

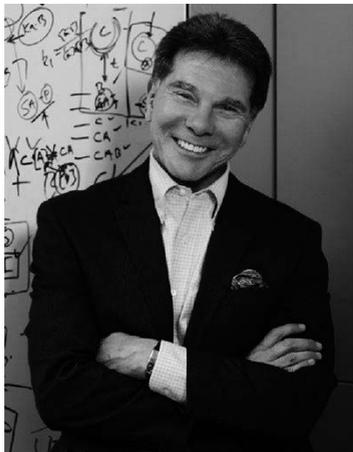
# ONLINE INFLUENCE

*Boost your results with proven behavioral science*

Bas Wouters and Joris Groen

With the assistance of  
Jaap Janssen Steenberg and Stijn Kling

“With their new book, Bas Wouters and Joris Groen have given a true gift to those of us who want to become more influential online. In one place, they have provided current, scientifically-based information on the most successful forms of behavior design, persuasive prompts, psychological motivators, practical applications, and more. I was particularly impressed with the book’s advice on simple strategies for making online messaging more effective. For anyone working in online commerce, this book should not be missed.”



Robert Cialdini

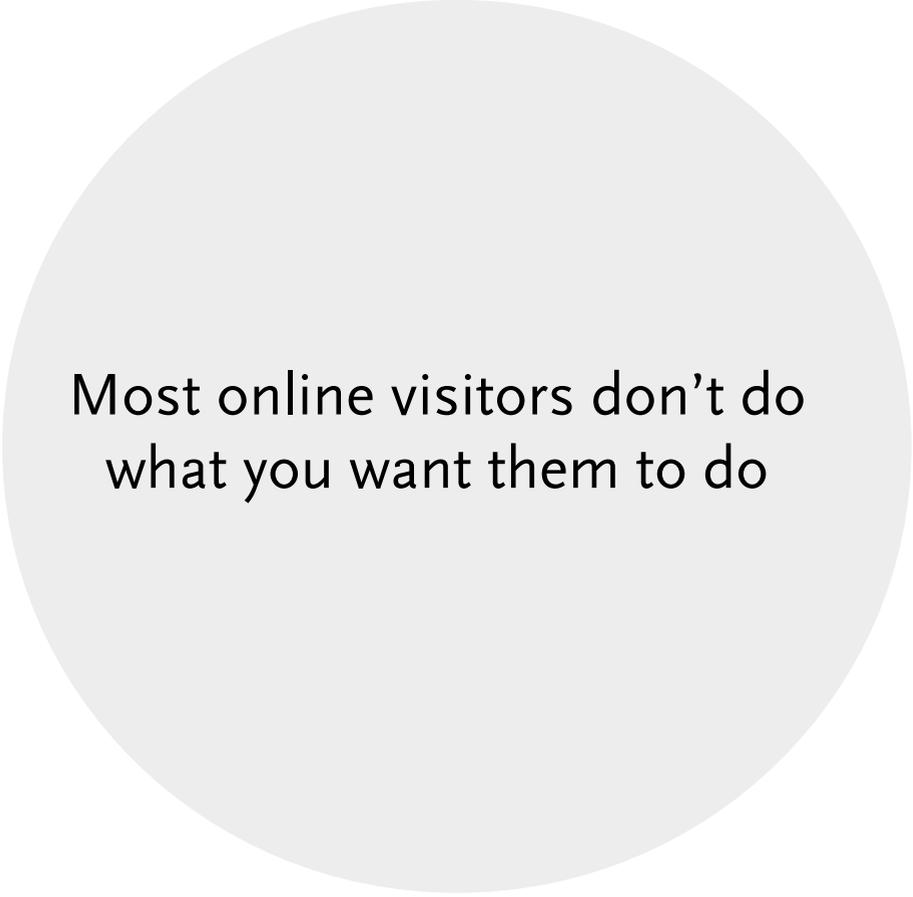
*New York Times* best selling author of *Influence and Pre-Suasion*

