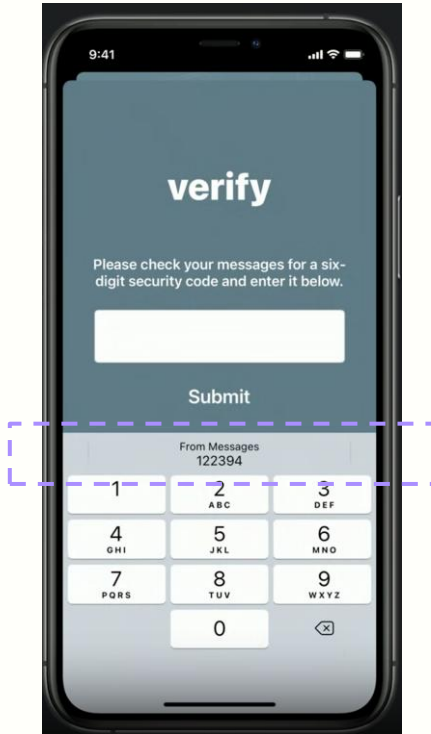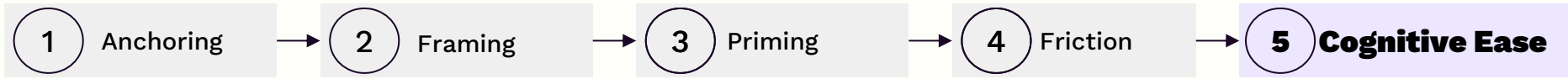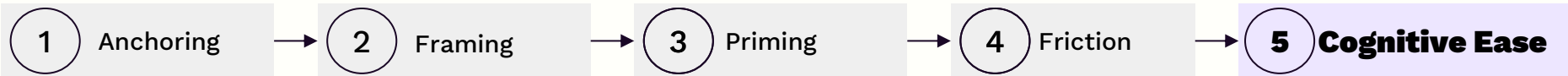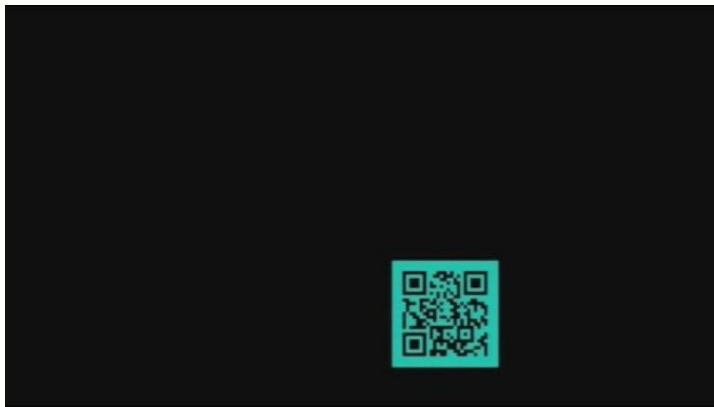
Apple's Auto-fill

Automatically populates: E-mail addresses, names and contact info, payment details, passwords. two-factor authentication codes

- Eliminates memory recall, decision fatigue, and small stressors
- **Reinforcing Apple's reputation for intuitive design**, reliability and trustworthiness

coinbase

The Coinbase Super Bowl QR Code Ad (2022)

- Visual callback was **easy to process, nostalgic, and playful**. It took **no effort to "understand"** it.
- Viewers were primed to expect celebrity packed, noisy ads, but the quiet black screen broke that pattern
- Boosted curiosity and FOMO

Aftermath:
- **20 million** hits to landing page in **1 minute**
- The **site crashed** due to the spike in traffic.
- **App downloads surged,** and Coinbase was #2 in the App Store shortly after

Using BeSci as a Market Researcher

# Why Traditional Market Research Often Misses the Truth

People don't wake up thinking like researchers.
They think like humans: messy, emotional, & imperfect humans!

- People overstate, misremember, self-censor, overclaim or idealize in research.

- **When questions don't feel inclusive** people hold back or try to be someone they're not.

- Especially in finance, shame, fear, or confusion **can lead to distorted responses**.

- **Real decisions happen under pressure**, with limited time and emotional complexity.

