



PERSONALISED PERSUASION

Your handbook for targeted ads.



patrickfagan.co.uk



Advertising basically sucks.

It's one-size-fits-none, and when brands do try and personalise, they often do it badly, relying only on basic demographics and interests.

The best way to personalise is through personality – customising the tone of voice, wording, imagery, channel and behavioural science nudges based on how your audience's brains work.

This guide will help you do exactly that – and ultimately improve your acquisition, conversion and market share. And it's free.

You're welcome!

Patrick Fagan

(Your favourite behavioural scientist)





We're all cognitive misers.

All of us. The universe is infinitely big, and our brains are infinitesimally small – we just don't have the time, energy or brainpower to think through every decision carefully.

Instead, we rely on subconscious shortcuts called heuristics – like picking the most popular restaurant to eat because you know it must be good. These rules-of-thumb let us navigate the world without having to think too much.

When you're selling something, you can design 'nudges' which hijack these heuristics. If you had a restaurant, you might seat people by the window to make it look busy.

The thing is, these nudges don't work the same way for everyone. Some people (me) would hate to eat in a busy restaurant – they'd prefer somewhere quiet, away from people.

If you want to use nudges properly, you have to understand your audience.

just for you.

25 September 2003

Account Number:

Dear **[Name]**.

Congratulations! You are now eligible for a special interest rate on a personal loan with our bank. This is limited-time opportunity, so be sure to come in to your local branch by **31 October 2003** to take advantage of this offer!

You can use this cash for consolidating costly debts, handling unexpected expenses, or anything else you need!

Loan Amount	Loan Term	Monthly Repayment
R1000.00	4 Months	R379.90

LOAN AVAILABILITY SUBJECT TO TERMS & CONDITIONS

Loans are available in other amounts to suit your needs. No hidden costs, no surprises—what you see is what you pay.

How to apply:

Bring your ID book and most recent payslip to your local branch by **31 October 2003** and speak to a consultant.

We look forward to assisting you.

Customer Service Consultant

We look forward to assisting you.

P.S. If you have already taken a personal loan since 01 May 2003, this offer no longer applies to you.



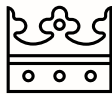
Nudging is not one-size-fits-all.

This study sent letters advertising loans to 50k people. They found that a picture of a smiling woman increased loan uptake to the equivalent of dropping the interest rate by 4.5% - but only among men. In short, the nudge only worked for a specific group.

Demogs aren't that useful.

Charles Mountbatten-Windsor (the King of England) and Ozzy Osbourne (the Prince of Darkness) have a lot in common. Yet their personalities are quite different.

Although they both like dogs, if you wanted to sell them dog food, you'd probably do it in different ways.



King Charles

- Born in 1948 ✓
- English ✓
- Twice married ✓
- Wealthy ✓
- Lives in a castle ✓
- Two children ✓
- Holidays in the Alps ✓
- Likes dogs ✓

Ruler

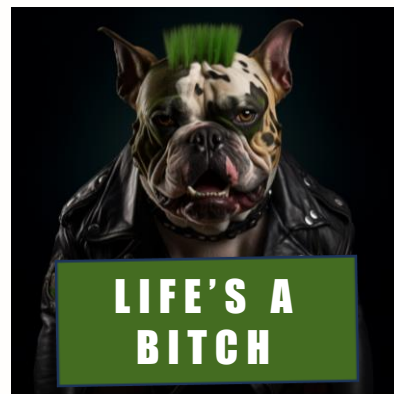
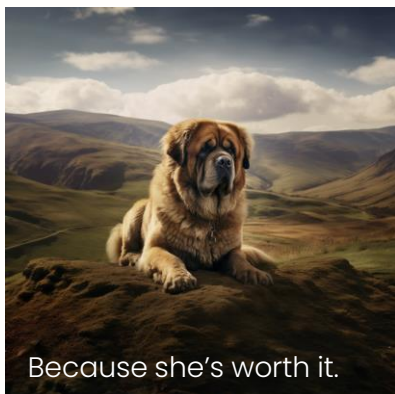
x



Ozzy Osbourne

- Born in 1948 ✓
- English ✓
- Twice married ✓
- Wealthy ✓
- Lives in a castle ✓
- Two children ✓
- Holidays in the Alps ✓
- Likes dogs ✓