# Content

<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	11
Online influence	13
<b>PART 1 HOW TO DESIGN BEHAVIOR</b>	17
What is behavior design?	19
The Fogg Behavior Model	27
Daniel Kahneman's two systems	33
Robert Cialdini's principles of persuasion	39
The ethical side	43
<b>PART 2 HOW TO DESIGN A WINNING PROMPT</b>	47
What is a prompt?	49
Attention	55
Competitive prompts	63
Affordance	69
Name the desired behavior, literally	77
Curiosity	81
Exceptional benefit	87
Simple question	91
Unfinished journey	97
<b>PART 3 HOW TO BOOST MOTIVATION</b>	101
What is motivation?	103
Anticipatory enthusiasm	111

Appealing to basic needs	119
Social proof	123
Authority	131
Baby steps	137
Scarcity	145
Positive feedback	151
Loss aversion	155
Perceived value	161
Reasons why	165
<b>PART 4 HOW TO INCREASE ABILITY</b>	<b>169</b>
What is ability?	171
Reduce options	177
Offer decision aid	183
Default, prefill and autocomplete	189
The Jenga technique	195
Remove distractions	201
Provide feedback	205
Offer reversibility	211
Page structure	215
Don't make me think	223
Familiarity	229
Expected effort	233
Making undesirable behavior more difficult	237
<b>PART 5 HOW TO DESIGN CHOICES</b>	<b>241</b>
What is choice architecture?	243
Hobson + 1	247
Anchoring	253
Extreme aversion	257
Decoy	261
Nudging	267
<b>PART 6 HOW TO APPLY BEHAVIORAL PSYCHOLOGY</b>	<b>271</b>
And now: how to put it all into practice	273
Online advertising	275
Display ads	279

Social media ads	289
Email ads	297
Search engine ads	313
Landing pages	317
Product detail pages	339
The checkout	353
Conversion research	375
Web analysis	381
Optimizing by experimenting	383
Behavior Design Roadmap	389
Checklists for the different applications	395
Acknowledgements	405
Reading suggestions	407
About the authors	409
Bibliography	411



Most online visitors don't do  
what you want them to do

## INTRODUCTION

# Online influence

**If you believe certain media, we are all a willing prey for online persuasion tricks. We are manipulated en masse, so the story goes, to click on banners, make commitments and order products that we don't really need. But the numbers paint a different picture: most website visitors, downloaders of apps and email recipients do not do what the makers want at all.**

For example, extremely successful web shops make a sale to 'only' one in ten people visiting their website. And as an online advertiser you are already doing pretty well if one in a thousand people clicks on your banner. If this were the performance of a face-to-face sales person, their employers would probably not be too happy.

In other words, in the online world the dropouts outnumber the buyers. It's hardly surprising, when you think about it: after all, it is pretty incredible how we allow images, texts and buttons to persuade us to share our personal data, fill in our credit card number and make long-term commitments. All this, without any intervention from 'real' people we know or trust personally.

### **A world of difference**

How you design your online environment can make a world of difference, as evidenced by the many successful experiments that we, and many others, have conducted. In this book, we want to share the knowledge we have gained with you. We will teach you how to use the science of behavior change or influencing to persuade many people online to do the behavior you want. This is what will happen:

- Ignoring becomes **responding**.
- Browsing becomes **buying**.
- Unsubscribing becomes **continued membership**.
- Dropping out becomes **keep going**.
- And “hmm” becomes “yes”.

Which will lead to:

- more online revenue;
- lower advertising costs;
- a higher conversion rate;
- more **satisfied customers**.

### **Satisfied customers**

In our opinion, the latter (satisfied customers) equals ‘sustainable’ online persuasion. This is an important point, because online influence is unfortunately still associated with deception sometimes. We call this ‘dark patterns’: misleading design patterns that lead us to buy travel insurance when we don’t want it, for example.

So that’s not what we’re going to do.