✦ **Can you relate moment:**

Ever ask a simple question and instead of telling you what they did... they tell you what they think "smart" people would do?
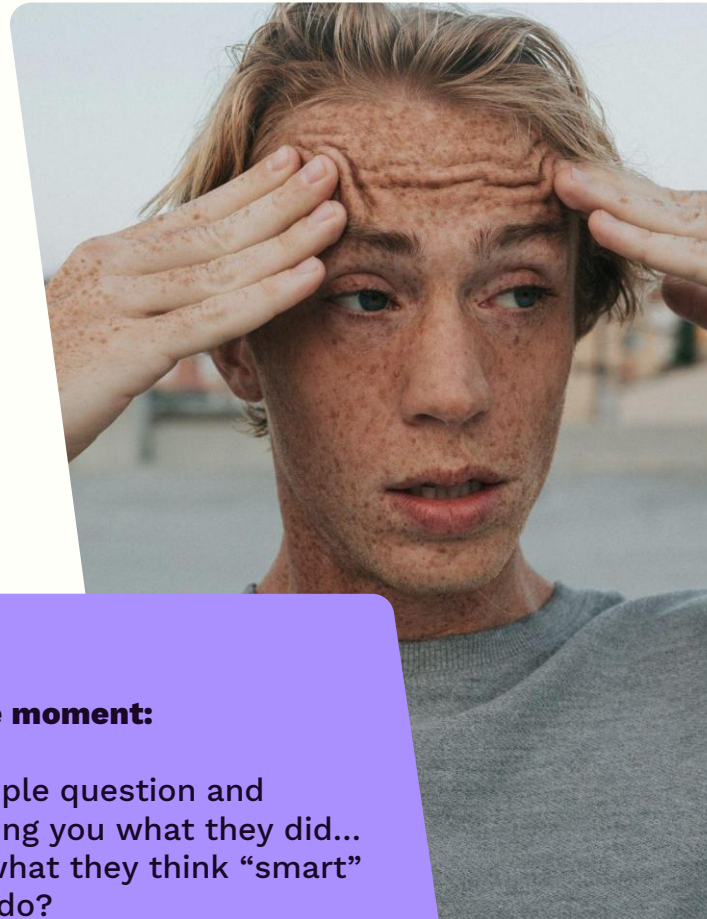
Write Questions that Feel Safe & Inclusive

The goal isn't just accuracy it's empathy. Design research that respects how people actually live and how they want to feel seen.

Prime for Self-Compassion

"How well do you manage money?"

↓

"What healthy financial habit have you adopted that you wish you had started sooner?"

Framing That Respects

"Why don't you save enough?"

↓

"What is something that has hindered where you want to be financially?"

System 1 vs. System 2

"How do you feel about using credit?"

↓

"What payment method did you use for your most recent purchase and why?"

Choice Architecture: Permission to Opt Out

Feeling forced to answer can trigger discomfort or false responses

↓

"I'm not sure" or "Prefer not to say"

Stop Friction be Human

Corporate language, sophisticated language

↓

Use warm, natural language

System 1: Fast, automatic, emotional thinking
System 2: Slow, deliberate, logical thinking
Choice Architecture: The way choices are presented shapes how people make decisions

AI is making it even easier!

Use AI tools like ChatGPT, Gemini, Co-pilot and others to support in-house (BeSci) research (learn how to write effective prompts!)

Leverage survey platforms with built-in AI features (Qualtrics, SightX, Outset.ai) that help:
● Craft stronger, more targeted questions
● Automatically probe deeper based on respondent answers
● Richer faster insights

Although smaller tiered projects can be done in house with AI, **partner with BeSci specialized agencies for larger projects**

THE *BEHAVIOURAL* ARCHITECTS

What?

- Behavioral science helps us **understand how people make decisions** (which isn't always logical)

- BeSci highlights habits, feelings, and mental shortcuts

- It helps **show us what people actually do, not just what they say they do**

- **There are over 100 Be Sci principles** you can use to enhance Market Research

So What?

- Small tweaks in **wording, sequence, or defaults can dramatically shift behavior**.

- **How we ask questions directly impacts what we learn** because people self-censor, idealize, misremember, etc.

- By applying BeSci, we can **close the gap between what people say and what they do**

- **BeSci can be used as a mindset!** Constantly look for ways to innovate and improve how you help people whether that's how you frame communication, phrase questions, or build easy to use products

Now What ?

- **Audit touchpoints for friction:** Simplify onboarding flows, messages, and interactions.

- **Rethink how you frame questions:** Use empathetic, inclusive, and action grounded language.

- **Use AI tools to design your research** with behavioral principles in mind.

- **In-house BeSci can go far with AI** tools like ChatGPT but larger initiatives may benefit from BeSci specialist agencies.

Which BeSci principle could you apply to your brand right away?

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Marketing Research Analyst

Thank you

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