Rebel

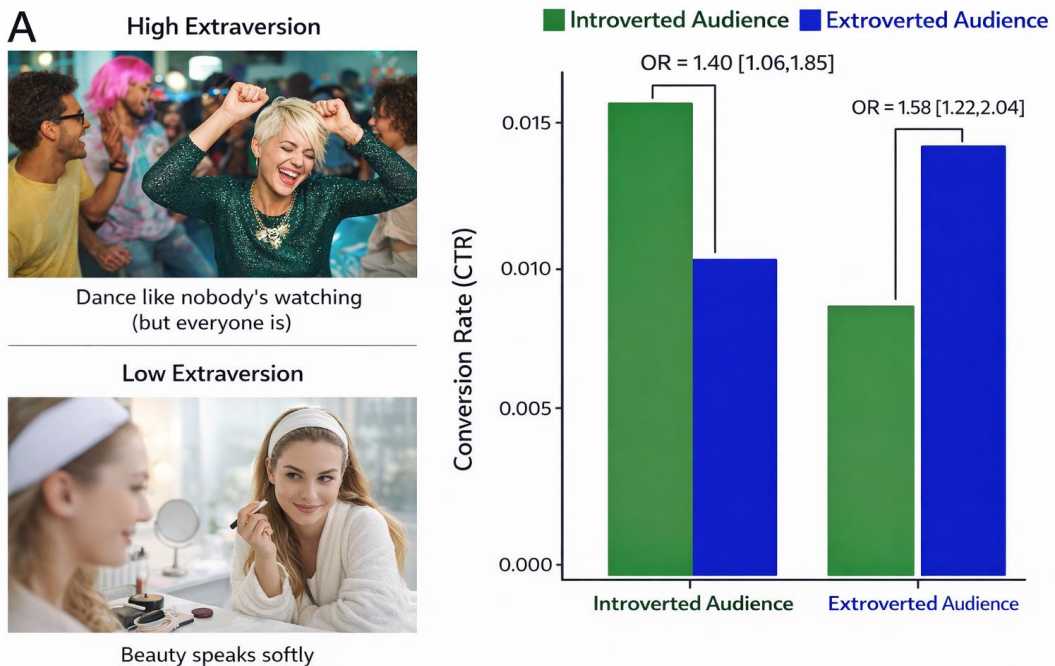


It works.

A study from Cambridge University found that personality-targeted Facebook ads had up to 50% higher conversion rates.

Another study concluded “The results show evidence that citizens are more strongly persuaded by political ads that match their own personality traits.”

And in my own research, I helped an insurer reduce their CPA by up to 49% using personality-targeted ads.



Matz, S. C., Kosinski, M., Nave, G., & Stillwell, D. J. (2017). Psychological targeting as an effective approach to digital mass persuasion. *Proceedings of the national academy of sciences*, 114(48), 12714-12719.

Explore the OCEAN.

To get these results, you must make messages with personality.

Over decades of research, psychologists took every word in the dictionary and had people rate themselves. Eventually, they found that these words clustered into just five underlying traits. These are called the Big Five, and they have the acronym OCEAN.

If you know your audience's OCEAN score, you can predict pretty much anything about them – especially the kind of adverts they'd like.





Openness

Openness is about being creative, thoughtful, and liberal. It's about cognitive fluidity versus stability. People who score low on this trait are more pragmatic.



Openness



AESTHETICS

Openness is the 'artistic' personality trait, often synonymous with creativity. They have wide tastes but stay away from conventional content like soft pop music or chat shows; instead, they like unusual, sensational, or subversive forms like punk music, horror films and even tattoos and piercings. Open people are also intellectual and therefore like complex content, like jazz or classical. They even prefer more complicated shapes and paintings. Anything ambiguous which makes them think is appreciated too, like documentaries, surrealist movies, or nonsense jokes.



LANGUAGE

Open people like to read, and they're good at it. They prefer abstract topics, like culture and science. Overall, they prefer language that's verbose and insightful. Analyses of speech patterns have indeed shown that open people are verbose (e.g., using more words and longer words), insightful (e.g., using words like "think", and asking more questions), rebellious (e.g., making more references to death, and swearing more), cultural (e.g., talking about music more and sport less), abstract (e.g., talking the present tense and first person less), and intellectual (e.g., using more punctuation).