Not only for ethical reasons, but also because it is simply not how you achieve success in the long term.

As you will notice, online persuasion is mainly about making people even more enthusiastic than they already were. But definitely also about:

- helping them to make difficult choices;
- guiding them optimally in their decision whether or not to do business with you;
- simplifying the route to the goal.

This leads to more results and a higher appreciation of your online channel.

### **Science and practice**

A lot of books and especially blogs have been written about online influencing. But in our opinion, they are still not practical and complete enough. They often assume a rather randomly chosen psychological theory or a common cognitive

bias (irrational thinking pattern). This is often followed by well-meaning advice about what we could do to persuade people online.

It's a little bit like an architect picking a random law of physics and wondering how he might use it to design a complicated roof construction. This may not be the most efficient way.

*“A designer who doesn't understand human psychologies is going to be no more successful than an architect who doesn't understand physics.”*

– JOE LEECH<sup>1</sup>



In this book, we are going to handle things differently. The online customer journey will serve as our starting point, and we will be with you every step of the way to tell you what psychological knowledge you need to get the most out of it. You will learn how to cleverly and tactically design your ads, landing pages, forms, checkouts and even thank-you pages using design principles, and *which* principle you should use *where* and *when*.

We will give you an approach that is based on science and has been tested in practice. We have achieved excellent results for many companies with this approach. Prior to that, we also failed spectacularly by applying the wrong methods. This is good news for you, because you won't have to make the same mistakes. You can start immediately with the insights from our forty years of combined experience in online influence: scientifically founded, proven in practice.

### **Fogg, Cialdini and Kahneman**

The behavioral model of BJ Fogg, the founder of 'behavior design', plays a starring role. Although there are many models that *explain* behavior, this model actually helps you to *design* behavior. In addition, we gratefully draw on the work of persuasion psychologist Robert Cialdini, who has bundled years of research on persuasion mechanisms into seven powerful principles of persuasion. Another essential branch of psychology for online influencers is that of our unconscious, automatic brain, as described by psychologist, economist and Nobel laureate Daniel Kahneman. In this book, we explain his theory and teach you how to apply it in practice.

To complete the model, we have added many insights from our own online marketing practice, gained from many local and international clients, such as Mercedes-Benz, KLM, bol.com (the largest Dutch online retailer, comparable to Amazon).

Equipped with all these insights, you will be able to greatly increase your online influence and give your business a big boost.

Bas Wouters  
Joris Groen

---

### **WHO IS THIS BOOK FOR?**

We have written this book for all professionals who want to influence their (potential) customers' online behavior. So whether you are a web builder or ux designer, copywriter or graphic designer, entrepreneur, marketer or product manager: if you want to increase your online influence, you have come to the right place. From now on we will refer to you as a 'behavior designer'.

---

# Part 1

## How to design behavior



As of today you will design  
nothing but behavior

## HOW TO DESIGN BEHAVIOR

# What is behavior design?

**Imagine that as the authors of this book, we get to choose a single rule for you to remember for the rest of your career. We wouldn't hesitate even for a second. We would pick the rule on the previous page.**

'Designing behavior': it took us some time to get used to this word combination as well. You would typically design an advert, a website, a product. But 'designing behavior' sounds almost as if you can make people do anything you want. The founder of behavior design, BJ Fogg, has a much better definition, however. To him, behavior design means: getting people to do something they already want to do.

Hold on, you may be wondering, if people already want to do something, why would you need to persuade them? That is precisely where the problem lies. The fact that we *want* something does not automatically mean that we actually *do* it.

Behavior designers base their work on the following two important psychological truths:

- We don't often do things without being asked.
- If something becomes too hard, we give up quickly.

You may recognize this in yourself. Or you may prefer not to... After all, these are qualities we're not exactly proud of: being passive and not persevering.

