



# UNLIMITED

REFRAMING THE SHOPPING EXPERIENCE FOR COVID-19

Applying Behavioural Science to understand and nudge shoppers.

SEPTEMBER 2021





During the pandemic new government restrictions on public and enclosed spaces meant normal consumer behaviours were disrupted, causing many people to struggle as they adjusted to what was now required of them. McArthurGlen needed to ensure their shoppers abided by the new rules while also being able to enjoy their shopping experience - all while retaining the brand's reputation for luxury and style.

In order to achieve this, we ran a behavioural science audit of McArthurGlen's current communications in-store and online. We brought in key thinking from behavioural economics, neuroscience and semiotics and were able to identify many human biases at work. By systematically reviewing and addressing these we were able to advise McArthurGlen on which nudges could be deployed strategically. We could also address any potential pitfalls of human behaviour and how these could be managed. This case study gives you a snapshot of this work.



**SIMON COLLISTER PhD**  
Human Understanding  
Lab Director

Moving forward, we conducted a competitive review to benchmark learnings in the industry and developed a playbook of strategic nudges, designed to subtly encourage McArthurGlen shoppers to observe social distancing and other Covid-19 precautions, whilst not disturbing their luxury shopping experience at a conscious level.

# COVID affects us in a number of psychological ways creating uncertainty in a changing world...

People are looking for safety (through certainty and reassurance). **Familiar brands can provide stability and comfort in difficult times.**

With some luxuries, e.g. holidays, unavailable. **we are finding other ways to treat ourselves, such as everyday affordable rewards.**

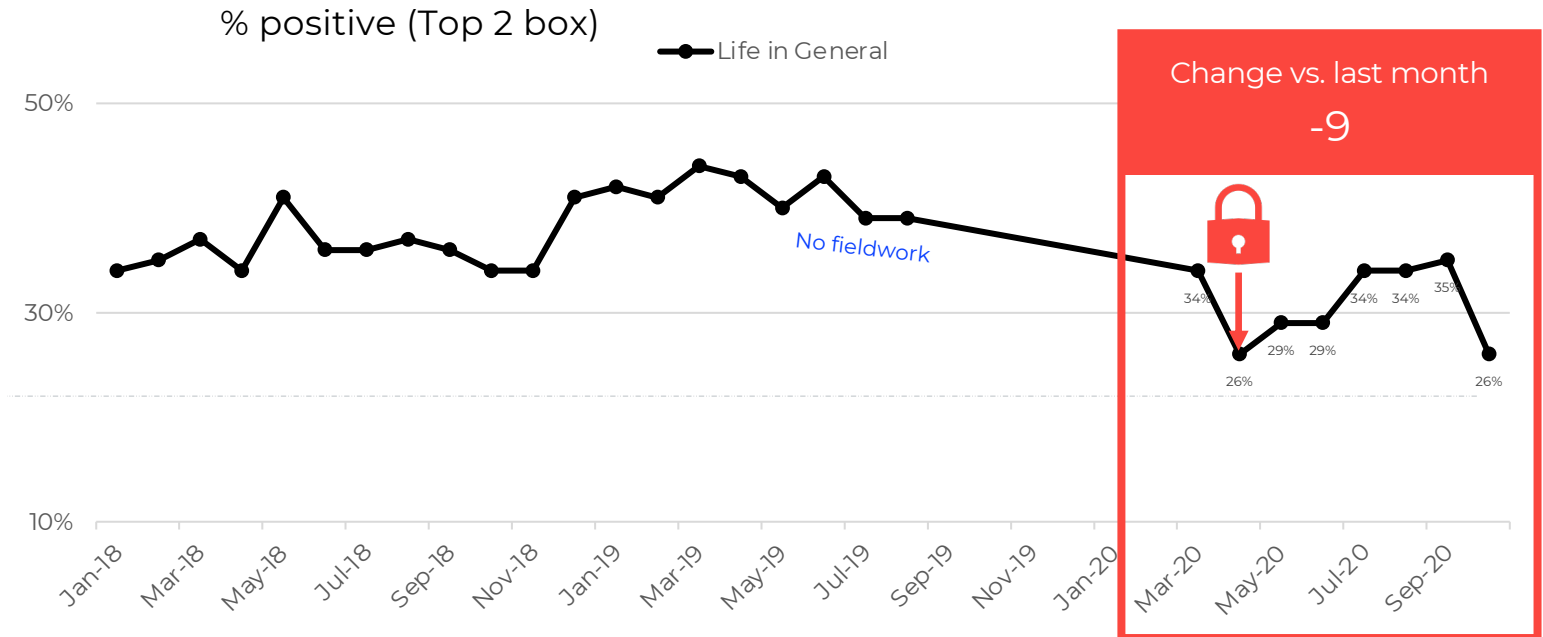
New consumption scenarios and day-to-day interactions, e.g. WFH, and video calling, are the norm. **These create new consumption 'anchor' points to think about**