HEURISTICS

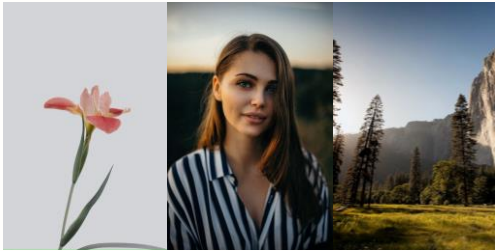
Open people are more intellectual, curious, and tolerant of ambiguity: they like to think things through. They respond better to persuasive appeals which have implicit appeals rather than explicit conclusions, which encourage thoughtfulness and fantasising, and which have strong arguments. Open people tend to be more reward-focused and risk-taking, meaning they respond well to hedonic benefits. They are nonconforming and follow individualistic hopes rather than duties, making them less likely to be nudged by appeals to authority or obligation.



Openness

low

high



VISUALS



Simple, natural, clear

Artistic, abstract, complex

Everyday topics, shorter words,
common words, concrete
language (e.g., present tense)



WORDING

Verbose and unusual, proper
syntax, insight and thought, sex,
drugs and rock 'n' roll



An everyday caregiver
Warm, wholesome, light
Family, health, happiness



BRANDING

A magical artist
Intellectual, creative, upmarket
Curiosity, social purpose

Fluent, simple, explicit, direct
Duty, obligation, regret
Friends and family



INFLUENCE

Metaphors, implicit conclusions
Success and independence
Scientists and creatives

Pets
Baking
Gardening
Etc...



TARGETING

Art
Science
Philosophy
Etc...



Openness

 **Patrick's Peanuts**
London, UK



1,178 likes

Patrick's Peanuts 😊 Enjoy our classic family recipe. We have, for over 35 years. Find Patrick's Peanuts™ at all good retailers now.

[View all 423 comments](#)

5 DAYS AGO

 **Patrick's Peanuts**
London, UK

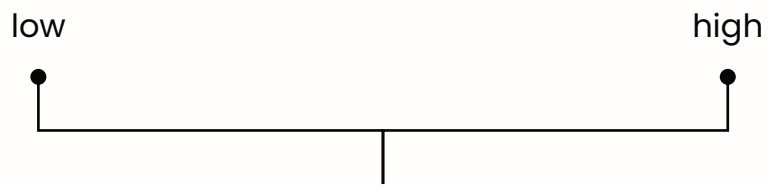


1,178 likes

Patrick's Peanuts 😊 Think you know Arachis hypogea? Think again. Find Patrick's Peanuts™ at all good retailers now.

[View all 423 comments](#)

5 DAYS AGO



A worked example for Patrick's Peanuts





Conscientiousness

Conscientiousness is about being organised and hard-working. It's about inhibition and future-planning. People who score lower are more impulsive and rule-breaking.





Conscientiousness



AESTHETICS

Conscientiousness is related to preferences for traditional styles which conform to norms. These people are less likely to enjoy things like metal or horror, or even comedy. Instead, they like 'safe' content like pop, country, or rom-coms. They also have a desire to stay in control, and thus prefer media that is structured and predictable over things like thrillers. Similarly, they dislike complex paintings and prefer art that 'does what it says on the tin', like portraits and landscapes.



LANGUAGE

Conscientious people have narrow interests, focusing on factual material like science and current events. They prefer wording to be useful and concrete. Analysis of their speech patterns reveals conscientious people use language that is responsible (e.g., referring to time and the future), practical (e.g., talking about home and work rather than music or religion), dutiful (e.g., not swearing or showing negative emotion), impersonal (e.g., referring to people less and using "you" less), and constructive (e.g., making more references to optimism and energy).



HEURISTICS

Conscientious people are more prudent and attach more weight to the utilitarian value of a product. They respond poorly to risky appeals and they like to think things through rationally. Conscientious people have a need for structure and consistency, and are thus more likely to be nudged by commitments, obligations, and duties.



Conscientiousness

low

high



VISUALS



Subversive, bold, messy

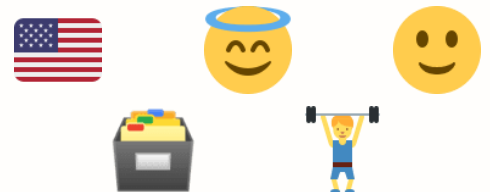
Representational, sensible, symmetrical

Tentative (e.g. 'maybe'), pop culture topics, abstractions, antagonisms (e.g., swearing)



WORDING

Formal, unemotional, optimistic, time-focused, dutiful topics (e.g., work, school)



A romantic outlaw
Intense, rebellious
Counter-culture



BRANDING

A persistent hero
Sensible, reliable, dutiful
Light entertainment

Impulsiveness, urgency
Personal benefits, rewards
Social justice



INFLUENCE

Utility
Group loyalty, duty, tradition
Religious leaders, colleagues

Crime
Dating
Comedy
Etc...