Behavior designers don't judge this. They set up the (online) environment in such a way they break through the inactivity. They do this first of all with

‘prompts’ that alert their target group to the desired behavior. Second, they make behavior as easy as possible. They achieve this by removing barriers, like overly complicated click paths or unnecessary fields in a contact form. And thirdly, they try to give the motivation a temporary boost so that the target group is willing to overcome the barriers. After all, some behavior will always remain hard to do.

### **From web design to behavior design**

When designing a new website, an online campaign or a landing page, newbie designers like to search for successful examples by others. These best practices form the basis for their design. The more experienced designers usually start by mapping out the user profile in detail and analyzing the ‘tasks’ they have to perform. Next, they design a website that facilitates user tasks. The positive user experience they are aiming for is the core of the user experience design field, usually abbreviated as ‘ux design’.

If you want optimal online results, however, you need more than just user-friendliness to persuade people. The term ‘user’ is actually an unfortunate choice. This term suggests that there is a motivated person on the other side of the screen who has actually already decided to do business with you and use your website. Also take a critical look at the term ‘customer journey’: what do you mean: customer? That remains to be seen.

Whether your visitors eventually become customers depends very much on the context they are in. Often, they are not sure if they want to order, or to order from you and not your competitor. And who knows, they might drop out because they have doubts after all. Or get distracted. Or think the order process is too complicated. This means we should not only facilitate our potential customers, but also persuade them step by step – behavior after behavior – towards conversion.

This is why behavior designers prefer the terms ‘visitors’ or ‘potential customers’ to ‘users’. This means a change in perspective. As a behavior designer, you start from the behavior you want to see and create a route full of persuasion tactics to achieve this behavior. You also understand that you are battling with competing temptations that, just like you, are fighting for your visitors’ time and attention.

This is why behavior design is so much more than a simple ‘sauce’ of persuasion on an existing website. It is a fundamentally different view of online

design. It is a view that leads to different solutions than simply copying best practices or relying exclusively on user-friendliness.



### An example

Let's take a practical example. See the mailing Joris and his team at Buyer-minds designed for KLM. It's the email people receive two weeks before departure.

The desired behavior – or rather, the collection of 'micro-behaviors' – is that recipients open the email, read the intro, go through the checklist and click on a component that is relevant to them, like ordering additional luggage.

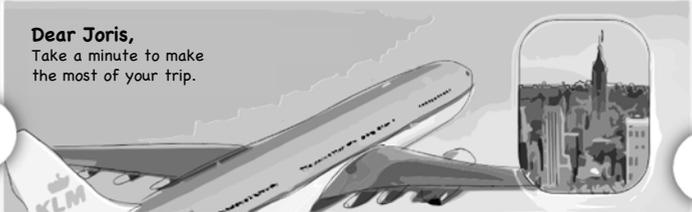
As you can read in the captions, we have used scientific insight in eight places to influence these behaviors. And successfully so: emails based on this design were opened more often and generated more clicks to the website.



**KLM** Royal Dutch Airlines

# Checklist for your flight to New York

1



**Dear Joris,**  
Take a minute to make the most of your trip.

2

3

## Don't forget

4

### Your passport

Valid until at least 15 Oct 2016  
An emergency passport is not accepted in the USA.

### ESTA authorization

Everybody traveling to the United States needs it

[Request it here](#)

## Your flight

✈ **AMS - NY**  
**KL636**  
1 OCT 2016  
02:00 PM

✈ **NY - AMS**  
**KL636**  
8 OCT 2016  
11:00 AM

Reservation number  
3829389v

[Check status >>](#)  
[Change or cancel >>](#)

### Special diet or allergies?

[Check our special menus >>](#)

## 5 Save time and money



### Baggage over 20KG?

Save 20% by upgrading online

[Check upgrade fees](#)

6



### Check in online

And save up to 1 hour time at the airport  
Check in from 30 SEP 02:00 AM

[Check in online](#)

7

Most people who travel to New York check in online

### **1 Arouse curiosity**

Checklist is a word that makes people curious. The original email said, “Prepare for your trip.” That’s less of an incentive to read.