# By October 2020 public positivity had returned to April lockdown levels

Following the initial strong emotional response to Covid-19 we had seen behaviours starting to stabilise as people adapted (a phenomenon known as *The Adaptation Effect*).

However, as cases started to rise again and new measures were brought into place, negative emotions began to shift.

Please indicate how you feel about...



SOURCE: Walnut's Understanding the Nation tracker  
Q1. On a scale from 1 to 7, where 1 is 'Extremely negative' and 7 is 'Extremely positive', how would you say you currently feel about your life in general?  
Base - n = c2000 per month



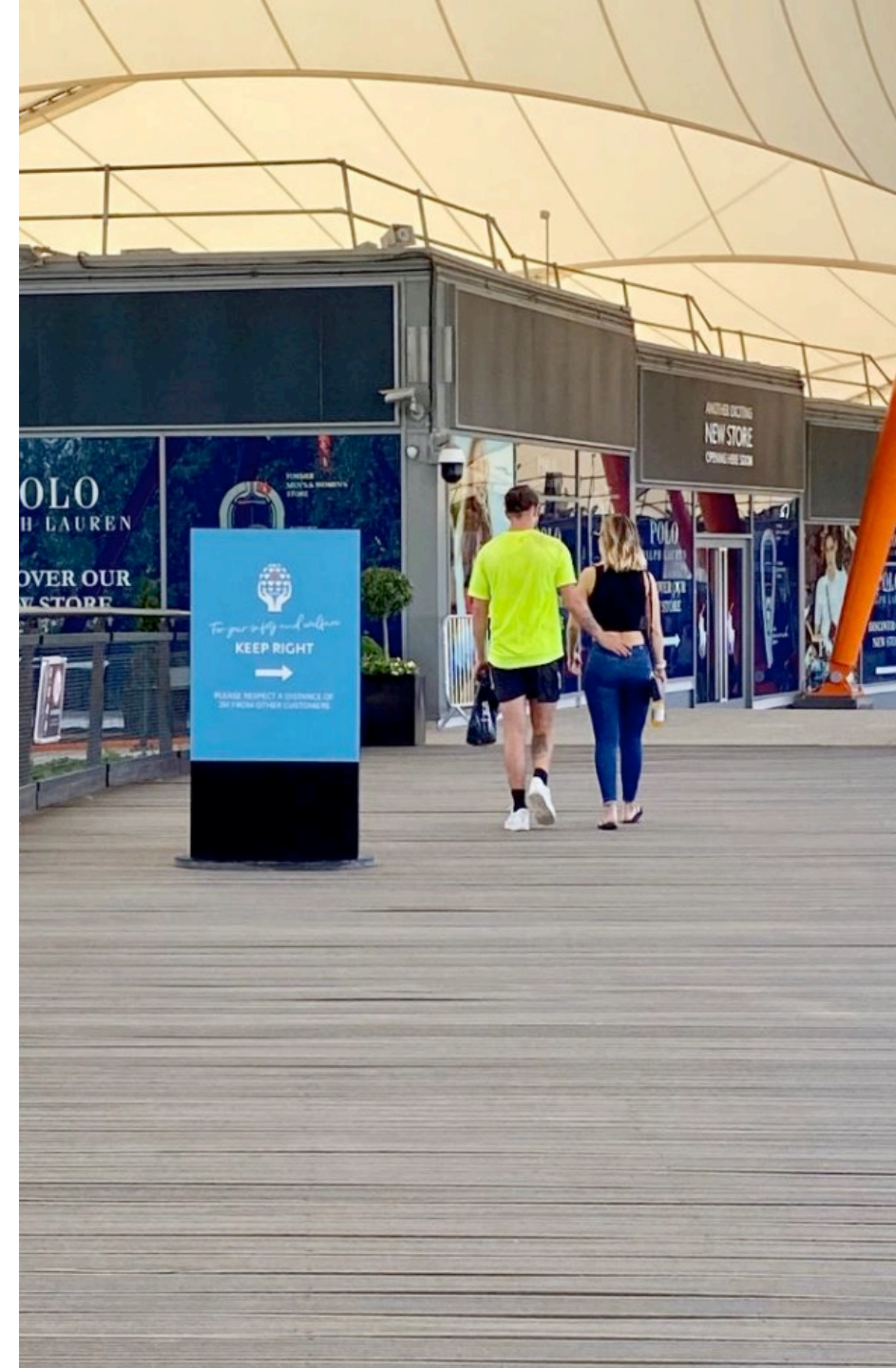
HUMAN UNDERSTANDING

# The Challenge

In this context McArthurGlen wanted to ensure the health and safety of their customers, while finding the right way to enforce regulations and provide a safe and enjoyable shopping experience for everyone.

Government restrictions on store capacity and social distancing (as well as hygiene) meant that getting into stores took longer, with significant queues at peak times and in key stores. Fixing these problems will bring a strong commercial upside, as people feel safer, are enable to visit more stores and have a more successful trip making them more likely to return.

**The key task was to analyse how McArthurGlen could manage queues and deliver COVID-secure environments while maintaining the halo effect of the overall visit experience.**



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# Shoppers find it hard to follow guidelines

**We know from our research and behavioural science that when it comes to busy environments, such as shopping centres, it can be difficult to guide the flow of movement. Shoppers can unintentionally create bottle necks, blocking up key areas. Auditing the shopping environment using behavioural science helps us understand why it can be hard for people to follow regulations and signs, and what brands can do to improve the impact of their communications.**



## Defaults bias

It is in our human nature to follow the path of least resistance. When doing familiar activities, we are on an auto-pilot when we do what we have always done or what seems like the easiest or default action.