TARGETING

Work
Finance
Current Affairs
Etc...



Conscientiousness

 **Patrick's Peanuts**
London, UK





1,178 likes

Patrick's Peanuts 🤯 HEY F*CKNUT. Try it, you might just like it. Or don't. Whatever. Find Patrick's Peanuts™ at all good retailers now.

[View all 423 comments](#)

5 DAYS AGO

 **Patrick's Peanuts**
London, UK



1,178 likes

Patrick's Peanuts 😊 At under 100 calories a bag, it'd be rude not to. Find Patrick's Peanuts™ at all good retailers now.

[View all 423 comments](#)

5 DAYS AGO

low

high

A worked example for Patrick's Peanuts





Extraversion

Extraversion is about being sociable, positive and outgoing. The core of extraversion is having a reward focus and need for stimulation. Low scorers are quiet and introspective.



Extraversion



AESTHETICS

Extraverts have a high need for external stimulation. Thus, they prefer energetic movies (e.g., action and adventure, and even sex comedies), rhythmic, fast, and discordant music, and louder adverts. They like bold and bright colours, especially red. Extraverts are also more emotionally positive, and thus enjoy happy music like pop, as well as simple, happy, modern paintings and photographs rather than anything too abstract. Extraverts need social interaction, and thus prefer social content like reality TV and pictures with people in.



LANGUAGE

Extraverts tend to prefer print media less, since they are excitement-seeking – and the text they do like tends to be related to people and activity, like celebrities, entertainment, and fitness. Research analysing the speech patterns of extraverts has found their language tends to be informal (e.g., faster with fewer pauses and hesitations but more errors, and using less punctuation, articles, or unique words), social (e.g., referring to other people and using more pronouns), positive (e.g., more positive emotion words and fewer negations like “no”), and outwardly-focused (e.g., talking about feelings less and asking fewer questions).



HEURISTICS

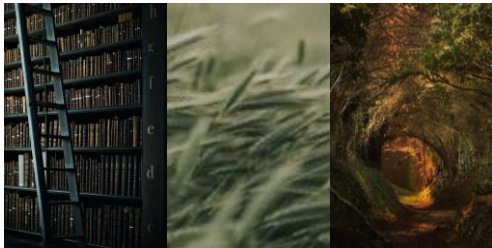
Extraverts have higher positive emotionality and thus messaging should focus on positives to be gained rather than losses to avoid. They similarly respond better to humour in adverts. Extraverts tend to be reward-focused and thus more likely to pick a risky option over a safe option; they are also more impulsive and want things here and now rather than in the future. Of course, extraverts are more social and respond better to messaging offering social benefits like being the life of the party. They also prefer ads with sex appeal.



Extraversion

low

high



Calm, earthy, fantastical



VISUALS



Stimulating, social, bright

Formal, structured, tentative
(e.g., 'maybe'), unique words,
feelings



WORDING

Informal, unstructured, social,
personal pronouns, positive
emotion



An everyday philosopher
Factual, sensible
Fantastical stories



BRANDING

An adventurous joker
Assertive, aspirational
Coolness, popular trends

Safety, loss/risk aversion
Commitment, habit
Scholarly surrogates



INFLUENCE

Ego appeals, social proof
Humour, sex, benefits
Celebrities, influencers

RPGs
Reading
Programming
Etc...



TARGETING

Fitness
Concerts
Celebrities
Etc...



Extraversion

Patrick's Peanuts
London, UK




1,178 likes

Patrick's Peanuts 📌 When the world's gone nuts, settle in with some good ones. Find Patrick's Peanuts™ at all good retailers now.

[View all 423 comments](#)

5 DAYS AGO

Patrick's Peanuts
London, UK



1,178 likes

Patrick's Peanuts 😄 yo! go nuts for deez nuts! as the #1 seller, every1 else is... Find Patrick's Peanuts™ at all good retailers now.

[View all 423 comments](#)

5 DAYS AGO

low

high

A worked example for Patrick's Peanuts





Agreeableness

Agreeableness is about being cooperative, trusting and empathetic – considering other perspectives and inhibiting selfish impulses. Low scorers are more cynical and aloof.