### **2 Reduce the expected effort**

The effort that we expect to have to put in partly determines whether we want to start doing something. By indicating that the checklist only takes a minute to complete, we encourage more people to read.

### **3 Create anticipatory enthusiasm**

By visualizing the view of the New York skyline from the plane, we allow the readers to (almost literally) look forward to the trip they had just booked. Anticipating the future reward helps to get people into active mode.

### **4 Reduce mental effort**

Facilitating behavior increases the chance that we will actually perform it. The layout of the mail minimizes the mental effort. For example, we keep important information, such as the flight number and departure time, separate from the checklist. This helps readers to easily find this information (or easily ignore it). This clear visual hierarchy allows us to communicate the structure of the checklist at a glance.

### **5 Give reasons why**

When you explicitly provide a reason for a certain behavior, chances of that behavior happening increase. In this case, saving time and money is obviously a good reason to upgrade your luggage and check in online.

### **6 Ask for minor commitments**

It’s easier to take small steps than big ones. To interest readers in an upsell or upgrade, we propose only a small commitment (‘Check upgrade fees’) instead of a big one (‘Buy now!’).

### **7 Provide social proof**

If someone asks us to do certain behaviors, we subconsciously check whether other people are doing those behaviors as well. When we see this, we call it ‘social proof’. That is why we show people that it is perfectly normal behavior to check in online.

## **The best profession**

The power of behavior design is that you leave nothing to chance. The desired behavior is central to everything. If you don't do this, your design is likely to be counterproductive because it makes things more difficult. But if you start working from this perspective as of today, you will be extremely valuable as a web builder or ux designer, as a copywriter or graphic designer, as an entrepreneur, marketer, product manager or whatever role you may play in convincing your target group online. It's the best job ever, in our view.