## Subconscious decision-making

To change behaviour and intervene with our previously used defaults, we need to cut through to the subconscious. We need to add very clear and easy to process friction points. These need to stand out and help break previous habits.



## Feedback loops

Human beings are motivated by seeing how our actions modify subsequent results. If there is no negative feedback to stop us doing what we shouldn't nor any positive feedback to encourage new behaviour, change will be difficult.



# A framework to understand and nudge behaviour.

Our simple, go-to framework is based on behavioural science studies, bringing together key thinking from behavioural economics, psychology, neuroscience and the wider social sciences. Each pillar includes **universally agreed principles of human behaviour**.

Our behavioural science framework shows how people decide in certain situations and what you can do about it. The five pillars of our Shortcuts framework can be used alongside other methods throughout the research process – from the kick-off workshop right through to the final debrief – to help us optimise the research design according to your specific objectives. Overlaying our behavioural science expertise with the research findings we can better understand and encourage behaviour change.



HUMAN UNDERSTANDING

# Behavioural science audit

**Behavioural science has shown that people don't make rational decisions. They often can't explain why they do what they do and over rationalise any decisions they make.**

Interpreting human behaviour is a science, and an art. Knowing why people do what they do, what motivates, and doesn't. Exploring how we feel about the world around us, and where we're going next. Peeling back the layers of the thought process to grasp and focus on the complex truth inside.

Our consultancy offer helps you leverage the power of behavioural science. Using our 'Short Cuts' framework we conduct an in-depth audit of your brand and shopping experience and identify the behavioural heuristics at work. This helps us understand the decisions your customers make beyond the typical rational responses. Combined with other research methods we can generate a wealth of actionable consumer insights and recommendations which you can apply to help optimise your strategies and create true business advantage.