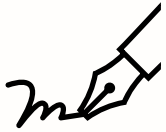


Agreeableness



AESTHETICS

Agreeable people are trusting, empathetic and cooperative. Unsurprisingly, they dislike content which is aggressive, confrontational, or nonconforming. They like communal media like romance books, soaps and chat shows, and dislike dark media like horror films or thrillers. They don't like seeing people embarrassed; they do like images where people are hugging rather than fighting. They enjoy warm content, like pop music, and they prefer curved lines and the colour orange. Content for agreeable people should be congruous rather than confronting – realistic, simple, and relatable.



LANGUAGE

Agreeable people are conforming and thus like to read material that is popular with everyone else, like contemporary fiction. Analyses of the speech patterns shows they privilege language which is positive (e.g., using more positive emotion words, more exclamation, fewer negations, and less swearing) and people-focused (e.g., referring to family and home, and using both "I" and "we" more).



HEURISTICS

Agreeable people are highly risk-averse, preferring to pick the safe or sensible option over the risky or hedonic one. They are more likely to be persuaded by advertising appeals that encourage the audience to empathetically take another person's perspective. Being conformist, they are more resistant to 'rebellious' advertising messages and instead are better persuaded by appeals to social norms, morality, and regret, and are likelier to be influenced by messengers they like.



Agreeableness

low

high



VISUALS



Modern, abstract, aggressive,
Upmarket, hedonistic

Soft, curvy, muted, natural,
harmonious

Negations, swearing, negative
emotions especially anger,
bodily feelings



WORDING

Positive emotion, first person,
exclamations, folksy topics
(family, home, school, etc.)



A rebellious ruler
Intense, edgy
Selfish benefits, luxury



BRANDING

A relatable caregiver
Warm, friendly, wholesome
Empathy, fairness

Agency / 'Reverse psychology'
Social status
Break social norms



INFLUENCE

Empathy, liking
Conformity, morality, regret
Altruistic appeals

Luxury
Business
Automotive
Etc...




TARGETING

Family
Religion
Donations
Etc...



Agreeableness

 **Patrick's Peanuts**
London, UK





1,178 likes

Patrick's Peanuts 😈 It's sheer dining indulgence, exclusively for you. Find Patrick's Peanuts™ at all good retailers now.

[View all 423 comments](#)

5 DAYS AGO

 **Patrick's Peanuts**
London, UK

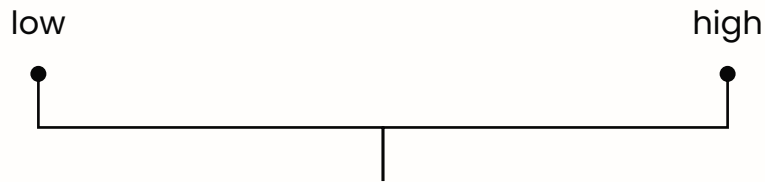


1,178 likes

Patrick's Peanuts ❤️ You love her. She loves them. Lovely stuff all round. Find Patrick's Peanuts™ at all good retailers now.

[View all 423 comments](#)

5 DAYS AGO



A worked example for Patrick's Peanuts



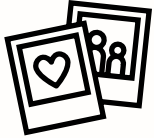


Neuroticism

Neuroticism is about being pessimistic, irritable and moody. Ultimately, it's about sensitivity to threats. People who score low on this trait are more relaxed and easy-going.



Neuroticism



AESTHETICS

Neurotic people are more sensitive to negative emotions and potential threats. Thus, they usually do not respond well to disturbing content. They dislike the colour red, and they prefer structured, straight, unambiguous pictures. Content which provides parasocial contact and keeps away feels of isolation and depression – like soap operas and romantic novels – are more popular among neurotics. They even prefer romanticism in their art. However, they may also like content which mirrors their gloomy interior, such as downbeat shows, music, and paintings, and dark colours and greys.



LANGUAGE

Neurotic people like to read content which allows them to 'escape' or experience parasocial contact, like contemporary fiction. Their speech patterns reveal that they prefer language to be emotional (e.g., talking about physical states and feelings), unstable (e.g., using more exclamations and questions), sensitive (e.g., talking about themselves and the present more), negative (e.g., referring more to anxiety and sadness) and isolated (e.g., talking less about other people and cultural landmarks like TV). However, they may not want to be talked to this way: they likely prefer reassurance.