---

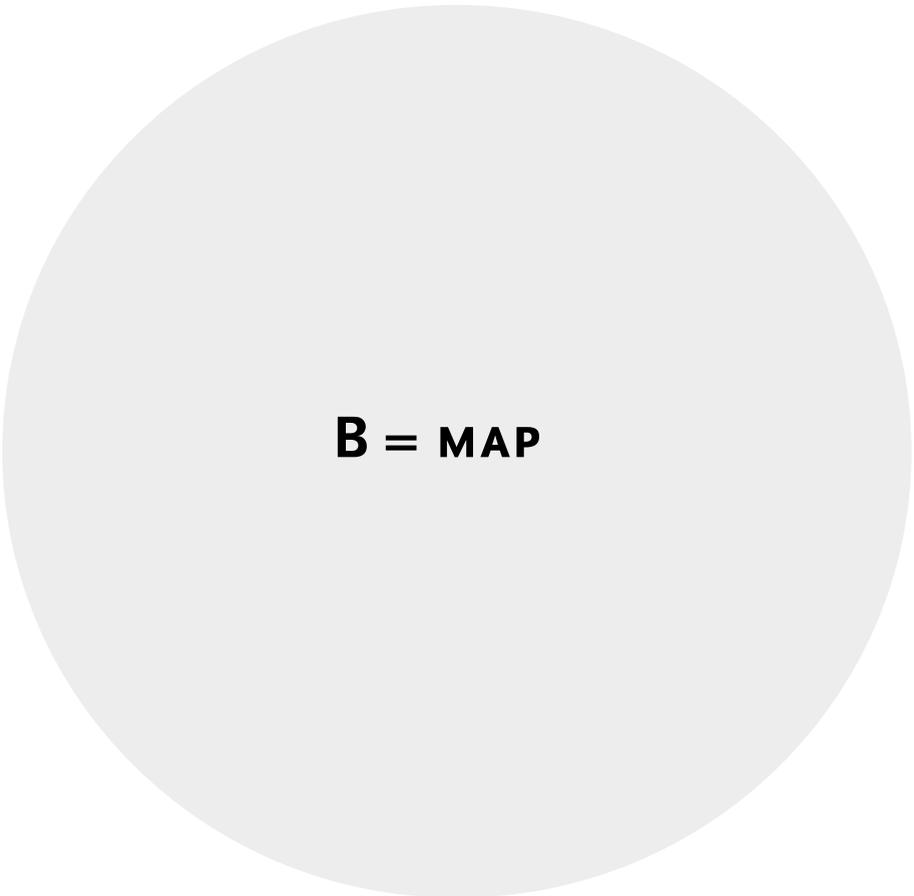
**CONVERSION**

In this book, we often use the word 'conversion'. As an online professional, you undoubtedly know what that term means, but for the newbies in this field, we would like to say a few words about it. The conversion ratio is the measure of persuasiveness in the online world: the number of visitors who do the desired behavior, divided by the total number of visitors, expressed as a percentage:

$$\text{Conversion ratio (\%)} = \frac{\text{Number of visitors doing the desired behavior}}{\text{Total number of visitors}} \times 100$$

Suppose: in a web shop, 5 out of 100 visitors leave a review. The conversion ratio is 5 percent. If, after your redesign, 10 out of 100 visitors leave a review, your conversion rate is 10 percent. In other words: your conversion has doubled. On the surface, it seems as if you have 'only' (for example) adjusted the header, the image and the call-to-action button, but by doing so you have first and foremost changed the behavior of your visitors: a boost for your online business!

---



**B = MAP**

## HOW TO DESIGN BEHAVIOR

# The Fogg Behavior Model

**Right, so we are going to *design* behavior. To do so, we turn to BJ Fogg. In 2009, this American behavioral scientist came up with a model that allows us to examine behavior and behavioral change in a structured way. Unparalleled in its applicability, it is worth its weight in gold for you as a behavior designer.**

BJ Fogg is a professor at Stanford University, one of the most prestigious universities in the United States. He researches human behavior and what exactly it takes to change it. There were some big names among his students. How about Mike Krieger, a co-founder of Instagram? Or Tristan Harris, the founder of the Center of Human Technology (CHT), the movement that fights, among other things, addiction to social media? In addition to teaching, Fogg advises the business community about applying behavioral psychology.

But what matters here is that he has developed the model that now bears his name: the Fogg Behavior Model.<sup>2</sup> This makes him the inventor of the discipline we now call 'behavior design'. The starting point of his model is that people do not just start exhibiting certain behaviors of their own accord. According to Fogg, three conditions must be met:

- There has to be a prompt to start the behavior.
- At the time of the prompt, the motivation must be high enough.
- At the time of the prompt, the behavior we ask for must be simple enough.

### Trinity

Let's start by zooming in on the prompt. What exactly is a prompt? A prompt is something that asks or reminds us to do certain behavior. Think, for example,

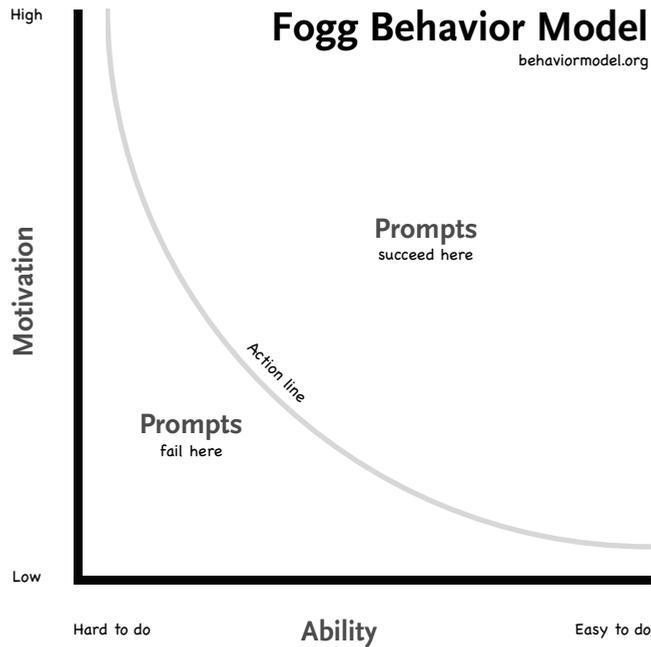
of the sound of your alarm clock: this is your call to wake up in the morning. Or take the push notification on the screen of your smartphone: it invites you to open an app. According to Fogg, there are not many behaviors that are not triggered by an external request.