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# AUDITING SHOPPER BEHAVIOURS



HUMAN UNDERSTANDING

# Speaking to shoppers showed the importance of getting signage right.

“ I've seen a lot of floor queuing stamps get crumbled/dirty and unstick from the floor, making them useless.. That puts me off a brand that doesn't take the time to check/maintain - what else are they neglecting to maintain?! ”

“ I think there is something interesting in how it feels when people 'get it wrong', like you are in the wrong place, a feeling of awkwardness or embarrassment , which is not great for customer experience. ”

“ I like it when shops are witty, or personal about their messages, rather than a 'warning' or very functional sign. ”

“ Floor stamps are all well and good if you know they're there... but most of the time they're so easy to miss ”

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# Findings and recommendations.

## FLOW



**Chunking** shows that the information grouped into familiar, manageable units is more easily processed and remembered. While the chunks are very clear, there is too much text underneath each point, which will likely not be read.



To further enhance the impact of the signage, McArthurGlen can lead with the key message, tapping into **Primacy effect**. This shows that we are more likely to read and remember the first paragraph of a text. Furthermore, **Sequencing** shows that we are more likely to take action when complex activities are broken down into smaller tasks. Shoppers have limited time and capacity to absorb all the messages – be more single minded in the messaging and provide key messages at key points in the shopping journey, e.g. wear a mask message at entry points. Last but not least, to ensure shoppers are reading your signs, it is important to have these as close to eye level as possible.

## LEAD



Showing more **authority** with messaging style will further ensure compliance. This can also act as reassurance.



# Findings and recommendations.



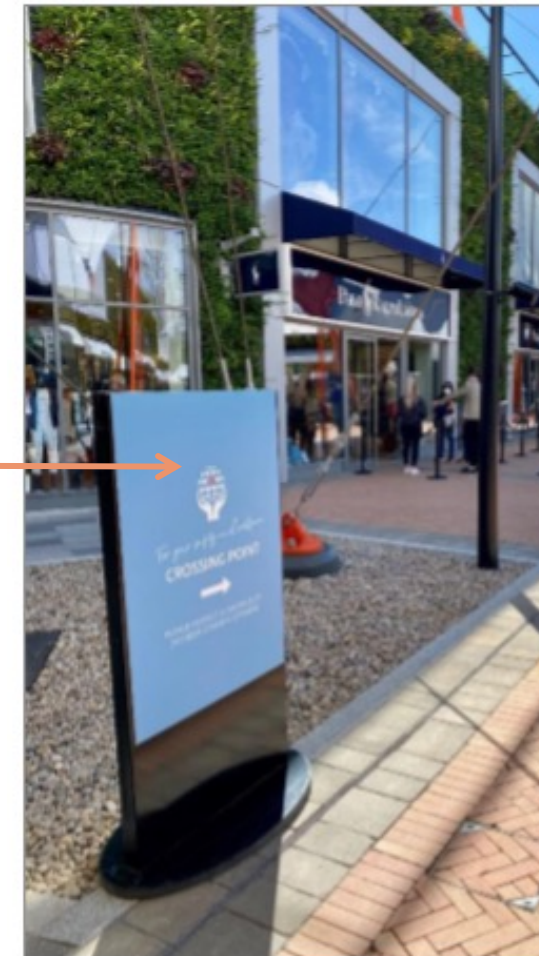
- ✓ Logo and colours create a **consistent** campaign, that will make it easy to follow throughout the shopping centre.

FLOW



Further enhance impact by ensuring primary symbols convey key messages. Single, consistent message further optimises engagement. Using same colour and style throughout, e.g. green arrows, ensures **fluency** even if details aren't read.

Leading with images, high contrast, lowercase and clear fonts make signs easier and faster to process by the brain. Arrows can be made more salient, and signs positioned close to eye level to ensure signage is not missed.





# Findings and recommendations.



**Primacy effect** - lead with the face mask logo for maximum impact.

Balance of attention grabbing at times where they need to vs. having it in the background. Colour here is too subtle, as action is needed, and the signs need to stand out more. Ensure **fluency** through consistency in message on the floor and door.