HEURISTICS

Neurotics are motivated by a desire to avoid negative affect and punishment; they are sensitive to danger. Adverts can persuade them by activating feelings of personal distress. Scarcity appeals and FOMO work well too. However, if a message is too threatening, neurotics are likely to switch off: there is a delicate balance. They prefer brands which are presented as the safe option, and they want reassurance. Authority appeals and credibility cues will work well, as will attractive messengers. Messages should be very clear.



Neuroticism

low

high



VISUALS



Simple, natural, humanised

Romantic, distracting, dehumanised

Positive affect, calm and unemotional, third person plural ('we' and 'us')



WORDING

Emotions and physical states, questions, present tense, first person singular



A logical everyman
Relatable, warm, kind
Fun, positive content



BRANDING

A sensitive ruler
Powerful, assertive, strong
Cool, trendy content

Rational appeals
Kindness, duty nudges
Fun and independence



INFLUENCE

FOMO, scarcity
Authority, conformity
Safety

Work
Religion
Humanities
Etc...



TARGETING

Writing
Mental health
Online shopping
Etc...



Neuroticism

 **Patrick's Peanuts**
London, UK





1,178 likes

Patrick's Peanuts 😊 Relax – we're into peanuts just as much as you are. Find Patrick's Peanuts™ at all good retailers now.

[View all 423 comments](#)

5 DAYS AGO

 **Patrick's Peanuts**
London, UK

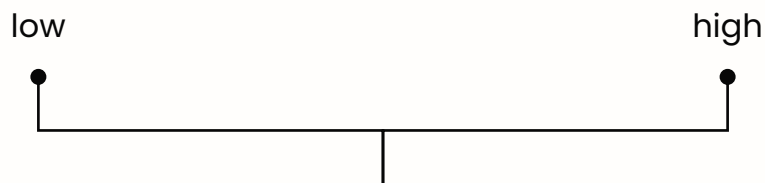


1,178 likes

Patrick's Peanuts 🤩 Don't miss out! Pure pleasure in peanut form. Find Patrick's Peanuts™ at all good retailers now.

[View all 423 comments](#)

5 DAYS AGO



A worked example for Patrick's Peanuts





Now you know.

**Improving your
messages is easy.**

**Bring them to life
with the Big Five.**



Simple, traditional,
everyday



Imaginative,
unusual, complex



Impulsive, edgy,
subversive



Reliable, orderly,
functional



Quiet, formal,
thoughtful



Cool, social,
exciting



Luxury, dominant,
individualistic



Caring, gentle,
likeable



Calm, neutral, clear
and simple



Indulgent, safe,
attractive



There are some caveats.

The Big Five are traits, not types. This means your target audience could be high, low, or anywhere in-between for all five traits. It's too simple to just say, for example, "My audience are extraverts."

To make it easier, you can pick the top two traits to define your audience – for an illustration it could be conscientious introverts – and then design your messaging using the recommendations in this document.

This document is designed to be used for creative inspiration – like a mood board. Although it's all based on data and peer-reviewed studies, it's not an exact science. Don't be afraid to go with your gut a little.

Ideally, you'll conduct a psychographic segmentation of your audience. This controls for all five traits at once, as well as other motivations and behaviours relevant to your audience.

You should also combine your customer data with this psychographic survey to build predictive models of personality, allowing for personality-targeted messaging in the wild.



Here's the sell.

Look – you could probably do kind-of-a-good-job applying this stuff yourself. But why not bring in the expert? (Me.)

I'm an applied behavioural scientist with almost fifteen years' experience finding out what makes people tick. I used to be the lead psychologist at Cambridge Analytica, and I'm a Sunday Times bestselling author and a part-time university lecturer.

My work has been trusted by brands like...



In short, I know my stuff. And here's what I could do for you.



Research

...to get inside your audience's heads and find the right purchase buttons to push.



Profiling

...to break your audience into psychographic segments for targeted nudging.



Data

...to read your data through a beh-sci lens and make it commercially useful.



Modelling

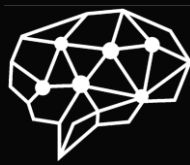
...to build predictive algorithms on your data and forecast and change behaviours just in time.



Nudging

...to use psychology to optimise your messages and user experiences.

Are you
personalising
your **persuasion?**



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