If you are already familiar with the Fogg Behavior Model, you will know that Fogg initially used the term ‘trigger’. That term proved to be open to too many interpretations. That is why he now calls it a ‘prompt’, and so do we. In the *Prompts* section, we will elaborate on this, but for now it is enough to remember that almost every behavior starts with a prompt.

The Fogg Behavior Model says that a prompt will only lead to actual behavior if the motivation and ability to do that behavior are sufficient. We will also deal with these concepts in detail in the *Motivation* and *Ability* sections. For now, it’s enough to know that motivation is about how *much* a person wants something, and ability about how *easy* it is to do behavior.

Without sufficient motivation and ability plus a prompt, no behavior will occur, Fogg teaches us. If we look at these three factors systematically, we will make much more progress with our online design than if we look for a ‘nice template for a landing page’ or the ‘top 10 best-scoring advertisements’.

Take a look at the graph. Motivation, ability and the prompt are a crucial trinity. The vertical axis indicates motivation, the horizontal axis the ability. If both are high enough and above the action line, behavior will occur the moment we observe the prompt. If the motivation and ability are not high enough, and thus remain below the action line, a prompt will not lead to the desired behavior.

**B = MAP**

*To initiate behavior a person must be sufficiently motivated (motivation) and the behavior must be easy enough (ability). That's the moment to introduce your prompt.*

**Interaction**

This does not mean that both the motivation and the ability have to be very high at the time of the prompt. There is an interaction. For example, look at the top left corner of the graph. If you are extremely motivated, it does not matter much how difficult the behavior is. After all, you are prepared to overcome 'all' obstacles, no matter how complicated, expensive or difficult the behavior is. For example, if you want to buy tickets to a concert by your favorite artist, which usually sells out in no time, you will happily sit with your laptop for an hour and keep updating your browser for a chance to get those tickets. In that case, your high motivation compensates for the limited ability.

The reverse is also true, of course: if your motivation is very low, you can still be persuaded to do something by greatly increasing the ability. See the lower right corner of the graph. For example, if you're walking in a shopping area, there's always one of those friendly students around who wants to give you a free newspaper. Even if you have a newspaper at home and you don't like the one on offer, you will still accept it sometimes. Why? The ability is enormous: it is almost easier to accept the newspaper than to refuse.

If one factor is extra strong, it may be sufficient to compensate for the other factor if it is less strong. Behavior design is all about that interplay.



Good to know: of the three factors of the Fogg Behavior Model, motivation is the most difficult to influence. In other words, it is best to try to change behavior in situations where there is already some motivation. In our section on motivation, we therefore mainly assume *motivation-enhancing* influence, and not influencing unwilling people. As a behavior designer, you can design prompts and make behavior easy.

### Model as the basis of this book

The Fogg Behavior Model is your ideal guide to behavior design. That's why we used it for the layout of this book. We cover all 37 design principles in the light of the three factors of the model:

- principles that make prompts more effective;
- principles that increase motivation;
- principles that increase ability.

When you wonder how you can stimulate a certain behavior – and thus achieve more conversion – as a behavior designer you systematically work your way through these three factors. The same applies to the thought experiment with WhatsApp (see the experiment below). By doing research or thinking logically,

you can pretty much estimate what is wrong with it: motivation, ability or a clear prompt. Or maybe two or even three factors. You examine which factor you can improve the fastest and easiest. Tip: this is usually the prompt, followed by ability. And as we've mentioned: motivation is the most difficult.