We tend to follow the patterns of similar others. Utilise the **social proof**, e.g. stating or showing visuals of other shoppers and staff that are wearing masks

Be firm with the guidelines to show strong leadership and convey a sense of **authority**. We have a strong tendency to follow the lead and advice of a legitimate authority. The presence of a formal authority figure (or brand) provides reassurance and credibility.

FLOW

LEAD

FLOW



Floor signs are very good at providing the **social norm**.



Make signage as **clear** as possible. Also ensure they can't miss it by providing a different texture when stepping on these.

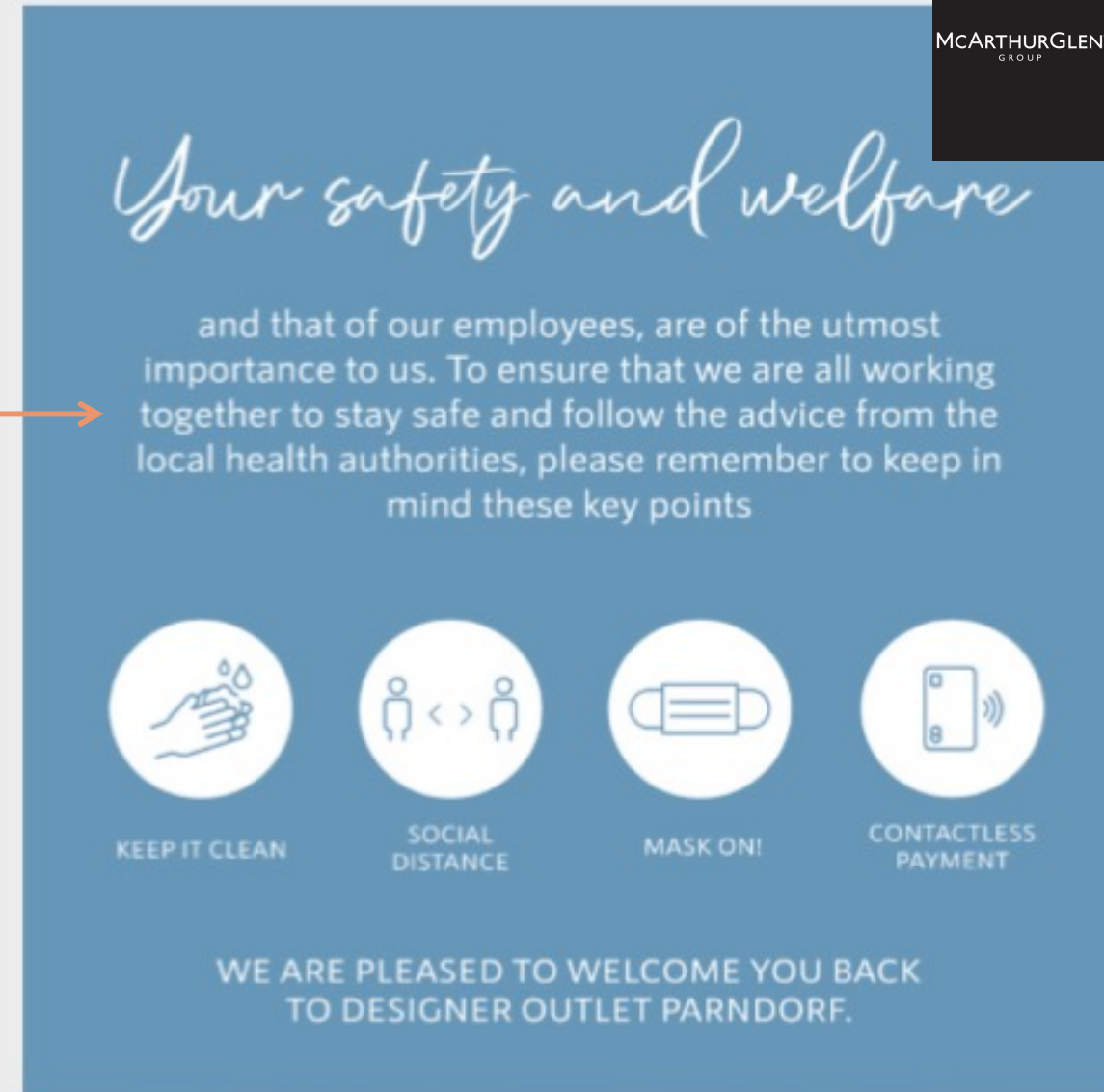


Important to keep floor spots maintained, replace when needed as this will create a sense of cared for environment and will show safety through cleanliness, having an impact on the entire shopping experience.

