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6 Minute English



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How advertisers make us spend money



This is not a word-for-word transcript.

Pippa

Hello, this is 6 Minute English from BBC Learning English. I'm Pippa.

Phil

And I'm Phil. What's the last thing you bought and why did you buy it?

Pippa

I bought a new pair of headphones recently because my old ones broke, and I did lots of research to try and find a good pair. How about you?

Phil

I bought a soft drink on the way to work this morning. It might be because I saw someone I like promoting it in an advert. We call this a celebrity endorsement. But why do they work? Let's start by hearing from Ben Jones, a behavioural research expert, speaking to BBC World Service programme Business Daily.

Ben Jones

When we're unsure, we don't know what to do, it's kind of easy to follow the lead of those who we think are credible or knowledgeable. It's a **mental shortcut**. It's something that helps us navigate uncertain times or make quick choices. We start doing that from an early age. Our parents... for some people, it's about our teachers – you know, these people who help us learn and make sense of the world. And some businesses can draw on this through things like endorsements – you know, dentists recommending toothpaste, athletes endorsing sportswear.

Pippa

Ben says that endorsements work as a **mental shortcut**. This is something that helps us make a decision quickly. If we trust the endorsement, then we don't need to think about it that much.

Phil

In this episode, we're going to look at the way that people can be convinced to do things.

Pippa

And as usual, we'll learn some useful new words and phrases. And remember, you'll find all the vocabulary and a quiz on our website, bbclearningenglish.com.

Phil

OK. But first I have a question for you, Pippa. Today we're talking about behavioural science. What's the name of the theory that says people respond to small prompts? Is it:

- a) push theory,
- b) pull theory, or
- c) nudge theory?

Pippa

Oh, I'm not sure. I'm going to say b) pull theory.

Phil

OK. Well, we'll find out the answer at the end of the programme. In recent years, many fast-food chains have installed touchscreen machines for people to order their food. They've reported taking more money as a result. Could behavioural science tell us why this happens? Here's product designer Dean Ward speaking to BBC World Service's Business Daily.

Dean Ward

Firstly, the psychology of speaking to someone and feeling **judged** – we think is a key factor. So, would you like extra fries? Would you like to go large? Not all people, but I think there's definitely a large proportion of people who may feel **judged** in those instances and may say no. There's the fact that you've got more time to look. You can see the product, you can see what's in it, you can see all the products linked to it as well. And also around **upsell** as well. Would you like to add this? Would you like to do that? Because you've got more time and you're not being **judged**, you're very much more inclined to actually say yes to these things. And that's typically what we're seeing – an increased **basket spend** of typically 25–30%.

Pippa

If people feel **judged**, then it means that they worry what other people will think of them. If we have to ask a human for extra fries, we might worry what they think of us, but no one feels **judged** by a computer screen.

Phil

If you **upsell** something, then you get someone to spend more. For example, waiters often try to get people to buy larger portions, more drinks, or dessert.

Pippa

Dean says that **upselling** can increase people's **basket spend**. A **basket spend** is the total amount that someone spends in one transaction, on everything that's in their basket. Now, this is an example of a business using behavioural science to nudge people to do things. But it's not just businesses that use behavioural science in this way. In Tunisia, the United Nations World Food Programme wanted to encourage people to eat food together more often. They made a TV show set in a restaurant. Let's hear from Takwa Khelifi from the World Food Programme, talking to BBC World Service's Business Daily.

Takwa Khelifi

So, we needed something really creative and really different to **think outside of the box**, or to let people see themselves in those stories, because people are learning and changing by imitating and **modelling** and, like, observing others' behaviours and others' actions and emotional reactions to things. So, this is why we tried this project or this... tried this product or this TV series – in order that you impact people.

Phil

Takwa says that they needed to **think outside the box**. This means to try and think in a different way, to come up with something creative.

Pippa

The TV programme leads to people **modelling** behaviour. If you **model** behaviour, then you behave in a way that other people can copy. Now **Phil**, I think it's time to hear the answer to your question.

Phil

Yes, it is. I asked what theory says that people respond to small prompts to change their behaviour.

Pippa

I thought it was pull theory...

Phil

...which I'm afraid was the wrong answer. Nudge theory says that people's behaviour can be changed by small prompts or nudges.

Pippa

OK. Let's recap the vocabulary we've learned, starting with **mental shortcut**, which is something that helps us make a decision quickly, usually because we don't need to think about it.

Phil

If someone feels **judged**, then they're worried about what other people think about them.

Pippa

Upsell refers to persuading someone to buy something extra, like a dessert at a restaurant.

Phil

Basket spend is what you spend in one transaction on the things in your shopping basket.

Pippa

If you **think outside the box**, then you think about something in a different way to come up with a creative solution.

Phil

And finally, **modelling** is behaving in a way that others can copy. Once again, our six minutes are up, but why not head over to our website, bbclearningenglish.com, to try the quiz and worksheet for this episode. See you again soon!

Pippa

Bye!

VOCABULARY

mental shortcut

something that helps us make a decision quickly

judged

worried about what other people think about us

upsell

selling extra products, or more expensive products to customers

basket spend

amount of money spent on a single transaction

think outside the box

think creatively to come up with a solution

model

show behaviour that you want others to copy



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