---

### **THOUGHT EXPERIMENT: WHATSAPPING WITH YOUR PARTNER**

Why not try this thought experiment to better understand the Fogg Behavior Model.

Imagine that you have asked your partner to go out for dinner via WhatsApp. You can see the familiar blue check marks appear, so your message has been read. But after half an hour you still have no response. While the behavior you want is: answering your message.

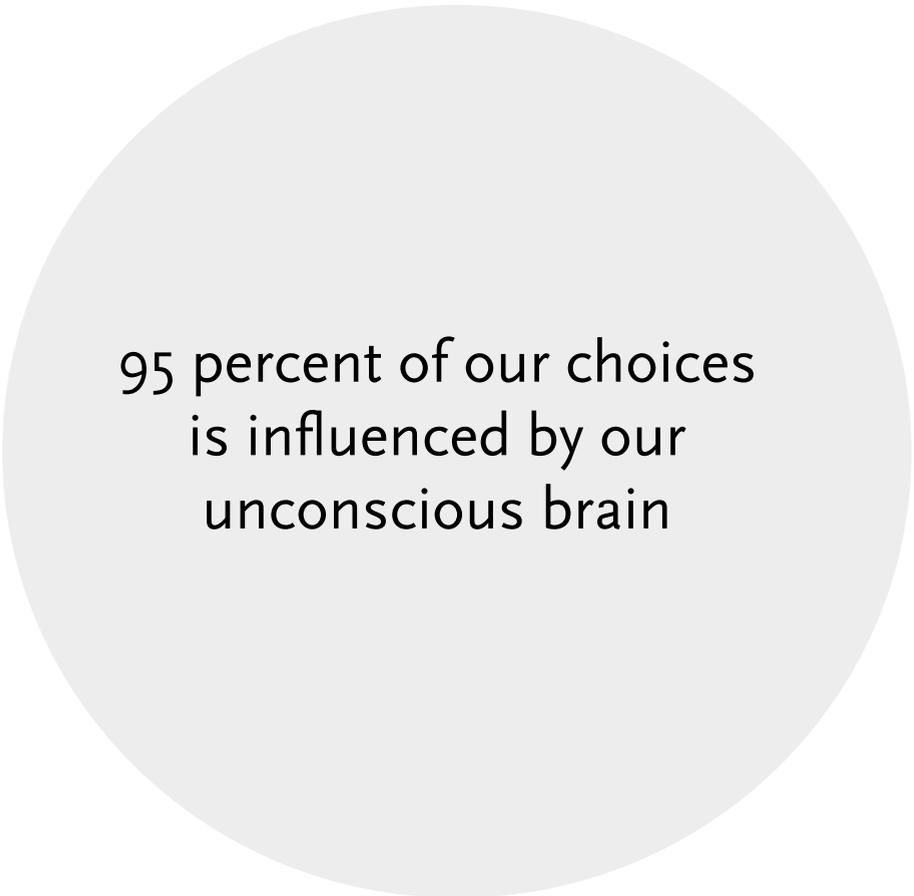
Ask yourself what might be going on: not by speculating wildly, but by applying the Fogg Behavior Model. Where are you going wrong?

- *Is the prompt missing?*
- *Is it lack of ability (too difficult)?*
- *Or is it lack of motivation?*

When, during our workshops and lectures, we ask who thinks it's because of motivation, hands invariably go up en masse. Apparently, people are inclined to doubt people's motivation when the desired behavior does not occur. However, as a behavior designer, you have to let go of this assumption. Who knows, it might have been difficult to answer at the time. Or maybe your partner didn't even read the message. After all, the check marks also turn blue if the screen is opened briefly while you are doing something else.

In short: there are three possibilities why the desired behavior, answering a message, does not occur: lack of a prompt, lack of ability and/or lack of motivation. If you do this with your website, online campaign or banner, for example, you are already taking a huge step towards successful behavior design.

---



95 percent of our choices  
is influenced by our  
unconscious brain