# Findings and recommendations.

## FLOW

- ✓ **Fluency** is ensured through clearer fonts, lowercase writing and well **chunked** pieces of information that do not show too much text.



# Findings and recommendations.

## LEAD



Good use of **social proof** – shared challenge, shared solution. Tap into **reciprocation** – you are doing everything you can to keep them safe, now is their turn to help. Make it a shared response and responsibility.

## FRAME



Digital channels offer opportunities to manage shoppers' expectations when they are in store, as well as **reframe** why measures are in place - for their own safety and to ensure a good shopping experience, e.g. emptier shops, more pleasant experience.

## MOTIVATE



Further scope to **motivate**, by showing what are the outcomes of following the guidelines: e.g. you can help keep your local businesses up and running by continuing to follow the rules

## FEEL



Also tap into their **loss aversion** by showing what they could be losing if they don't follow the rules, e.g. your favourite store might close.



### TOGETHER WE'RE SAFER

YOUR HEALTH AND SAFETY ARE OF THE UTMOST IMPORTANCE TO US.

[Learn more](#)



# What the client says...

“

**Seeing the results of Walnut's Behavioural Science audit has been incredibly helpful to see what we are doing right**, but more importantly how we can continue to improve. This area of communication is critical right now to reassure all our guests in our 25 Designer Outlets and the audit allows us to really focus on a number of specific improvements.

It's given us things to think about such as layout and flow, humour and different styles of communication that will be even more effective. Our aim is for constant improvement, and we will be applying these clear and structured learnings into future communications.

”



