

Announcer: Welcome to Tram Talks, a little taste of Deakin University here in the world's first mobile lecture theatre. You've chosen to listen to podcast number 4, 'No Control'. Dr. Paul Harrison presents a mini-lecture on the mysterious effects of marketing and advertising on consumer behaviour.

Dr. Harrison: Hi, there. My name is Dr. Paul Harrison, and I teach and research consumer behaviour in Deakin University's Business School. And today, I want to talk to you about one overarching idea that you may find a little tricky to accept: you are not in control.

I don't mean you're all out there having a Britney Spears-style meltdown and shaving your heads, but I do mean that you're not in complete control of your actions, and certainly not your wallet. However savvy a shopper you may think you are, you are being thwarted at every turn by marketers who know just how to tickle the reptilian and even rational part of your brain.

I think the first and most important issue is that all the research in this field in the past 20 to 30 years has shown conclusively that much of our behaviour is automatic and outside our awareness. That's not to say we're just automatons at the behest of the evil marketing geniuses, it's just to say that there is no way we can be aware of every decision we make in our waking hours.

Studies in consumer behaviour have looked at how the environment in which we consume influences our behaviour. Obvious things like lighting, music and smells, but also seemingly benign things like the colour of the shirt a sales person wears, the width of their face, the creakiness of their voice, things I doubt many of us even notice.

Starting with light, a study in 2014 found that lower lighting in the glassware section of IKEA led to increased sales. Another found that installing additional 500-watt lighting in the ceiling or over a display makes shoppers spend more time inspecting and touching the items. Another found that switching between red, blue, green or traditional white lighting significantly affected consumer's estimates of the value of wines they tasted in a winery.

Another study found that playing French music in a wine store increased sales of French wine, while German music increased sales in not lederhosen but German wine, although by not as much as the French wine. And the people who were surveyed didn't know that they were being studied and were not consciously of what music was playing.

So it was as close to reality that you can get in a study. Not in a lab, but in the same place where you and I go shopping. A different study found that the

playing of classical music in general resulted in people spending nearly 70% more on a bottle of wine than when they played top 40 music. So I guess people were feeling 70% more fancy or something. Anyway the researchers in this paper argued that perhaps the classical music had subliminally communicated that the place was a sophisticated environment and so they should really only consider premium products and the premium price tag that goes with them.

And here's a bit more on music. One study found that increasing the tempo of background music from less than 72 beats per minute - that's about this fast - to more than 94 beats per minute - that's about this fast - made consumers move more rapidly through the aisles. But the researchers also found that the turnover at a supermarket increased by 40% with a lowered tempo of music, because customers spent longer in the aisles, which led them to buy more stuff.

So if you want to stay under budget when you're doing your groceries, maybe use your iPod to drown out the store's music with your own techno. Although techno may get you into a heightened state, create some ego depletion, and your willpower will be lowered. So I don't know, just be careful what you listen to.

Then there's touch. Merely touching or holding an object apparently makes us not only more likely to buy it but willing to pay more for it. Even our backsides are influenced by touch, but not in a creepy way. A study published in the journal 'Science' in 2010 got 86 participants to sit in a hard or a soft cushioned chair and then asked them to imagine that they were shopping for a new car. It was a kind of bidding or negotiation situation, and the people who were seated in the soft chairs were willing to offer 40% more on their second offer than the people in the hard chairs. So a hard seat quite literally made people more hard-nosed.

In the paper, the explanation that the researchers gave was that the hard chair changed the buyers' perception of their negotiating power and made them harder bargainers. And again, this was outside of the participants' conscious awareness. So my advice is, don't sit on the beanbag at the car dealership. Maybe bring your own milk crate.

Let's talk about colour. When sales staff are wearing red clothing, we're more likely to consider their information to be accurate than when they're wearing white or blue. And prices displayed in red rather than black results in greater perceived value by men.

There are quite a few things about actual salespeople that affect us. For example, people rate customer service higher and spend more money when the sales person copies our gestures, and also when we find the salesperson

attractive. In one study, people gave nearly a full rating point out of nine for customer service from people who they believed were attractive. And before people ask, "What is attractive? Isn't that a value judgment or culturally determined?" The answer is yes to all that. So the researchers used a different study with a different group of punters to assess the attractiveness of the salesperson.

And finally, I think my favourite of all of these studies is one from Duke University titled 'The Effect of Voice Quality on Ad Efficacy'. So the researchers did this experiment where they got consumers to listen to an advertisement. They actually used an Internet service ad from an Australian telco, although this was done in the States. And they measured how people's responses to the ad differed depending on the type of voice they heard reading it.

So they had all these different categories of voice quality: creaky, breathy, harsh, nasal, tense, and whisper. And they also had both male and female variations. Let's just listen to a couple of those samples. So this one is the female whispery voice.

Woman: Are you tired of slow, expensive Internet? Is your unreliable Internet interfering with paying your bills, looking up directions, and researching your future purchases?

Paul: And this one is the male creaky voice.

Man: Are you tired of slow, expensive Internet? Is your unreliable Internet interfering with paying your bills, looking up directions, and researching your future purchases?

Paul: And this one is the female creaky voice.

Woman 2: Are you tired of slow, expensive Internet? Is your unreliable Internet interfering with paying your bills, looking up directions, and researching your future purchases?

Dr. Harrison: Now, those last two examples were the two that had the greatest effect on people's response to the ad. Female listeners were more likely to purchase a service being advertised when they hear it from a male creaky voice but least likely when they hear it come from a female creaky voice, although men seem to be insensitive to voice variations, and maybe I'd hazard a guess that there's some kind of social conditioning playing a part in there.

So be careful out there, shoppers. There are all kinds of hidden factors well out of our conscious reach influencing our shopping behaviour. But don't stress too much, it's okay. We're all a product of our psychological biases, and to be at least a little bit more aware of them and, really importantly, recognising that we all have vulnerabilities is a good first step toward being a little more in control.

Announcer: Thanks to Dr. Paul Harrison. This has been another Tram Talk from the world's first mobile lecture theatre. Just a small sample at what's available at Deakin University. Visit study.deakin.edu.au to learn more.