**Matt Burke**  
Head of Insight  
McArthurGlen Group



# OUR EXPERIENCE

# Implicit understanding is fundamental

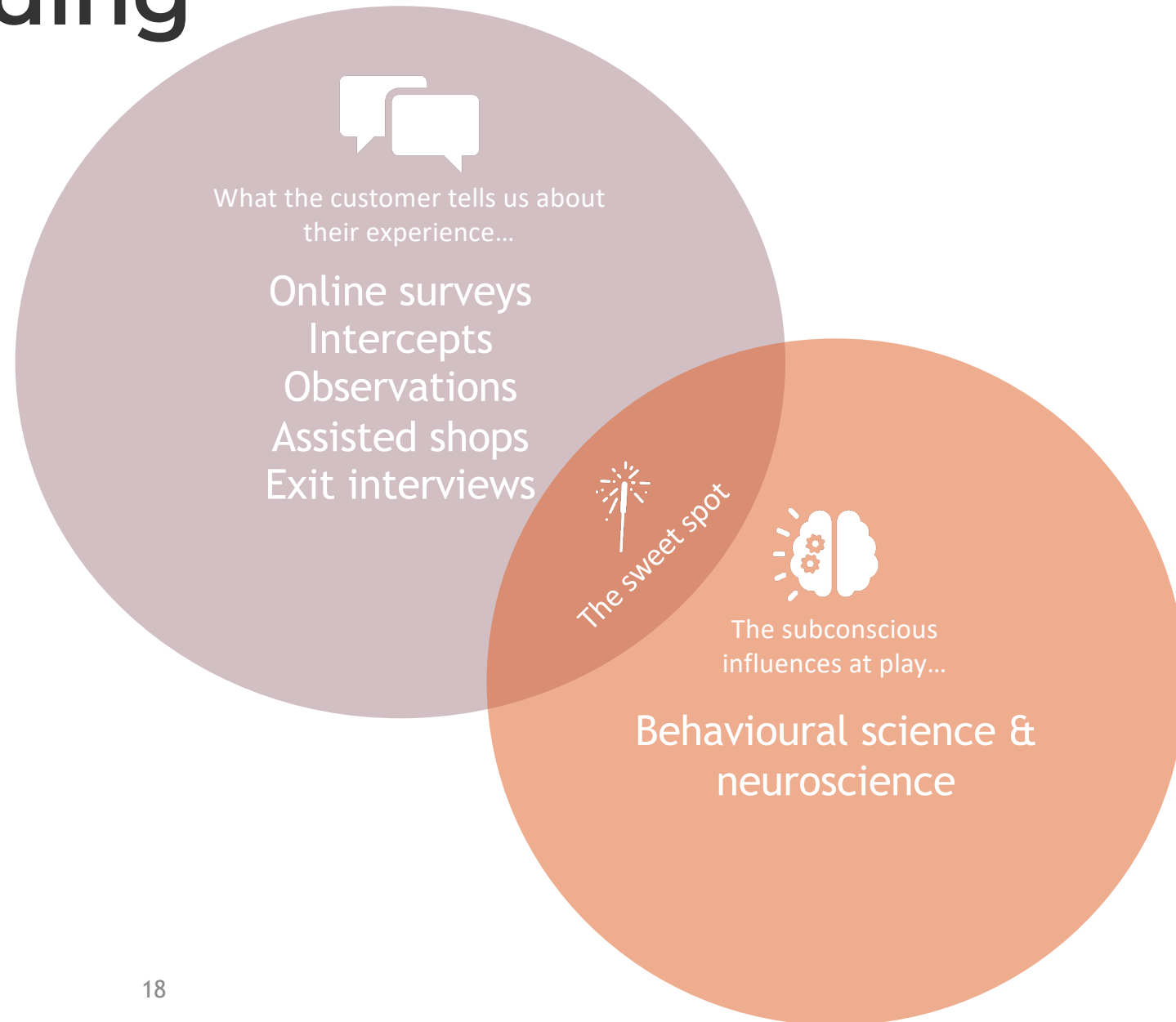
Traditional research approaches can illuminate authentic, in-the-moment feedback from customers.

Whilst this is important, and can fuel decision-making, it only provides one part of the puzzle.

When asked, consumers can find it difficult to pin down the exact factor that swayed them to make one choice over the other - we aren't great at explaining the reasons why we do what we do.

We can decode subconscious biases at play to see the whole picture of consumer response to reach the under the surface, difficult to verbalise attitudes.

Our Behavioural Science lens unlocks this full understanding to provide the crucial **why and what you can do about it.**





# Where we can help...



## Consultations

Apply a Be Sci lens to existing research and data.

We can help you incorporate behavioural principles into customer research. Furthermore, we can help you make the most of your existing data.

Our experts will review your existing data sources through a Be Sci lens to elevate the richness of your insight.



## Behavioural Science store audit

Using a Behavioural Science lens, our experts will audit your store to identify opportunities for optimisation in the store experience, including in-store flow and comms.

This approach can include customer interviews, to talk to customers in-the-moment on the shop floor and get authentic feedback on their experience. We will then overlay our behavioural science Shortcuts framework to inform the optimum strategies, which can be further tailored to key audiences.



## Creative testing

Whenever a new marketing strategy is being defined it is crucial to be able to test and validate this with your customers. It is not enough to just ask what they think about it, we need to go beyond their rational answers to uncover their implicit reactions.

Using Reaction Time Testing allows us to overlay a powerful neuroscience technique to optimise the delivery of the key messages - all through an online survey with quick turnaround.



## Solutions activation

Within our workshops we work with you to fuse our behavioural expertise with your existing knowledge. We work with you to identify key areas where you want to influence behaviour change, either with customers or employees. Then we workshop potential strategies that you can use to influence that behaviour.

This is an interactive session designed to distil behavioural know-how and key research findings to a diverse stakeholder group, as well as to brainstorm actionable next steps.

# THANK YOU

**IF YOU HAVE ANY QUESTIONS, PLEASE CONTACT:**

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